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Tourists' motivations and perceptions of destinations that have hosted mega events: The case of Paris 2024 Olympic Games

The Olympic Games (OG) are widely regarded as one of the most significant international mega-sporting events, attracting a global audience and intense media attention with an increasing number of cities compete to host the Games, reflecting their perceived strategic value (Pratt et al., 2016). Hosting the OG is associated with a broad range of social, economic, and environmental impacts, encompassing both potential benefits and costs. Host countries often aim to stimulate tourism revenue, enhance urban and transport infrastructure, gain extensive international visibility, and, importantly, project a positive and healthy national image through the successful staging of the OG. Given the magnitude and complexity of the OG, assessing the return on investment of hosting this globally oriented, one-off mega-event warrants careful consideration from both practical and academic perspectives with reference to tourists' motivation (Gursoy et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

Kirkup and Sutherland (2017) argued that the motivations driving sport event attendance exert a significant positive influence on attendees' emotional attachment to the host destination. The effectiveness of the OG legacy largely depends on the extent to which the event is strategically leveraged to strengthen the host destination's marketing mix and to build a strong, distinctive destination brand capable of stimulating sustained tourism demand (Hung et al., 2021).

Despite the extensive body of research on sports tourism and mega-sporting events, limited attention has been given to the impact of such events on host city image and how these perceptions influence consumer behaviour and motivation to visit a destination before and after the OG (Liu, 2013). Moreover, relatively few studies have examined how lived event experience affects visitors' intentions to revisit the host destination (Hung et al., 2021). This study seeks to address this gap by employing a qualitative research approach to examine how visitor perceptions evolve before, during, and after the Paris 2024 OG. The rationale for this research stems from a strong academic interest in sports and event tourism, combined with the contemporary relevance of the Paris 2024 Olympics, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into visitor perceptions and consumer motivations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 attendees of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The interview guide was informed by the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (Trail & James, 2001) and the Sport Interest Inventory (Funk et al., 2011), enabling an in-depth exploration of tourists' motivations for event attendance and their perceptions of destinations

hosting mega sporting events. Data collection took place over a four-week period and was conducted primarily via online platforms, specifically Microsoft Teams. This approach facilitated access to participants across different locations while allowing for flexible scheduling and rich, in-depth discussion as well transcription. Participants were selected based on a key inclusion criterion, having attended the Paris 2024 OG, with respondents recruited on a random basis within this group. The study employed the framework method of analysis, which is particularly well suited to qualitative research of this nature. This approach supports systematic data reduction and synthesis, enabling the identification of typologies, key concepts, and meaningful relationships across categories, thereby enhancing the clarity and robustness of the study's conclusions (Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

The study found that tourists' motivations to visit destinations, especially in the context of mega sporting events such as the OG, are driven by a combination of physical, cultural, personal, and social factors (Mishra et al., 2021). These motivations are further shaped by destination image, perceptions of the event, overall satisfaction, and social influences. Sporting events play a significant role in forming tourists' perceptions of a host destination, with positive experiences often increasing the likelihood of repeat visits (Muller & Kewell, 2018).

While events can enhance destination image and tourism, they also raise concerns related to cost, displacement, and environmental impact (Ikram, 2022). Tourists' motivations and perceptions are central to engagement, loyalty, and long-term destination success (Hung et al., 2021). This study finds that personal and social factors, such as watching specific sports and sharing the experience with family and friends, were key motivators for attendance, alongside Paris' iconic landmarks and its blend of cultural and sporting experiences. Although sustainability initiatives were recognised, they had little influence on attendance decisions. Overall, while the Olympics improved perceptions of Paris, practical factors such as cost and convenience played a major role in shaping future travel intentions.

Keywords: mega-event; event experience; motivations; perceptions; sustainability; media coverage; urban development

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