

Framing the Bisht: A Multimodal Analysis of Arab and Non-Arab Online Media Coverage in the 2022 World Cup Final

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Abstract—This study investigates how Arab and non-Arab online news sources covered the bisht moment during the 2022 FIFA World Cup final. The study's corpus consists of 10 English-language online news reports, evenly split: 5 from Arab and 5 from non-Arab sources, collected from their official websites, to ensure diverse cultural representation and prevent bias. Using Machin and Mayr's (2012) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) framework and Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square model, the study analyzes the corpus to explore how text and visuals were used to shape the story. The findings revealed that Arab media focused on the bisht as a symbol of pride and tradition, using positive language and images to show it as a gesture of respect and cultural importance. On the other hand, non-Arab media often described the bisht as awkward or unnecessary, highlighting controversy and ignoring much of its cultural meaning. The findings also showed that both sides framed the event differently based on their cultural perspectives. Arab media celebrated the moment, avoiding any criticism and focusing on the bisht's rich heritage. Non-Arab media, however, highlighted its clash with Messi's jersey, seeing it as a distraction from his amazing win. The visuals also reflected these narratives, with Arab media blending tradition and celebration, while non-Arab media leaning toward creating tension. Finally, the study highlighted how media shapes public views of cultural moments and the need for fair and balanced reporting in global events.

Index Terms—Arab and non-Arab online news sources, bisht, multimodal critical discourse analysis, Qatar World Cup 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how Arab and non-Arab online news sources covered the bisht moment during the 2022 FIFA World Cup final. The tournament's hosting has always generated worldwide controversies over many issues, including bidding, politics, and ethics. Qatar's selection in 2010 to host the 2022 World Cup was not an exception to the rule. The decision faced criticism over issues, such as infrastructure, extreme heat, social policies, and migrant worker rights. Despite these challenges, Qatar hosted the first World Cup in the Arab world, blending cultural significance with athletic excellence.

A. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)

Multimodality in media discourse integrates multiple modes of communication beyond written or spoken language. Kress (2010) defines it as “an approach that looks at multiple modes of communication such as text, color, and images” (p. 1), emphasizing how these elements interact to create meaning. Writing conveys abstract ideas, images communicate quickly, and color highlights key points. This is especially relevant in online media, where multiple modes enhance understanding. Lyons (2016) highlights that modes are culturally and socially shaped resources for meaning making, requiring shared recognition within communities. She identifies semiotic resources, like facial expressions or technology, as crucial in multimodal frameworks. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) extend multimodality through three assumptions: communication involves interrelated modes, meaning depends on their selection and arrangement, and these resources develop socially over time. Multimodal analysis applies to diverse media, from print (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) to film (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) and face-to-face interactions (Norris, 2004). This understanding led to MCDA, which examines semiotic resources, such as words, visuals, sounds, and gestures. Machin and Mayr (2012) stress that “while linguistic analysis provides insights, visual and non-verbal modes play an essential role in constructing meaning”, revealing implicit messages in media.

B. Bisht's Cultural Status in the Arab Culture

The moment Messi received the World Cup trophy draped in a bisht sparked international debate on sport, culture, and identity. Just before he lifted the trophy, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani placed the traditional black cloak, symbolizing honor, authority, and celebration in Gulf culture, over Messi's shoulders. Worn by tribal chiefs, kings, and

imams, the bisht carries deep cultural meaning. While some saw it as a gesture of respect, others, like New York Times journalist Panja (2022), argued Qatar sought to share the spotlight. Critics felt it overshadowed Argentina's celebration, while supporters saw it as a symbol of cultural appreciation.

C. *Aims and Questions of the Study*

This study analyzed how Arab and non-Arab online news sources framed the bisht event during the Qatar World Cup 2022 final celebration. It examined whether these portrayals were positive or negative, influenced by the outlet's cultural or political orientation. The study explored the use of text, images, and symbols in shaping representations, focusing on the interplay between linguistic and visual semiotics. In addition, it investigated the ideological implications of these portrayals, assessing how media narratives reflected or challenged dominant cultural, social, and political perspectives. By comparing representations across contexts, the study offered insights into how media content reinforces or disrupts ideologies related to identity, power, and cultural values in high-profile sporting events. To achieve these objectives, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent did Arab and non-Arab online news sources in English portray the bisht scene positively or negatively during the final celebration of the Qatar World Cup 2022?
2. What modes and devices did these online news sources utilize to communicate their intended meanings about the bisht scene?
3. To what extent were these portrayals ideologically shaped, and did they involve manipulation strategies?

D. *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant for its focus on a culturally symbolic moment in a major global sporting event, the bisht scene at the Qatar World Cup 2022. It examines how Arab and non-Arab online news sources represented this moment, highlighting the role of language and visuals in conveying cultural and political ideologies. The study contributes to MCDA by investigating how different modes of communication, including text, imagery, and symbols, combine to create meaning. Unlike previous research on sports media coverage, it explores how these elements shape media narratives. It also sheds light on how media discourse influences cultural and political identities, revealing ideological perspectives in representation. By analyzing this event, the study deepens our understanding of the intersection between sport, culture, politics, and media in a globalized world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims at placing available research in the context of existing knowledge concerning MCDA with ideological perspectives. Ideology is regarded as one of the fundamental and most studied topics in critical discourse analysis. Van Dijk (1998) defines ideology as the "socially shared, general beliefs" (p. 32). Ideology in discourse mostly appears when there are different groups having opposing points of view. Texts are described as multimodal when they incorporate various modes of communication beyond just written or spoken language.

Mostafa (2018) examined the portrayal of Arab female athletes during the Rio 2016 Olympics, focusing on their increased participation in traditionally male-dominated sports and its challenge to gender stereotypes. Using the MCDA framework by Machin and Mayr (2012), which integrates social semiotics to analyze language and imagery in reinforcing ideologies, the study analyzed two articles on Egyptian weightlifter Sara Ahmed's bronze medal win. The Olympic Games Organization's article provided a neutral, Western perspective, while Ahram Online contextualized the achievement nationally. The findings revealed that both articles' lexical and visual elements conveyed implicit and explicit values about Arab female athletes, framing them as equals on the global stage.

Assaiqeli (2021) examined the role of visual representations in shaping and preserving national themes related to the Nakba, a key event in Palestinian history characterized by mass displacement and dispossession. The study revealed that iconic images, such as keys, tents, and olive trees, function as powerful symbols that memorialize the Nakba while signifying resilience, the Right of Return, and enduring connections to the homeland. The study also found that these visuals serve as resistance tools, opposing attempts to erase Palestinian identity and historical memory. The findings highlight that visual representations transcend linguistic barriers, making them accessible and evocative tools for resistance and advocacy. The study highlighted the critical socio-political role of visual discourse. Finally, the study findings enrich the understanding of visual semiotics, showing how imagery continues to be instrumental in memorializing history, mobilizing communities, and sustaining the Palestinian struggle for justice and self-determination.

Abdelghany et al. (2023) examined how memes about COVID-19 reflect cultural and political attitudes in Egypt and the United States. Using 80 memes taken from Facebook, the researchers analyzed how text and images combine to create metaphors, revealing hidden meanings and social critiques. The study identified five main metaphors which show how different cultures responded to the pandemic. Egyptian memes often highlight emotional appeals, religious practices, or dismissive attitudes toward the virus. In contrast, American memes focus on issues like generational pessimism or reliance on unproven remedies. These themes, social insensitivity, media trends, pessimism, and government incompetence, reveal both shared and culture-specific responses to the crisis. The findings revealed that memes do more than just make people laugh; they also express opinions about social and political issues.

Atma (2023) investigated gender stereotypes in Algerian TV advertisements using multimodal analysis to explore consumers' perceptions of these portrayals. The findings revealed that TV commercials heavily rely on gendered stereotypes. These stereotypes are visually reflected through strategies like modality, transactional processes, and offer gaze, and linguistically through declarative statements, active voice, and repeated lexical choices. These portrayals align with traditional societal roles, depicting women as housewives striving to please their families and portraying them as weak and calm, while men are shown as emotionless and authoritative. The study concluded that these advertisements perpetuate outdated gender roles, despite societal shifts in gender dynamics, as acknowledged by respondents.

Amer (2024) conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the Palestinian movement, Hamas, examining digital discourses on X (formerly Twitter) using critical discourse techniques and a social semiotic framework by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006). The findings revealed that tweets with Hamas were often linked to terms, such as terrorism, portraying Hamas negatively and legitimizing actions against it, while Hamas' tweets emphasized "occupation" and related terms like "Jerusalem" and "Hamas." The study highlighted the potential for Palestinians to use social media strategically to share their narrative and suggested expanding future research to include more platforms and multimodal sources, preserving the historical record of the Palestinian struggle amid efforts to remove such content.

Al-Taleb and Hamdan (2024) conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis of nine Disney animated films released over three decades (1990-2019). The study focused on the visual and linguistic portrayal of male characters, utilizing Aley and Hahn's (2020) framework of men's visual portrayal, developed from Goffman (1976) and Coates' (2016) framework on men's language. The findings revealed significant shifts in the representation of masculinity over time. Visually, male characters transitioned from exaggeratedly large sizes with big muscles to more realistic body types with logical proportions. Early portrayals emphasized physical strength, but later decades presented heroes as powerful gentlemen, valuing qualities beyond brute force. By the 2010s, male characters no longer relied on attire to signify their status, reflecting broader sociocultural changes in ideals of heroism. The depiction of masculine touch also evolved: in the 1990s, interactions often conveyed control, while in subsequent decades, they shifted to convey protection and care. Eye withdrawal, however, remained consistent, symbolizing introspection and emotional depth. Linguistically, "asking questions" and "giving orders" were dominant features of male characters' speech across the three decades, while swearing and interruptions were less common. These changes in visual and linguistic representation illustrate how Disney's portrayal of masculinity has adapted to reflect evolving sociocultural values and expectations.

Alexandrovna and Andreevna (2025) apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how language constructs legitimacy, power, and ideological control. While the bisht study investigates media narratives surrounding a cultural event, this study explores how presidential rhetoric frames war as a morally justified act. Both analyses highlight the role of discourse in shaping public perception, whether in sports media or political decision-making. Moreover, they underscore the function of language as a tool for reinforcing dominance and justifying actions, much like how non-Arab media framed the bisht moment in alignment with their cultural perspectives.

Finally, as far as the researchers can ascertain, the portrayal of the bisht in media and its multimodal representation has not been extensively studied or remains significantly under-investigated, leaving a clear gap in the literature. This dearth of research has served as the primary motivation for the current study, which aims to address this gap by exploring the bisht's symbolic and cultural significance through a multimodal lens.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section explains corpus and data collection, the framework of the study, and the analysis method.

A. Corpus and Data Collection

The corpus includes 10 English-language online news sources, evenly divided: 5 derived from Arab sources (Ahrām Online, Al Jazeera, Arab News, Khaleej Times, and Middle East Eye) and 5 from non-Arab sources (BBC Sport, Daily Mail, CNN Sport, NDTV Sports, and All-Football). This balanced selection ensures a comprehensive view of how the bisht was portrayed, combining perspectives from the Arab world with those from Europe, North America, and Asia. The Arab sources represent diverse regional viewpoints, while the non-Arab sources provide an international lens. By including both widely popular platforms with global reach and smaller regional outlets, the corpus captures a rich mix of global and local perspectives, offering a comprehensive understanding of how the bisht was presented during a major international event. This approach, however, ensures a diverse cultural representation and avoids bias from any single perspective. The researchers gathered the data from the official websites of these news sources. The selection criteria required that the reports were published within 15 days of the 2022 World Cup final (19 December 2022 – 02 January 2023), focused on Messi's coronation and the bisht presentation, and included multimodal elements, combining text and visuals. All reports were in English to enable a consistent analysis.

B. Framework of the Study

The study conducted a qualitative analysis of semiotic features, both linguistic and non-linguistic, as well as ideological framing, using two distinct frameworks. Machin and Mayr's (2012) MCDA framework was first applied to analyze how Arab and non-Arab online news sources in English portrayed the bisht scene during the Qatar World Cup

2022 final. The analysis focused on both linguistic elements in the report texts and visual semiotics in the accompanying images, such as Messi's stance and the placement of the bisht. This approach highlighted framing strategies and revealed narratives about cultural identity, authority, and tradition. Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square model was then employed to analyze ideological framing within the discourse. This framework revealed manipulation strategies in media portrayals of the bisht event, such as emphasizing positive traits of the ingroup while stressing negative characteristics of the outgroup. It further illustrated the power dynamics shaping media narratives of the event.

C. Analysis Method

The analysis was conducted at two levels to explore semiotic features and ideological framing in the data. The first level of analysis examined linguistic elements, such as lexical connotations, overlexicalization, lexical absence, quoting patterns, functionalization versus nomination, and specification versus generalization, as well as non-linguistic elements, including visual semiotic choices, multimodality, iconography, and framing and positioning. Their definitions are drawn from Machin and Mayer (2012). Lexical connotations reflect ideological stances through word choice, such as describing someone as a "revolutionary" versus a "rebel," which suggests positive or negative views (p. 38). Overlexicalization emphasizes negativity through repeated terms like "regime," "dictatorship," and "authoritarian government" (p. 37). Lexical absence involves omitting key details, such as protesters' demands, to downplay their perspective. Quoting patterns, such as prioritizing statements from officials over ordinary citizens, reinforce specific viewpoints. Functionalization versus nomination highlights how referring to people by roles (e.g., "the worker") depersonalizes them, while using names (e.g., "John Smith") humanizes them (p. 79). Specification versus generalization examines the use of generalized terms like "migrants," which can imply collective behavior, compared to specific terms that focus on individuals (p. 80). According to Machin and Mayer (2012), these strategies reveal implicit ideological positions and are central to critical discourse analysis.

Machin and Mayr (2012) emphasize that non-linguistic elements play a crucial role in understanding meaning making in discourse. Visual semiotic choices involve the selection and arrangement of visual elements to convey specific meanings and ideologies as "visual semiotic resources can be used to connote discourses and ideas" (p. 70). Multimodality refers to the interaction of various semiotic modes, such as language, images, and layout, to create meaning, emphasizing that "meanings are communicated through a complex interplay of different semiotic resources" (p. 1). Iconography addresses the use of culturally or ideologically significant images and symbols, where "certain kinds of people, places and things have become established as familiar and instantly recognizable" (p. 50). Framing and positioning influence interpretation by determining "what is included and excluded, and how elements are arranged," along with "the angle or point of view adopted" (p. 72). All in all, these elements reveal deeper ideological framing and semiotic strategies embedded in multimodal texts.

The second level analyzed ideological dimensions in the data considering Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square model, which outlines four key strategies for constructing ingroups and outgroups through discourse. The first is emphasizing positive ingroup characteristics, highlighting their favorable traits to create a positive self-image. The second is emphasizing negative outgroup characteristics, where their unfavorable traits or actions are heightened to portray them negatively, reflecting that "their bad actions and properties are emphasized, while their good ones are ignored or mitigated" (p. 267). The third strategy, mitigating positive outgroup characteristics, involves downplaying or ignoring favorable aspects of the outgroup, ensuring their contributions remain invisible or unacknowledged. Finally, mitigating negative ingroup characteristics minimizes or rationalizes unfavorable actions of the ingroup, presenting them as exceptions or less significant. These strategies reflect deliberate inclusion or exclusion in discourse to shape ideologies, maintain power dynamics, and reinforce group identities.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents the results of analysis by addressing the three research questions: "To what extent did Arab and non-Arab online news sources in English portray the bisht scene positively or negatively?", "What modes and devices did these sources use to communicate their intended meanings?", and "To what extent were these portrayals ideologically shaped and involved manipulation strategies?". The first two questions were examined using Machin and Mayr's (2012) MCDA framework, analyzing text and images. The third was addressed through Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square model. The analysis focused on six randomly selected reports, three from each source type to balance depth and representation. Random selection ensured objectivity, while limiting the sample to six allowed for a more focused exploration of key trends. Non-Arab reports were analyzed first to capture a global perspective on the bisht scene, reflecting broader cultural and ideological biases. These sources, with wider reach, employed distinct framing strategies, often contrasted by Arab sources responding to their claims.

A. Non-Arab Online News Reports

Report Example 1: The All-Football report titled "Bizarre moment Messi is dressed in traditional Arabic robe ahead of trophy lift" <https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Headline/Bizarre-moment-Messi-is-dressed-in-traditional-Arabic-robe-ahead-of-trophy-lift/2986143>

The linguistic analysis revealed key framing strategies shaping the bisht moment. Lexical choices such as “bizarre,” “awkward,” and “odd” framed the bisht negatively, suggesting discomfort and unfamiliarity. The report stated that Messi “endured an awkward moment” and later “cut an odd figure” lifting the trophy in the bisht. This contrasted with descriptions of the bisht as a garment “traditionally worn for special or ceremonial occasions” and carrying “connotations of power” due to its association with royalty and clergy. Overlexicalization emphasized its ceremonial weight, contrasting it with Messi’s Argentina jersey, which was “partially obscured by a long black robe.” This focus suggested cultural intrusion at a moment many viewed as Argentina’s. Selective quoting reinforced a critical framing, prioritizing negative reactions, such as one calling the bisht a “PR tool for the Qatari regime.” While some supportive views, such as a fan calling the robe “a fitting way of acknowledging Messi as the king of football,” were mentioned, they received less emphasis. The report included dismissive remarks, such as the bisht being “grossly indulgent” and that “it should be a moment for the players, not the host.” Though a counterview like “live your life and stop whining” was noted, it was downplayed, further skewing the narrative. Functionalization and nomination also shaped the framing. The Emir was referred to by title, emphasizing his authority, while Messi was named throughout, reinforcing his global identity. Specific criticisms like “Messi finally wins the World Cup and is made to put on a robe. You just don’t do that” highlighted objections, whereas generalized positive acknowledgments, such as comparisons to black-tie attire, were underplayed. These strategies collectively framed the bisht as a cultural imposition, overshadowing its intended symbolism of honor and respect. The images added depth through non-linguistic features. Semiotic choices, such as the contrast between the bisht’s black and gold design and Messi’s jersey, symbolized the blending of traditions. Multimodality combined visuals and situational elements, positioning Messi as the focal point. Iconography reinforced cultural pride, linking Messi’s victory to local traditions. The bisht’s connotations of power were echoed visually, aligning with its description as “worn by royalty, officials, and clergy.” Framing techniques placed Messi at the center, with the Emir and FIFA president’s presence adding formality. These visual elements highlighted the interplay between cultural pride and global recognition, suggesting an appreciation of tradition.

Ideologically speaking, the analysis revealed deeper narratives in how Western norms were positioned as the standard, while the bisht was framed as exotic and intrusive. Messi was said to have endured “an awkward moment”, reinforcing negative outgroup traits by portraying the gesture as unwelcome. The claim that Messi “cut an odd figure” with his jersey “partially obscured” further suggested the bisht clashed with Western expectations for the trophy presentation. Negative outgroup characteristics were also emphasized by framing the bisht as political. A cited tweet called the gesture “symbolic. A way to stamp culture on what will be one of the most iconic images ever,” suggesting an imposition rather than respect. Critiques like “you just don’t do that” and claims that the bisht detracted from Argentina’s celebrations reinforced this cultural dominance narrative. At the same time, positive outgroup traits were mitigated. While the bisht was compared to Western black-tie attire, its associations with power were quickly overshadowed by criticisms. Tweets labeling it “grossly indulgent” dominated, reflecting a selective focus on controversy. The report also downplayed negative ingroup traits, avoiding any critique of dismissive Western attitudes. For instance, it did not challenge the claim that the bisht was a “PR tool for the Qatari regime.” Messi’s acceptance and the gesture’s respectful intent were minimized. While the report acknowledged that the bisht is “traditionally worn for special or ceremonial occasions” and was presented by the Emir with FIFA President Gianni Infantino applauding, this was undermined by its portrayal as a display of power. Positive ingroup characteristics were reinforced by framing the bisht as overshadowing the celebration, aligning with Western perspectives on trophy presentation propriety. This framing strategy reflects power dynamics, portraying the bisht as cultural dominance rather than an honorable tribute.

In conclusion, the All-Football report presents a mixed view. Linguistically, it leans toward criticism, using words like “bizarre” and “awkward” to highlight controversy. Visually, it suggests cultural respect and unity, with Messi appearing as a bridge between global and regional traditions. This contrast reflects ideological divisions: the text skews toward controversy, while the images suggest mutual appreciation.

Report Example 2: The BBC Sport report titled “World Cup final: Lionel Messi lifts trophy in bisht - traditional Arab robe” <https://bbc.atualizarondonia.com/sport/football/64018448>

The linguistic analysis of the BBC Sport report revealed a more neutral and celebratory framing of the bisht moment compared to the All-Football report. Lexical choices such as “iconic moment” and “the great Lionel Messi” emphasize the significance of Messi’s achievement. The bisht is described in culturally respectful terms as a “traditional men’s cloak popular in the Arab world,” avoiding pejorative connotations like “bizarre” or “awkward” found in the All-Football report. This difference in lexical framing positions the bisht moment as a natural part of a culturally rich event rather than an imposition. Overlexicalization is used to highlight Messi’s triumph, with phrases like “glittering and unparalleled career” and references to “the greatest finals ever witnessed.” In contrast, the cultural significance of the bisht receives limited emphasis, with its ceremonial importance noted briefly as “a dress for an official occasion and worn for celebrations.” This lexical imbalance highlights Messi’s role over the cultural symbolism of the bisht, aligning with a Western-centric narrative. The report integrates quotes to provide multiple perspectives. Hassan Al Thawadi, the secretary general of Qatar’s tournament organizing committee, describes the bisht as “a celebration of Messi,” framing it as an act of respect, while Sheikh Tamim states that the World Cup was an opportunity to “learn about the richness of our culture and the originality of our values.” These quotes contextualize the bisht as a gesture of cultural pride. However, the report also acknowledges criticisms, stating, “others have seen it as disrespectful and overshadowing the

day he had been waiting for.” The analysis of the accompanying image revealed non-linguistic features that contributed to the framing. Semiotic choices, such as the contrast between the bisht’s black color and Argentina’s jersey, symbolized cultural pride as well as global sportsmanship. Multimodality added further depth, with body language, facial expressions, and clothing visually linking Messi’s victory to Arab culture, while his teammates’ celebratory presence reinforced the moment’s significance. Iconography also played a key role, as the bisht added cultural depth to Messi’s image, blending his personal triumph with a gesture of cultural exchange. The report describes how the moment coincided with Qatar’s National Day and marked the conclusion of the first World Cup held in a Muslim country. This framing situates the bisht as more than a personal gesture to Messi, emphasizing its regional and cultural significance.

The ideological framing analysis revealed comprehensive strategies in the report, aligning with Van Dijk’s (1998) Ideological Square model. In this regard, the report emphasizes positive ingroup characteristics by celebrating Western values such as merit and teamwork. It highlights Lionel Messi’s achievements and Argentina’s collective success with phrases like “The great Lionel Messi was called up on stage to lift the trophy he had craved for so much of his glittering and unparalleled career,” and “overcame France on penalties in one of the greatest finals ever witnessed,” underscoring resilience and unity. The report emphasizes negative outgroup characteristics by framing the bisht moment as an intrusion. Statements like “It may have been a big honour for Messi to be dressed in the Arab attire, but others have seen it as disrespectful and overshadowing the day he had been waiting for,” suggest a lack of cultural appreciation and reinforce negative perceptions of Arab traditions. Furthermore, the report mitigates positive outgroup characteristics by downplaying the cultural significance of the bisht, despite quotes from Hassan Al Thawadi and Sheikh Tamim highlighting its intent as “a celebration of Messi” and an opportunity to “learn about the richness of our culture.” The absence of Western voices endorsing the gesture limits its prominence and diminishes its value. Finally, the report mitigates negative ingroup characteristics by avoiding a critical examination of Western biases. While it mentions views that the bisht was “disrespectful and overshadowing,” it does not question whether these reactions stem from cultural misunderstandings, presenting them neutrally instead. This framing keeps the focus on Messi’s career and Argentina’s victory, presenting the bisht as secondary and aligning with a predominantly Western perspective.

In conclusion, the BBC Sport report celebrates Messi’s win while diminishing the bisht’s significance, focusing on Western values and presenting Arab traditions as secondary. The narrative highlights Messi’s achievement, with the bisht serving as a minor gesture of cultural exchange. This analysis reveals both respect and bias, underscoring the challenges of representing diverse perspectives in global sports media.

Report Example 3: The Daily Mail report titled “Selfish moment Qatar World Cup hosts force Lionel Messi to cover up his iconic No.10 shirt with an Arabic robe for trophy presentation” <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-11551783/Bizarre-moment-Lionel-Messi-dressed-traditional-Arabic-robe-ahead-World-Cup-trophy-lift.html>

The Daily Mail report used linguistic features to shape its portrayal of the bisht moment. Lexical choices like “selfish,” “force,” and “awkward moment” depict the gesture as intrusive. For instance, the report states, “Lionel Messi endured an awkward moment after Argentina’s World Cup win on Sunday as he was draped in a robe ahead of the trophy lift,” implying that the bisht overshadowed Messi’s identity and Argentina’s victory. Overlexicalization amplifies criticism with repeated phrases like “it should be a moment for the players” and “grossly indulgent,” while lexical absence limits discussions of the bisht’s cultural significance, briefly mentioning it as worn for “special or ceremonial occasions.” Messi’s voice is missing, leaving the narrative unbalanced. Selective quoting further reinforces bias, giving prominence to criticisms like “You just don’t do that” over supportive remarks such as “live your life and stop whining.” Functionalization and nomination frame interpretations: Messi is described as “Argentina’s captain” and “king of football,” reinforcing his global status, while the Emir of Qatar is referred to only by title, implying political motives. Visual elements add depth to this framing. Semiotic choices highlight the bisht’s contrast with Messi’s Argentina jersey, symbolizing a mix of cultural and global identities. Messi’s calm expression suggests possible discomfort, complicating the celebration. Multimodality emphasizes Messi as the focal point, with fireworks in the background adding grandeur but isolating the bisht as a distinctly Arab symbol. Iconography positions the bisht as a cultural artifact, while the World Cup trophy remains the ultimate symbol of victory. Framing and positioning place Messi at the center, but in some shots, the bisht’s prominence suggests cultural imposition, potentially overshadowing his national identity.

The report employed distinct framing techniques to shape perceptions. Positive ingroup characteristics highlight Argentina’s victory and Messi’s status as a global icon. The report states that Messi’s triumph “has put an end to the debate over who the greatest footballer of all time is,” reinforcing his greatness. Argentina’s journey is depicted as historic, emphasizing Messi’s role in securing victory and ensuring the ingroup’s excellence. Conversely, negative outgroup characteristics emerge in criticisms of Qatar’s role. The bisht is labeled a “selfish” act and “PR tool” to impose cultural identity. One tweet states, “It’s a moment for the players, not the host,” while another calls Qatar’s actions “grossly indulgent.” The framing suggests that Qatar’s gesture detracted from the authenticity of the celebration, casting it as cultural overreach. While positive aspects of the outgroup are briefly acknowledged, skepticism dominates. The bisht’s ceremonial role is compared to Western black-tie attire, yet this recognition is undermined by dismissive remarks like, “Messi finally wins the World Cup and is made to put on a robe to lift the trophy. You just don’t do that.” Even when described as a “king of football” gesture, the bisht remains framed as an imposition rather than an honor.

Negative aspects of the ingroup are softened by portraying Messi's reaction as calm and compliant. The report ensures that Messi's dignity remains intact, avoiding any suggestion of discomfort. It redirects focus to Argentina's "thrilling final" and Messi's crucial role, reinforcing the purity of Argentina's triumph rather than Qatar's cultural intervention.

In conclusion, the Daily Mail frames the bisht moment as an intrusion, contrasting with Argentina's celebrated victory. Linguistically, it emphasizes criticism using words like "selfish" and "awkward moment." Visually, however, it portrays cultural respect and unity, with Messi as a bridge between global and regional traditions. This contrast reflects ideological divisions, with the text leaning toward controversy while the visuals suggest mutual appreciation.

B. Arab Online News Reports

Report Example 4: The Ahram Online report titled "From 10 to 150 a day: Boom for 'Bisht' maker after Messi's World Cup" <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/482964.aspx>

The analysis of the report highlighted several linguistic features that framed the bisht and its presentation positively. Lexical choices and word connotations used terms like "traditional gown" to describe the bisht, linking it to significant events, such as "weddings, graduations, and official events." Words like "delicate," "handmade," and "family company" emphasized tradition, craftsmanship, and cultural pride. The gesture of dressing Messi in the bisht was framed as an "honour", reflecting Arab values. Overlexicalization added to this positive portrayal, with detailed descriptions of the bisht's materials and its increased sales overshadowing any criticism, emphasizing its cultural and economic importance. On the other hand, lexical absence was evident, as negative or critical terms were avoided to ensure a positive and respectful depiction of Arab traditions. Quotes further reinforced this narrative, such as the statement of Ahmad Al-Salem, whose family company made the bisht, "It was a gift from one king to another king," which highlighted admiration and family pride. Functionalization versus nomination also shaped the narrative: Messi was referred to by name and title, emphasizing his individuality and achievement, while the Emir was functionally described as a "sheikh" or "emir," emphasizing ceremonial authority. Generalized terms like "Arab commentators" created a sense of cultural unity, portraying widespread approval of the bisht gesture. However, the analysis of the accompanying image provided insights into the non-linguistic elements that complemented the textual narrative. Semiotic choices, such as draping Messi in the bisht, symbolized the blending of global sports and Arab tradition, turning the garment into a representation of inclusivity and cultural pride. The multimodality of the image, combined with captions and commentary, framed the gesture as one of mutual respect between Qatar and the global community. Iconography further amplified the bisht's cultural significance, with its regal black and gold colors and intricate craftsmanship transforming the trophy presentation into a celebration of Arab heritage. In addition, framing and positioning emphasized Messi's central role in the image, draped in the bisht and surrounded by cheering spectators, creating a unifying and celebratory tone that focused on cultural appreciation.

The ideological framing analysis reinforced positive Arab identity using Van Dijk's Ideological Square model to shape ingroup and outgroup dynamics. The bisht was framed as a "traditional gown" worn at "weddings, graduations, and official events," emphasizing its cultural significance. The report highlighted that Messi's bisht was crafted by Salem's family company, a "longstanding bisht supplier to Qatari royalty", reinforcing tradition and quality. Criticism from the outgroup was mitigated by attributing it to misunderstandings. Salem explained that dressing Messi in the bisht was meant to "honour" him, suggesting negative reactions stemmed from cultural differences, not the gesture itself. The report also downplayed positive outgroup perspectives, mentioning Western criticism but omitting appreciation. Internal dissent within the Arab community was also absent, presenting a unified ingroup image. By focusing on tradition, honor, and cultural misunderstanding, the report aligned with Van Dijk's strategy of emphasizing positive ingroup traits while minimizing criticism.

In conclusion, the Ahram Online report utilizes Van Dijk's Ideological Square model by emphasizing the positive aspects of the Arab identity and the bisht, attributing criticisms to misunderstandings, and maintaining a focus on the ingroup's perspective, thereby reinforcing a positive self-image.

Report Example 5: The Aljazeera News report titled "What is a bisht and why was Messi wearing it at the World Cup?" <https://aje.io/71z8yh>

The analysis revealed linguistic and visual strategies that frame the bisht moment positively. Lexical choices, such as describing it as a "mark of honour" and "an embrace by Messi of the local culture," emphasize its respect and significance. The bisht is portrayed as a "formal robe worn by royalty, dignitaries, grooms, and graduates," reinforcing its prestige. Overlexicalization highlights its ceremonial importance, countering potential Western misunderstandings, while lexical absence omits criticisms. Expert quotes, such as Mustafa Baig's statement that the gesture was "a mark of honour" and "a cultural acceptance," further validate this framing. Functionalization presents the Emir of Qatar as a symbol of Arab hospitality and Messi as a cultural ambassador, promoting global harmony. Visual analysis supports this framing through semiotic choices, such as draping the bisht over Messi's jersey, symbolizing a fusion of tradition and sportsmanship. The black and gold design enhances its ceremonial value, while iconography elevates Messi's status, reinforcing cultural authenticity. The image's composition visually connects the bisht to Messi's jersey, crafting a narrative of unity and respect.

The ideological framing analysis emphasized positive ingroup traits, calling the bisht a "mark of honour" and "cultural acceptance", reinforcing Arab pride by linking it to royalty and status. In contrast, Arab media counters negative outgroup traits, portraying Western critiques as culturally uninformed. Mustafa Baig argues that Messi's act

was “an embrace of local culture”, challenging dismissive narratives. Western perspectives acknowledging Messi’s gesture as “smart thinking” are framed as superficial, failing to grasp its deeper cultural meaning. Instead of engaging with Western critiques, Arab media focuses on cultural education. Hassan al-Thawadi, Qatar’s tournament secretary general, describes the gesture as “a regional celebration”, subtly reframing the narrative. To mitigate negative ingroup traits, Arab media downplays criticisms of the gesture as performative, portraying the Emir’s action as diplomatic and celebratory. Controversial interpretations are omitted, ensuring a unified, dignified representation of Arab traditions.

In conclusion, the Al Jazeera News report frames the bisht as a symbol of respect and pride, using positive language, expert perspectives, and visual elements to reinforce its cultural significance. Ideologically, it emphasizes Arab hospitality and honor, presenting the bisht moment as a celebration of cultural exchange and inclusivity while subtly responding to external criticisms.

Report Example 6: The Arab News report titled “Western media mocks Messi for wearing honorary Bisht, downplays Martinez’s obscene Golden Glove gesture” <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2218771/media>

The Arab News report employed specific linguistic features to frame the bisht moment as both respectful and significant, while simultaneously criticizing Western media’s reactions. Lexical choices such as “gesture of high respect” and “highest honor” emphasize the cultural value of the bisht, portraying it as a meaningful symbol of Gulf tradition. In contrast, terms like “mock,” “downplay,” and “ignorant” are used to criticize Western media for their dismissive attitudes, highlighting double standards. For instance, the report notes that “several Western media outlets have condemned Qatar for ‘ruining’ the World Cup final on Sunday by honoring Argentina’s Lionel Messi with a bisht, a gesture of high respect, while merely describing goalkeeper Emi Martinez as ‘lewd’ for holding the Golden Glove trophy against his crotch.” Overlexicalization is evident in the repeated use of words like “racist” and “ignorance,” which strengthens the defensive tone and draws attention to cultural insensitivity. Lexical absence further shapes the narrative by omitting neutral or conciliatory Western responses, maintaining a polarized perspective. Selective quoting, such as references to a “flimsy black robe” contrasted with social media praise, highlights the tension between cultural misunderstanding and appreciation. Functionalization and nomination personalize the criticism by naming Western figures like Gary Lineker, while generalizations about Western media reinforce the overarching narrative of cultural disparity. The analysis of the accompanying images highlighted non-linguistic elements that supported the report’s framing of the bisht moment. Semiotic choices, such as Messi standing with the Emir and FIFA President while wearing the bisht, emphasized a connection between global sports and Gulf traditions. The luxurious black and gold bisht draped over Messi’s jersey symbolized cultural pride, blending tradition with modernity. Multimodality further enriched the narrative, using Messi’s expression and the formal setting to communicate themes of respect and unity. Iconography played a central role, with the bisht symbolizing prestige and tradition, while the secondary image of Martinez’s obscene gesture with the Golden Glove disrupted the ceremonial tone. This stark contrast between the primary and secondary images highlighted the disparity between respectful traditions and irreverent behavior. The framing and positioning of the images emphasized these differences, with Messi’s central and balanced composition celebrating cultural pride, while Martínez’s isolated and inappropriate gesture disrupted the event’s dignity.

Ideologically, the report positioned Arab culture positively while critiquing Western media’s reactions. Positive ingroup characteristics are emphasized through the bisht’s portrayal as a symbol of pride and hospitality, reflecting Gulf traditions and values. Negative outgroup characteristics are highlighted by focusing on Western media’s alleged ignorance and cultural insensitivity, particularly in their dismissal of the bisht’s significance. While positive Western reactions are briefly acknowledged, they are framed as exceptions, reinforcing the critique of broader Western attitudes. The report avoids addressing potential negative aspects of the bisht gesture, such as accusations of politicization, ensuring a cohesive and favorable narrative about Arab traditions. Power dynamics are portrayed through the bisht moment, with the gesture framed as an assertion of cultural pride on the global stage, countering narratives of Western dominance.

In conclusion, the Arab News report frames the bisht as a symbol of cultural respect and pride, using linguistic and visual elements to criticize Western media’s reactions while celebrating Gulf traditions. Through positive language, selective imagery, and ideological framing, the report positions the bisht moment as a powerful statement of Arab identity and cultural diplomacy. The inclusion of Martínez’s obscene gesture in the secondary image further reinforces the narrative by contrasting respectful tradition with inappropriate behavior, emphasizing the contrast between cultural pride and irreverence. This framing underlines themes of inclusivity and mutual respect, presenting the bisht as a bridge between tradition and global sportsmanship.

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of Arab and non-Arab media coverage of Messi wearing the bisht highlights notable differences and some shared elements in framing the event. The subsections below provide a detailed discussion and comparison.

A. Semiotic Features

Arab media frame the bisht as a symbol of “honor,” “pride,” and “tradition,” while non-Arab reports use terms like “awkward,” “bizarre,” and “controversial,” portraying it as intrusive. Some non-Arab sources attempt neutrality, calling it a “traditional Arab robe.” Both sides show overlexicalization: Arab media emphasize “handmade” and “gold-

threaded,” while non-Arab reports repeat “unnecessary” and “overshadowing.” Selective omission also shapes narratives, Arab media avoid Western critiques, while non-Arab outlets downplay the bisht’s cultural significance. Quoting patterns differ: Arab reports highlight cultural experts, while non-Arab media amplify skepticism, citing Gary Lineker’s “a shame” remark. Functionalization and nomination reinforce framing. Arab media call Messi “the victorious captain” and the Emir “custodian of Arab traditions,” while non-Arab sources label the Emir simply “the host.” Arab reports celebrate the bisht’s craftsmanship; non-Arab media generalize its role but critique its impact on Messi’s jersey. Multimodal strategies vary, Arab media pair images of Messi in the bisht with celebratory captions, while non-Arab reports use similar visuals but frame the bisht as contentious. Both highlight its iconographic significance, but Arab media see it as cultural unity, while non-Arab media depict it as disruptive.

B. Ideological Framing

Arab reports emphasize Arab culture as generous, respectful, and rooted in tradition, presenting the bisht as a symbol of honor. In contrast, non-Arab reports focus on Western values of sporting tradition and individuality, framing Messi’s jersey as sacred. Both narratives agree on Messi’s global significance but diverge on cultural interpretation. Negative outgroup framing deepens this divide. Arab reports label Western reactions as “orientalist” and dismissive, while non-Arab reports call the bisht “awkward” and “unnecessary”, portraying it as cultural imposition. Both sides selectively acknowledge outgroup support but avoid self-criticism, Arab reports omit the bisht’s exclusivity, while non-Arab reports ignore Western cultural insensitivity. Power dynamics are also framed differently. Arab reports present the bisht as cultural diplomacy, portraying Messi’s act as voluntary. Non-Arab reports interpret it as Qatari assertion, overshadowing Messi’s triumph. Despite contrasts, both narratives highlight the bisht and Messi as symbols of broader cultural discourse.

C. Comparisons With Previous Studies

The study’s findings highlight both similarities and contrasts with prior research on multimodality and ideological framing. It confirms that the media shapes public perceptions of cultural events through text and visuals. Like Mostafa (2018) on Arab female athletes, this study found that media blends local and global narratives. However, unlike Mostafa’s “harmonious identity fusion,” non-Arab media framed the bisht as clashing with Messi’s jersey, emphasizing cultural conflict. Similar to Atma (2023), Arab media paired celebratory bisht images with positive captions, while non-Arab sources focused on controversy, reinforcing opposing narratives. The study also aligns with Assaiqeli (2021), showing how visual symbols preserve cultural identity. Just as Nakba images (olive trees, keys) evoke resilience, Arab media framed the bisht as a tradition of pride, resisting Western critiques. A contrast arises with Abdelghany et al. (2023), who analyzed humor in cultural critique. While this study examined serious ideological framing, Abdelghany et al. showed how memes used satire to critique society. Similarly, Amer (2024) and Al-Taleb and Hamdan (2024) found that media integrates text and visuals to highlight heritage. Regarding ideology, Arab media framed the bisht as Gulf pride, while non-Arab media framed it as awkward or intrusive, reinforcing selective narratives (Assaiqeli, 2021; Abdelghany et al., 2023).

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main aim of the present study was to examine how Arab and non-Arab online news sources framed the bisht moment during the 2022 FIFA World Cup differently, influenced by cultural and ideological perspectives. Arab media celebrated the bisht as a symbol of pride and tradition, using positive language, historical context, and visuals to emphasize its significance. In contrast, non-Arab media often portrayed the bisht as intrusive or unnecessary, relying on critical language and visuals to suggest that it detracted from Messi’s achievement. Both sides employed selective framing, reflecting broader cultural and ideological biases. This demonstrates how linguistic and multimodal strategies shape public understanding of culturally significant events. To address these findings, future linguistic and multimodal research should focus on how media constructs and communicates cultural narratives. Future research should compare how different cultures frame traditions in global events, analyzing word choices, metaphors, and rhetorical devices to reveal patterns of bias. Researchers should also examine how visuals, captions, and text interact to create or reinforce cultural meanings, using multimodal discourse analysis to explore the relationship between language and imagery. Finally, researchers should investigate how providing historical and cultural context in media narratives influences audience understanding and appreciation of cultural gestures. This will help reveal how media represents or misrepresents cultural practices, contributing to more inclusive and accurate communication in global contexts.

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