The role of sports events in shaping destination branding and tourist perception in the United

Kingdom

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**CHAPTER 1**

*1.1 Background of the Study*

Destination branding is marketing a place – a city, region, or country – to create an identity that attracts tourists, residents, and investors (Hanna, 2021). Sports events are essential in establishing cities, nations, and regions as premier tourism destinations (VisitBritain, 2024) and creating a strong and dynamic brand identity that enhances global recognition and attracts visitors (Gibson, 2008). These include local events like cycling tours and marathons and mega-events like the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics (VisitBritain, 2024). The events attract excitement and thrill that drive the tourists' perception, which is their cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses toward a destination based on their experiences and exposure (Bazzanella, Schniter, and Bichler, 2023).

Barnes and Ballou (2014) state that communities use sports events, such as the Olympic Games, to raise the image and profile of their region or city. The aim is to attract tourists and outside investment to the town and establish a positive economic effect (Barnes & Ballou, 2014). The same trend is noted in the UK, which has built a reputation for its sports, specifically football and marathons (VisitBritain, 2024).

Events such as the Wimbledon Premier League and the London Marathon attract thousands of tourists yearly (Statista Research Department, 2024). Figure 1 (See Appendix) shows tourists' attendance at the Wimbledon Championships between 2017 and 2023. Visitor numbers have steadily increased from 473,372 in 2017 to 532,651 in 2023 (Statista Research Department, 2024). It was only in 2021 that the visitor numbers dropped to 301,837 because of the impacts of COVID-19 (Statista Research Department, 2024). In 2023, the London Marathon attracted about 48,000 runners locally and internationally (Lee, 2023). The high number of visitors is evidence that the UK is a popular brand in global tourism, and sports might have played a significant role in solidifying its position as a tourist destination (Barnes & Ballou, 2014).

In 2012, the UK hosted the London Olympics, significantly impacting economic, social, and cultural change (Statista Research Department, 2024). For instance, as tourists visit the UK, the economy benefits from increased employment and product and service sales (Zarotis, 2021). Moreover, these events increase visitor numbers and foster a positive global perception of the destination (Bazzanella et al., 2023). A positive global perception emerges from shared tourist experiences via social media, which enables such information to reach millions of other potential

tourists worldwide (Taberner & Junca, 2021). Zarotis (2021) highlights that sports events are widely considered a product of tourism as they influence tourists' perceptions and are quickly becoming a topic issue, gaining more importance in tourism. This makes it easier for tourist agents and governments to brand a region as an exciting destination (Taberner & Junca, 2021).

Branding assists destinations, such as the United Kingdom, in developing a distinct position to attract residents, welcome tourists, encourage foreign investment, and stage cultural events, such as sports events (Richelieu, 2018). For example, the number of overseas visits to the UK progressively increased from 2002 to 2024, with 2020 and 2021 recording the lowest visitor numbers because of COVID-19 (See Appendix, Figure 2) (Statista Research Department, 2024). The United States, France, and Germany recorded the highest visitor numbers in the UK in 2023 (See Appendix, Figure 3). Gil-Alana, Ruiz-Alba, and Ayestaran (2020) claim that seasonality is also a critical determinant of UK tourism and arrivals. Their study cites the UK weather as a contributing factor, especially during the summer (Gil-Alana et al., 2020). The same is evidenced in Figure 3, which notes millions of tourists visiting Britain in 2023 for the summer holidays (Statista Research Department, 2024). As these tourists spend their holidays in Britain, they are attracted to experience sporting events, which the media would have advertised as interesting and exciting, hence increasing its visibility and dynamism (Taberner & Junca, 2021).

Tourism has always been a significant contributor to the UK economy; for instance, it created 3.64 million jobs in 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2024) and accounted for 9% of the UK GDP in 2013 (VisitBritain, 2013). However, Yun, Lee, and Kim (2024) argue that a destination must offer excitement to visitors, creating strong emotional bonds that will influence referrals or return visits. This excitement and loyalty to the destination influence positive brand image and economic growth, and sports such as football and marathons are key factors in elevating the excitement among visitors (Yun et al., 2024). Tourists want more than visiting beaches, restaurants, and local attractions (Joeng, 2023); UK events such as the Wimbledon Championship offer unique experiences that differentiate it from other destinations (VisitBritain, 2024).

As noted, sports are a major contributor to the high tourism numbers in the UK. For example, in 2019, Britain welcomed 1.5 million visitors who attended a live football match, equivalent to 1 in 27 visitors (VisitBritain, 2024). Events like the English Premier League bring in millions of international and domestic visitors annually, generating immense revenue for local economies (VisitBritain, 2024). Such figures play sports a crucial determinant of visitor numbers

in the UK and essential in destination branding. Beyond the economic benefits, these events have cultural significance, national pride, and unity and highlight the UK's cultural heritage to the world (Lickorish & Middleton, 2007). Nonetheless, despite the benefits, there is a need for in-depth academic research into the dynamics of how sports events impact branding and perception. Current research provides fragmented insights, often focusing on individual events or limited geographical areas.

## 1.2 Aim and Objectives

This research aims to determine the role of sports events in tourism and destination branding. It will analyse how sports events influence consumer perception in the context of the United Kingdom and determine how it impacts destination branding and tourism metrics. The fundamental objectives that will be used for guiding the research include the following:

| Objectives |
| --- |
| 1. To explore the role of sports events in shaping destination branding in the UK. |
| 2. To investigate the role of sports events, such as the Olympics, the UEFA Champions League, and the Premier League, in shaping tourist perceptions in the UK. |
| 3. To discuss how the English Premier League is a driver of tourism and economic development. |
| 4. To understand how destination branding influences tourist perception and behaviour. |
| 5. To provide recommendations to the tourism sector on leveraging sports events to improve destination branding and improve tourist experiences. |

## 1.3 Rationale of the Study

This research will benefit academics, policymakers, destination marketers, and event organisers and function as a guide for future studies. Understanding the impact of sports events on branding and tourist perception can inform the design and delivery of strategies to maximise the socio-economic benefits of such events. For example, the findings can help city planners and tourism boards create more effective marketing campaigns that use sports to attract tourists and investors. From an industry perspective, the study looks at the growing importance of sports tourism as a niche market. As destinations compete to host major events, understanding how to use events for branding and perception management becomes a competitive advantage. The research findings can also help stakeholders create events that resonate with tourists and align with destination branding goals. From an academic perspective, this study adds to the relationships

between sports tourism and branding. The UK context also generates localized knowledge that can inform global practice.

Furthermore, I desire to conduct this research based on my deep interest in understanding how sports events influence tourist behaviour. After experiencing the unifying effect of events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, the desire was built to explore how these moments of collective experience impact place perception and tourism. Another motivation behind this study was the need to fill the gaps in existing research and its contribution to the debate regarding the impact of sports on tourism and brand perception.

### *1.4 Dissertation Structure*

This dissertation is organized into five main chapters, each designed to address the research aims and objectives:

1. **Introduction**: The first chapter sets the foundation of the study, presenting the aims, objectives, background, and significance.

2. **Literature Review**: The second chapter critically examines existing literature on sports events, destination branding, and tourist perception globally and within the UK. It will then investigate primary theories, models, and empirical studies to establish the study's conceptual framework.

3. **Methodology**: This chapter details the research design and methods employed, including the criteria for selecting and analysing secondary data. It will be presented in two sections. The first section will highlight how data was gathered, and the second section will explain and justify data collection methods. This study will adopt a qualitative systematic review, reviewing, comparing, and assessing findings from diverse qualitative studies.

4. **Findings and Discussion**: Chapter four presents the analysis's findings, highlighting identifiable patterns and the relationships between sports events, destination branding, and tourist perception. The findings are contextualised within the broad literature, and implications for practice are highlighted.

5. **Conclusion and Recommendations**: This last chapter summarises the research study's findings, discusses implications, and offers recommendations that stakeholders can implement. It also includes the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

**CHAPTER 2**

**2.1. Introduction to Sports Events and Destination Branding**

Destinations provide a combination of tourism products and services that are offered under the destination's brand, giving tourists a cohesive experience (Bazzanella et al., 2023). Destinations refer to "locations that individuals visit and select to remain for a period to explore specific features or qualities—an identified attraction of some type," yet a destination can also represent a perceptual idea, which can be interpreted differently by consumers based on their travel experiences, cultural context, reasons for travelling, as well as their psychographic and demographic traits (Bazzanella et al., 2023). The term 'destination' encompasses both the physical area and the site's attractions, with these components being perceived and assessed by travellers in either a favourable or unfavourable manner (Bazzanella et al., 2023). Destination branding involves a multifaceted approach that extends beyond merely creating slogans and icons. Barnes & Ballou (2014) describe destination branding as a multifaceted combination of functional, emotional, relational, and strategic components. Together, all of these create a distinct network of connections in consumers' minds.

Sports have a key role in destination branding because they help increase tourism, promoting the development of local pride in the destination and enhancing Global recognition of the destination (Dubey & Kothari, 2022). Major sporting events like the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics create lasting impressions, enhance the status of a destination, and drive economic activity. The United Kingdom has a significantly rich history of sports tourism that dates to medieval tournaments and horse racing events (Su et al., 2022). In the contemporary era, iconic events like the Wimbledon 1877 and the FA Cup since 1871 have improved the reputation of the UK as a global sports destination. The London 2012 Olympics further reinforced the status of the UK in international sports tourism (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

**2.2. Theoretical Frameworks on Destination Branding and Sports Events**

**2.2.1. Place Branding Theory**

Place branding (which encompasses place marketing and place promotion) refers to the notion that "cities and regions can possess brands," using branding techniques along with various marketing strategies to enhance "the economic, political, and cultural progression of cities, regions, and countries." (Chiu et al., 2022). Unlike the branding of products and services, place branding is inherently more complex, since a 'place' is deeply "rooted in a history, a culture, an ecosystem,"

which is then woven into a web of associations, "connecting products, spaces, organizations, and people." (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021).

Consequently, the ideas of nation branding, region branding, and city branding (also referred to as urban branding) are included within the broader concept of place branding. It focuses on the concept that each destinations have a unique Identity and can be focused upon for differentiating them in the competitive Global tourism market. Sports have a key role in this process because major events and iconic teams help in developing a long-lasting brand identity of the destination (Dubinsky, 2021). Destinations like London and Barcelona have used sports to improve their Global appeal and make them recognisable beyond the physical aspects of the destination by associating them with vibrant cultural experiences and sporting excellence (Dubinsky, 2021).

## 2.2.2. Event Legacy Theory

Event legacy refers to an event's influence before, during, and after it takes place, encompassing cultural, physical, and economic effects. It is the influence and importance that a particular event can exert on individuals, whether in small or large communities, the hosting venue, and the surrounding area. A successful event legacy goes beyond short-term economic gain, promoting sustainable tourism, urban growth, and global recognition. The 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal served as a highly visible instance of this (Doyle et al., 2024). Event legacy, as defined by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), reflects the worth of sports facilities and community enhancements handed over to local communities or sports organizations following the Olympic Games (Doyle et al., 2024).

The legacy encompasses a 'legacy fund' dedicated to the continuous management of sports facilities and venues. This 'legacy fund' is a crucial component since the essential event infrastructure, such as luge tracks created for the Winter Olympics, frequently lacks economic viability and requires continuous operational funding (Dzwigol, 2022). Successful legacy planning guarantees that investments in infrastructure, policies, and branding approaches provide enduring advantages, enhancing the destination's appeal to future tourists, businesses, and residents while strengthening its global identity through the acclaim of previous sporting events.

## 2.2.3. Push and Pull Factors in Sports Tourism

The push and pull factors induce the development of a significant impact on the engagement of individuals in sports tourism. Push factors are internal motivations, which include

health benefits, the desire for adventure, and the need for social interactions. These factors increase the focus of tourists on searching for destinations that provide them with active and spectator sport experiences (Gibson, 2008). Pull factors, on the other hand, can be defined as external factors associated with a destination, such as modern facilities, high-quality sporting events or historical significance. As an example, it can be indicated that football fans travel to Manchester to visit Old Trafford while adventure seekers visit the Alps for skiing.

## 2.3. *Sports Events as Catalysts for Economic and Social Change*

### 2.3.1 Economic Impact of Major Sports Events

| Aspect | Description |
|---|---|
| Revenue Generation | Major sports events boost local economies through ticket sales, sponsorships, and broadcasting rights (Gil-Alana et al., 2020). |
| Tourism Growth | Events attract international and domestic tourists, increasing spending in the hospitality, retail, and transportation sectors. |
| Infrastructure Development | Investments in stadiums, transport, and urban facilities leave lasting economic benefits (Habu & Henderson, 2023). |
| Job Creation | Events generate employment in event management, hospitality, security, and service industries (Gil-Alana et al., 2020). |
| Long-Term Economic Effects | Successful events enhance a city's global reputation, attracting future investments and tourism. |

### 2.3.2 Cultural and Social Significance of Sports Events

| Aspect | Description |
|---|---|
| National Identity | Sporting events unite citizens, fostering national pride and a shared cultural identity (Hanna et al., 2020). |
| Community Engagement | Events promote volunteerism, local participation, and grassroots sports development. |
| Cultural Exchange | International events encourage cross-cultural interactions and global understanding (Habu & Henderson, 2023). |
| Health and Well-Being | Sports events inspire physical activity and healthier lifestyles in host communities. |

| Legacy and Inclusion | Large-scale events promote inclusivity, diversity, and social cohesion through community programs. |
|---|---|

*2.3.3 Case Examples: The 2012 London Olympics and Wimbledon Championships*

| Event | Economic Impact | Cultural and Social Significance |
|---|---|---|
| 2012 London Olympics | Generated £9.9 billion in trade and investment, created 70,000+ jobs, and improved transport infrastructure (Hanna et al., 2020). | Strengthened the UK's global image, increased sports participation, and promoted urban regeneration (e.g., Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park). |
| Wimbledon Championships | Contributes over £200 million annually to the UK economy, boosts tourism, and attracts global sponsorship deals (Jeong, 2023). | Represents British tradition and heritage, promotes tennis globally, and enhances local community engagement through outreach programs. |

## 2.4. The Influence of Sports Events on Tourist Perception

Tourists develop their perception based on three factors, which include emotional connection to sports events together with media disclosure and international brand status. Sports fans form strong emotional bonds with both their favourite teams and sporting events, which leads them to travel and visit prominent stadiums such as Wembley or Old Trafford (Jeong et al., 2020). The passion between tourists and teams motivates them to travel repeatedly while spending local money on dining hospitality services and purchases along with entertainment attractions (Jeong et al., 2020).

Media communications drive destination perception because their global platforms, social media networks, and marketing strategies elevate places into desirable destinations. Monetary events like the FIFA World Cup and Olympics gain greater interest from abroad when media reports are positive, but negative coverage results in decreased visitation rates. Numerous tourists from around the world visit England each year for matches that take place in the English Premier League (EPL) (Lee, 2023). The economy of Manchester and Liverpool receives direct benefits because football fans come to watch matches and participate in associated activities. The EPL's worldwide outreach positions England at the forefront of football tourism, which benefits the country by enhancing its football-forward position (Lickorish & Middleton, 2007).

## 2.5. *Sports Tourism and Seasonality Trends*

### 2.5.1 Role of Seasonality in Tourist Arrivals

| Aspect | Description |
|---|---|
| **Peak Seasons** | High tourist activity occurs during favorable weather, holidays, and major annual events (Su et al., 2022). |
| **Off-Seasons** | Tourism declines due to unfavorable weather, a lack of events, or reduced travel demand (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). |
| **Economic Impact** | Businesses face revenue fluctuations, with peak seasons bringing high profits and off-seasons requiring adaptive strategies. |
| **Destination Dependence** | Some locations rely heavily on specific seasons, affecting long-term sustainability (Chiu et al., 2022). |

### 2.5.2 Sports Events as Off-Season Attractions

| Event Type | Impact on Seasonality |
|---|---|
| **Winter Sports Championships** | Increases tourism in cold-weather destinations during low-travel months. |
| **Indoor Tournaments (e.g., Basketball, Tennis)** | Generates visitor traffic in cities where weather limits outdoor activities (Dubinsky, 2021). |
| **Marathons & Endurance Races** | Scheduled in off-peak months to boost tourism and maximize local business engagement (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). |
| **Football & Rugby Leagues** | Long seasons sustain visitor numbers outside peak holiday periods (Doyle et al., 2024). |

### 2.5.3 Statistical Insights: Trends in Visitor Numbers During Major Events

| Event | Visitor Increase (%) | Economic Impact |
|---|---|---|
| **Wimbledon Championships (UK)** | 25–30% rise in summer tourism (Doyle et al., 2024) | Boosts hotel occupancy and local business revenue. |

| Winter Olympics | 50–70% increase in host city visitors (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021) | Significant infrastructure investments with long-term tourism effects. |
| FIFA World Cup | 20–40% increase in international arrivals | Drives global recognition and post-event tourism growth. |
| Super Bowl (USA) | $500M+ in local economic benefits (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021) | Attract high-spending visitors, media exposure, and corporate sponsorships. |

## 2.6. Challenges and Criticisms in Sports-Driven Destination Branding

### 2.6.1 Over-Reliance on Sports Events for Branding

| Challenge | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of Diversification | Cities that focus primarily on sports events for branding may struggle if major events decline or move elsewhere (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). |
| Short-Term Visibility | The branding impact of a sports event can fade quickly without sustained marketing and investment in other attractions (Chiu et al., 2022). |
| Economic Risks | Heavy reliance on sports tourism can lead to financial instability if event revenue fluctuates or does not meet expectations (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). |
| Competitive Market | Many destinations compete for global sporting events, making it difficult to maintain a leading position in sports tourism. |

### 2.6.2 Sustainability and Long-Term Impact of Event Hosting

| Challenge | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Infrastructure Maintenance | Post-event, stadiums and facilities often become underutilized, leading to high maintenance costs. |
| Environmental Concerns | Large-scale events generate significant waste, carbon emissions, and strain on local ecosystems (Su et al., 2022). |
| Community Displacement | Construction for events may displace local communities, affecting housing affordability and social structures (Dubinsky, 2021). |
| Financial Burden | Host cities often face long-term debt due to expensive infrastructure investments that may not yield expected returns. |

*2.6.3 Managing Overcrowding and Economic Inequality*

| Challenge | Description |
|---|---|
| **Overcrowding** | Influxes of tourists can strain public transport, accommodation, and local infrastructure (Barnes & Ballou, 2014). |
| **Rising Costs** | Increased demand for housing, goods, and services can drive up prices, making cities less affordable for residents. |
| **Economic Disparities** | The benefits of sports tourism often favor large corporations and high-income groups, leaving local communities with minimal gains (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021). |
| **Tourism Dependence** | Cities that overly focus on sports tourism may neglect broader economic development, making them vulnerable to industry fluctuations. |

## *2.7. Gap Analysis and Research Opportunities*

Current research associated with sports-driven destination branding fundamentally focuses on the short-term economic benefits and does not analyse the community impact or long-term sustainability. There is limited assessment on the impact that sporting events have in influencing destination branding and the tourism perception particularly focus on a specific destination like United Kingdom. This research gap indicates the need for a more precise assessment of the role of sports events in destination branding and tourist perception.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

Research methodology is associated with the research techniques and methods employed to analyse and formulate a research study (Melnikovas, 2018). This chapter will provide the outline of the methodology that will be used for analysing *'The role of sports events in shaping destination branding and tourist perception in the United Kingdom'*. The study will implement the use of the *Onion Research Methodology* developed by Saunders to ensure that the research follows a systematic approach for the selection of research philosophy, approach, strategy, design, time horizon and data collection methods. The chapter will also provide a comprehensive discussion of the ethical considerations and the potential limitations of the research.
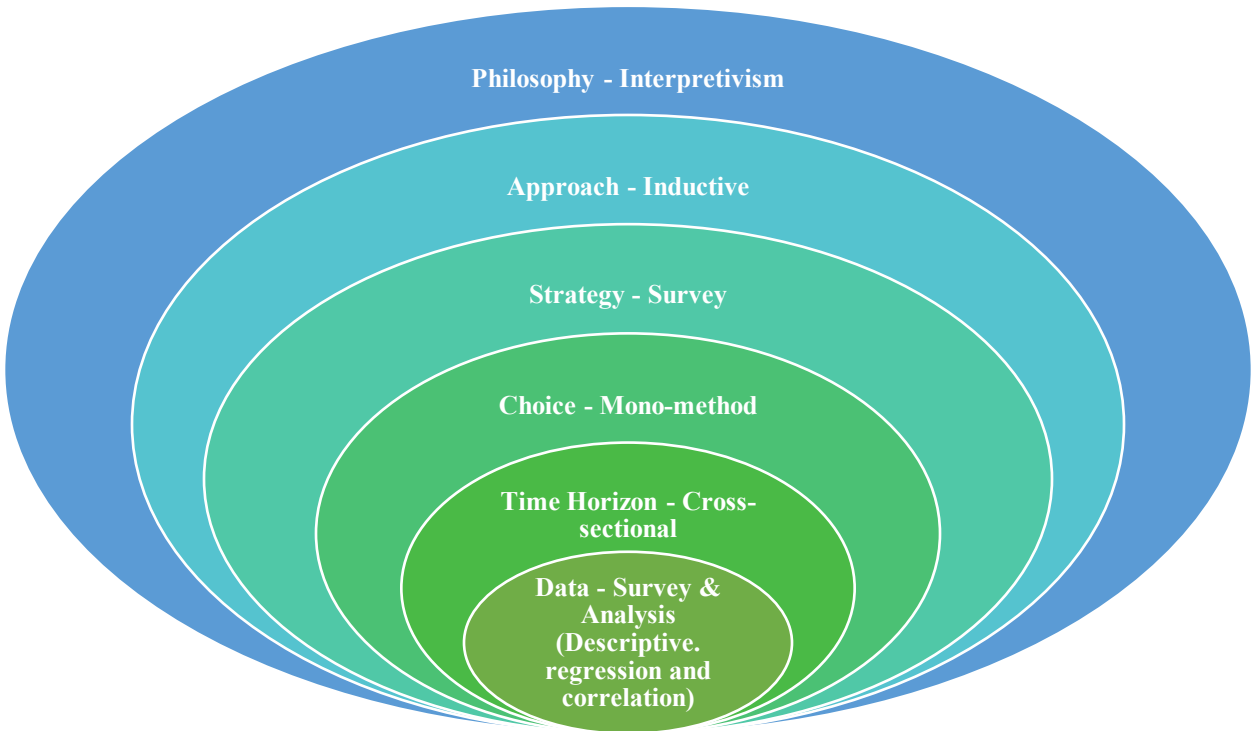
### 3.2 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy consists of fundamental principles that direct the planning and implementation of a research project, with various research philosophies providing distinct perspectives on comprehending scientific inquiry. Research philosophy pertains to the assumptions, knowledge, and essence of the study and focuses on the method of acquiring knowledge (Mishra & Alok, 2022). This research will adopt an interpretivism philosophy, which is feasible for analysing experiences and perceptions. Interpretivism is linked to the philosophical stance of idealism and is used to classify various approaches, such as social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; these approaches reject the objectivist perspective that meaning exists within the world independently of awareness.

In the interpretive approach, it is crucial for the researcher as a social actor to recognize the distinctions among individuals (Zhou, Li, & Sun, 2022). The interpretivism approach will help in acknowledging the concept that tourist perception and destination branding are subjective and are impacted by external factors like media coverage, marketing strategies, and sports events and internal factors like personal experiences. Implementation of this philosophy will help ensure that the research is associated with an elevated level of validity because the data collector will be more honest and trustworthy.

### 3.3 Research Approach

There are two kinds of research methods: the deductive method and the inductive method (Sahay, 2016). The research will follow an inductive approach. Inductive reasoning is a technique of reasoning where general principles or broad conclusions are drawn from a collection of

observations (Susilawati et al., 2025). Inductive reasoning differs from deductive reasoning (like mathematical induction), where the conclusion of a deductive argument is true if the premises are accurate; in contrast, the conclusion of an inductive argument is, at most, true based on the provided evidence (Habu & Henderson, 2023).

Philosophy - Interpretivism

Approach - Inductive

Strategy - Survey

Choice - Mono-method

Time Horizon - Cross-sectional

Data - Survey & Analysis (Descriptive. regression and correlation)

Rather than starting with a fixed hypothesis, the research analyses the relationships between sports events, tourist perception, and destination branding by implementing primary data collection. The fundamental justification for selecting the inductive approach is that it will help in analysing and generating new insights, increasing the flexibility of research, and capturing the complexity of the real-world phenomenon. In comparison to the deductive approach, which evaluates existing theories, the inductive approach will be more feasible to understand the views and experiences of the tourists rather than confirming the pre-existing theories.

This hypothetico-inductive research approach helps in supporting the data analysis and answering the research question by determining the relationship between the variables - destination branding, consumer perception and sports events. On top of this, the approach also helps in increasing the replicability of the research because a similar methodology can be applied in future studies in the same field for validating or challenging the findings.\

### 3.4. Research Method:

The quantitative method, as its name implies, focuses on quantitative data. The quantitative research method is relevant when research is performed on a significant number of participants, and the observations can be documented as quantities or numerical information (Melnikovas, 2018). Conversely, the qualitative method focuses on the information that respondents give based on their understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher refrains from using their perception when implementing the qualitative method. Therefore, the challenge in qualitative methods is that the researcher must develop the research methodology based on data from the observer instead of his or her interpretation (Mardiana, 2020).

This research uses a mixed method research design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques, which complements the unique research approach. The mixed method research design helps in providing a comprehensive assessment of the complex phenomenon - the impact of sports events on consumer perception and destination branding. The use of the research method is predominantly influenced by the substantial research questions and not only by the epistemological and methodological considerations. The mixed method research design is viable for this research because by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, their overlapping weaknesses are eliminated. The research approach helps in developing a thorough assessment of the research questions and triangulates the findings through the strategic deployment of both research approaches.

### 3.4 Research Strategy

The research strategy discusses the planned methods which researchers use for their research investigation and contains several techniques, including case studies, surveys, thematic analysis, experimental methods and thorough literature reviews (Mardiana, 2020). The research utilizes a mixed survey-based and thematic analysis research strategy. The research employs a survey strategy to collect primary data from tourists, event attendees, and industry professionals. Survey research is a distinct method for collecting data from a large cohort (Dzwigol, 2022). The advantages of surveys involve accessing a large population, which enhances statistical power, the capability to collect extensive data, and the presence of validated frameworks. Implementation of the survey research strategy will help in developing a feasible quantitative analysis, enabling the identification of trends and development of correlation between sports perceptions, events, and branding.

Thematic analysis complements the survey-based research through its systematic identification of recurring patterns found in existing data to serve as the qualitative research method. Careful assessment of existing studies helps to extract essential meanings that contribute to different interpretations of the research topic. The research gathers multiple reviewed studies and follows a systematic integration method to determine trends, recurrent themes and previous literature inconsistencies. The information acquired from the thematic analysis helps in validating the survey findings and reducing the risk of bias or inaccurate analysis.

### 3.5 Research Choices:

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasize two primary research options: the mono method and the multiple method. The mono method involves collecting and analysing data singularly. Techniques for collecting quantitative data or analysing data produce or utilize numerical values. Unlike the mono method, the multiple method employs several data collection techniques and analysis procedures (Dubey & Kothari, 2022). For this research, a multi-method quantitative and qualitative approach is used, meaning that structured survey data and meta-analysis data are collected and analysed statistically. The quantitative data is acquired by employing a survey comprised of 15 questions - 5 demographic questions and 10 research-based questions. The qualitative data, on the other hand, is sourced from the thematic analysis of previous literature. Collecting data from previous literature helps in providing contextual findings within existing research on the research topic, which, when combined with the quantitative data, strengthens the reliability of the results.

### 3.6 Time Horizon

A cross-sectional study design is used, meaning data is collected at a single point in time rather than over an extended period (Saunders et al., 2009). The cross-sectional research design is ideal for investigating the current tourist perception and destination branding impacted by sports events because it will help in collecting data at a single point in time and efficiently capturing real-time opinions of tourists, industry professionals and event attendees. It will help in reflecting the immediate impact of the sports event on perception and branding. In comparison to the longitudinal studies, which track changes over an extended period, the cross-sectional design will help in enhancing cost efficiency, time efficiency and feasibility for analysing relationships and trends through surveys. It will provide valuable information regarding how sports events influence brand perceptions and tourist experiences without needing an extended follow-up period.

| Task | Timeframe |
|------|-----------|
| **Ethics Approval** | January 2025 |
| **Introduction** | January 2025 |
| **Literature Review** | February 2025 |
| **Methodology Development** | March 2025 |
| **Survey Distribution & Meta-Analysis** | April – May 2025 |
| **Data Collection Completion** | |
| **Data Analysis (Quantitative & Thematic)** | |
| **Findings & Discussion** | |
| **Conclusion & Recommendations** | |
| **Final Editing & Submission** | |

## 3.7 Data Collection Method

### 3.7.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data will be collected by utilizing an online survey hosted on Google Forms, targeting 113 respondents belonging to the sample population of event attendees, tourists, and tourism industry professionals. The survey will comprise questions related to the role of sports events in influencing destination branding and tourist perception in the United Kingdom, subdivided into the two following sections:

- 5 demographic questions related to the assessment of age, sports event attendance, nationality, gender, and event type.
- 10 questions measuring tourism branding, tourist perception, media influence and economic impact of sports events.

The survey will implement the use of a 5-point Likert scale ( a rating scale used to measure opinions, attitudes, or behaviors) (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) for statistical analysis. When responding to a Likert item, the participants will indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement on the balanced agree-disagree scale for the 15 questions. This range will reflect the strength of their emotions toward a particular variable.
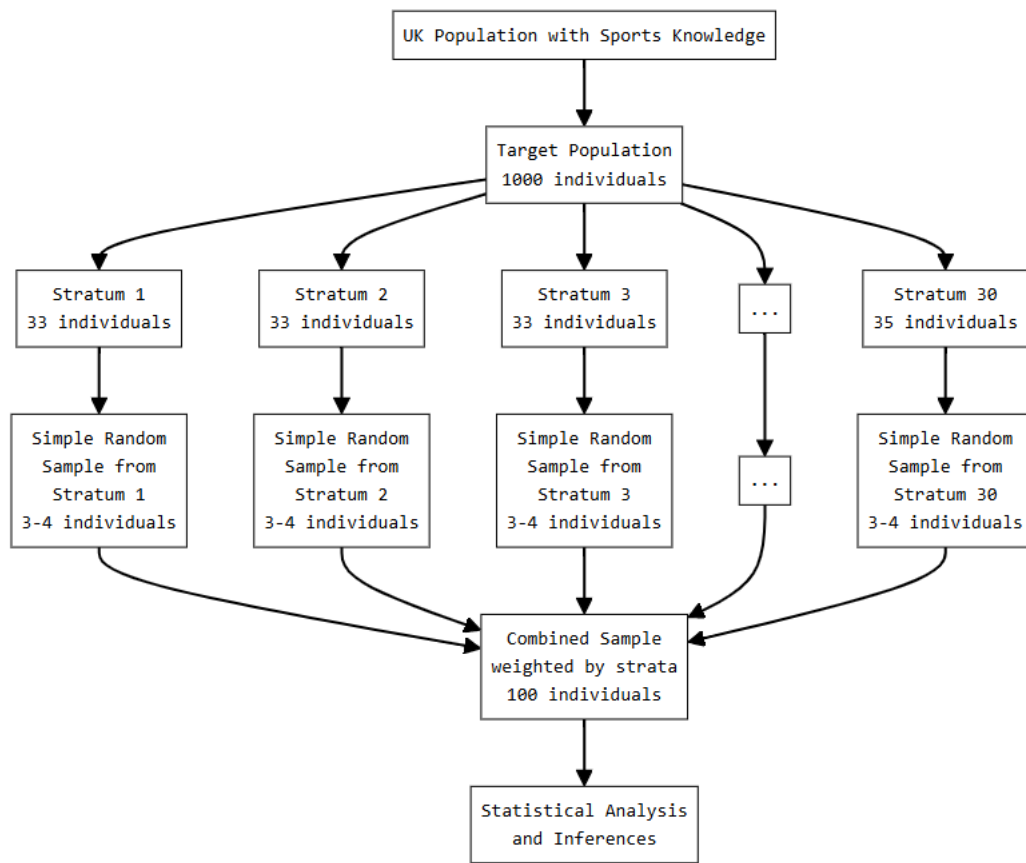
### 3.7.2 Sampling Technique

The accuracy of a study is heavily impacted by the process of sampling. Sampling techniques can be broadly categorized into two types: probability sampling techniques and non-probability sampling techniques. Probability sampling techniques include systematic random

sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling (Sahay, 2016). On the other hand, non-probability sampling techniques include quota sampling, convenience sampling, self-selection sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling (Abdelhakim, 2021).

The target population for this research includes individuals residing in the United Kingdom and having some knowledge of sports events in the United Kingdom. The sample includes:

- Tourists who have attended sports events in the UK
- Industry professionals in tourism and sports event management

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A stratified random sampling approach is used for sampling the target population to make inferences about the population as a whole. The total population size assumed for this research (considering the scope and time constraints) is 1000, which is divided into 30 sampling clusters or strata comprised of mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive groups of individuals. A simple random sampling is then independently drawn from each of these strata, and the resulting subsamples are weighted and combined to form a stratified random sample of approximately 100 individuals (n = 113).

A snowball sampling technique will also be implemented for this research. Snowball sampling (also known as chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, or referral sampling) is a nonprobability sampling method in which current study participants enlist future participants from their network of acquaintances. Therefore, the sample group is described as expanding like a rolling snowball. As the sample accumulates, sufficient data is collected to be valuable for research. This sampling method will be effective in gaining access to the concealed population of sports enthusiasts and sports event attendees that are otherwise difficult to access.

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         │ Papers Filtered Out│   │ Remaining Papers │
         │    59 papers     │     │    29 papers     │
         └──────────────────┘     └──────────────────┘
                                           │
                                           ▼
                         ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                         │     In-depth Assessment for   │
                         │ Alignment with Research Objectives│
                         └──────────────────────────────┘
                            │                       │
                            ▼                       ▼
                 ┌──────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐
                 │ Papers Excluded  │     │ Final Selection  │
                 │     9 papers     │     │    20 papers     │
                 └──────────────────┘     └──────────────────┘
```

For the thematic analysis, 168 research papers on the research topic are initially selected. A systemic filtering process is then integrated to ensure that only the most relevant, methodologically feasible and high-quality studies are selected. The initial screening was based upon title and abstract review, which excluded 80 studies and rendered only 88 studies to proceed, followed by methodology and quality assessment. The inclusion and exclusion criteria that were employed for filtering the previous studies include:

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
| --- | --- | --- |

| Publication Date | Studies published within the last 5–10 years for up-to-date insights. | Papers older than 10 years, unless they provide foundational knowledge. |
|---|---|---|
| Relevance | Papers must focus on sports events, destination branding and consumer perception. | Studies unrelated to sports or those focusing on general fitness without a clear relation to the research topic were excluded. |
| Methodology | Must include qualitative or mixed-method research suitable for thematic analysis. | Purely quantitative studies without thematic insights. |
| Source Credibility | Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and high-quality reports. | Non-peer-reviewed sources (e.g., blogs, news articles, opinion pieces). |
| Language | Only English-language papers for consistency and accessibility. | Studies published in languages other than English. |
| Methodological Clarity | Papers with clear research design, data collection, and thematic analysis approach. | Studies with unclear methodologies, weak data analysis, or insufficient details. |

The application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria led to the filtering out of 59 papers. Subsequently, an in-depth assessment of each of the remaining 29 research papers was conducted to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Studies that provided rich thematic information regarding the research topic were prioritized, which led to the exclusion of 9 studies and a final selection of 20 papers.

### 3.7.3 Survey Distribution

| Distribution Method | Platforms/Channels | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| Social Media | Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter/X | To reach a broad audience of tourists and sports enthusiasts |
| Online Forums | Sports and tourism discussion platforms | To engage individuals interested in sports events and tourism |

| Email Invitations | Sent to industry professionals | To gather insights from experts in tourism and event management |
|---|---|---|

### 3.8 Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method follows both quantitative and quantitative approaches. The data collected from the survey is analyzed by employing Excel. Graphical analysis is conducted analyzing the respondents' answers. Interpretative data is implemented for analyzing the primary trends in destination branding and tourist perception regarding sports events. Data analysis ToolPak and Pivot Table feature is used for visualizing and organizing the primary data collected.

Regression analysis will also be conducted to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variable by using the data analysis ToolPak:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- **Y (Dependent Variable)** = Tourist Perception or Destination Branding
- $X_1$ = Sports Event Attendance
- $X_2$ = Media Influence on Perception
- $X_3$ = Economic Impact of Sports Events
- $\beta_0$ = Intercept (constant)
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Regression Coefficients (showing the effect of each independent variable)

This will help in determining the significance and strength of relationships between destination branding and sports events.

On top of this, correlation analysis will also be conducted by using the CORREL function of Excel to measure the relationship between the primary variables. For example, the research will analyse whether higher media coverage is related to improvement in tourist perception or if sports event attendance induces an increment in the probability of recommending the UK as a travel destination. These analytical techniques will help in providing data-driven information for supporting the objectives and inferring the research questions of the research.

For the thematic analysis of 20 research papers, manual coding is used to extract the recurring themes and ensure a comprehensive qualitative synthesis. The results from the quantitative and qualitative approaches are then interpreted to identify gaps and answer the research questions.

## 3.9 Reliability and Validity

**Reliability**

| Method | Description |
|---|---|
| **Pilot Testing** | The survey was evaluated by 10 participants to ensure clarity, consistency, and ease of understanding. |
| **Cronbach's Alpha (Excel Analysis)** | The internal consistency of Likert scale responses is measured using Excel formulas to assess reliability. |

**Validity**

| Method | Description |
|---|---|
| **Content Validity** | Survey questions are designed based on prior research and expert input to ensure they reflect relevant concepts. |

| Construct Validity | Questions are structured to measure key variables accurately, such as branding, perception, and media influence. |
|---|---|

## 3.10 Ethical Considerations

The research maintains alignment with the research ethics guidelines of BU Business School to ensure that the rights and data security of the participants are protected. Informed consent will be acquired from the survey participants, and confidentiality will be maintained by not collecting any personally identifiable information. Participants will also be informed of they are right to withdraw from the research at any point of the research without any consequences. Data protection measures will also be integrated, which include secure storage on the password-protected device with data deletion after the research is completed. Kaun is setting that the research involves low-risk adult participants (18+), and no additional ethical approvals are required beyond the standard University procedures.

In consideration of secondary data, the main ethical concern is associated with the potential harm to individual subjects in the previous literature and the issue of obtaining consent (Kampira & Meyer, 2021). Secondary data from various sources may differ regarding the total amount of identifiable information accessible (Kampira & Meyer, 2021). If the data lacks any identifiable information, is entirely free of such details, or is properly coded with restricted access to the codes, then it does not need a comprehensive review by the ethics committee. Nevertheless, if the data sources hold identifiable details regarding the participants or information that could be used for identifying them, then it poses significant ethical issues (Kampira & Meyer, 2021). To prevent this, this research exclusively utilizes verified, industry-approved, and peer-reviewed data sources that lack identifiable information.

## 3.11 Limitations of the Study

| Limitation | Description | Possible Solution |
|---|---|---|
| Self-Reported Data | Responses may be influenced by bias, such as social desirability, where participants provide answers they believe are favourable. | Future studies can use observational methods or triangulation (comparing multiple data sources) to reduce bias. |
| Cross-Sectional Design | The study captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to track long- | Conduct longitudinal research to monitor changes in tourist perceptions over multiple years. |

| | term changes in branding and tourist perception. | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sampling Bias** | Purposive sampling focuses on specific groups (tourists and professionals), limiting generalizability to a wider population. | Use random sampling or expand the sample to include a more diverse tourist demographic. |

### *3.12 Chapter Summary:*

The chapter provided an outline of the research methodology by implementing the research on your framework of Saunders. A quantitative, mono-method, cross-sectional survey approach was adopted to ensure structural validity and statistical reliability of the data analysis. The next chapter will present the research findings and data analysis, examining the relationships between destination branding, sports events, and tourist perceptions in the United Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

### *4.1. Chapter Introduction:*

The relationship between sports and tourism has been widely discussed over the past decade, and sports tourism has been a complex and major research topic. The results and findings chapter provides a comprehensive presentation of the qualitative and quantitative research and develops a comparative cross-method analysis to infer the primary research.
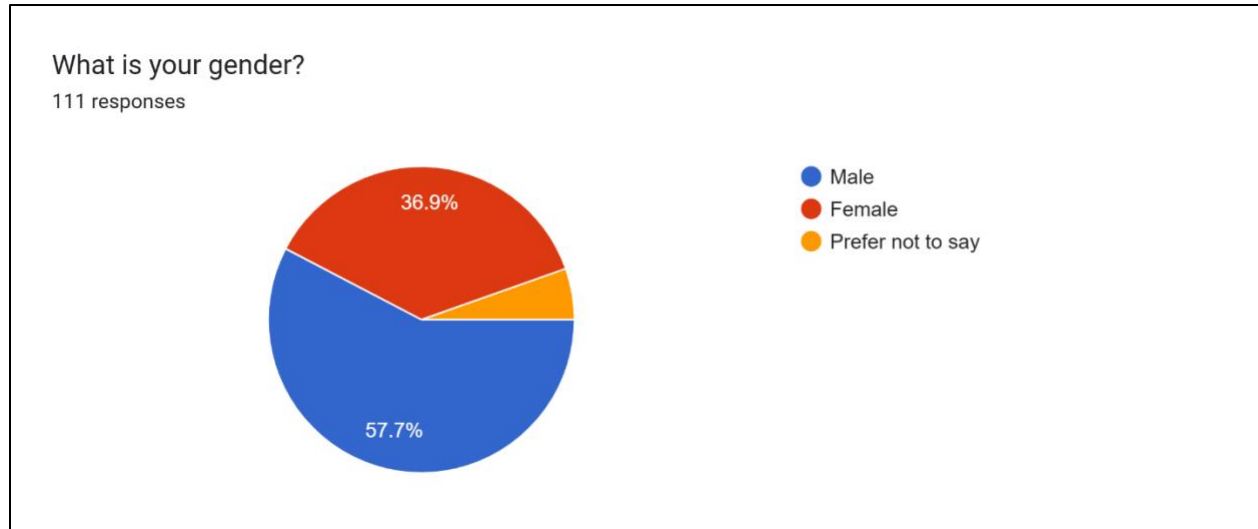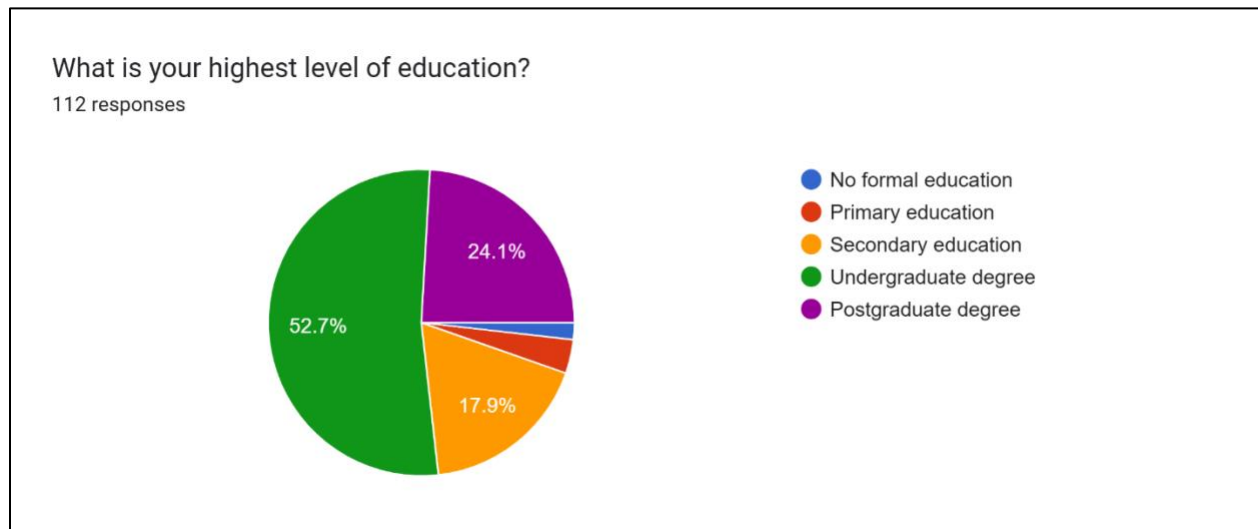
### *4.2. Survey Results:*

### *4.2.1. Demographic Analysis:*

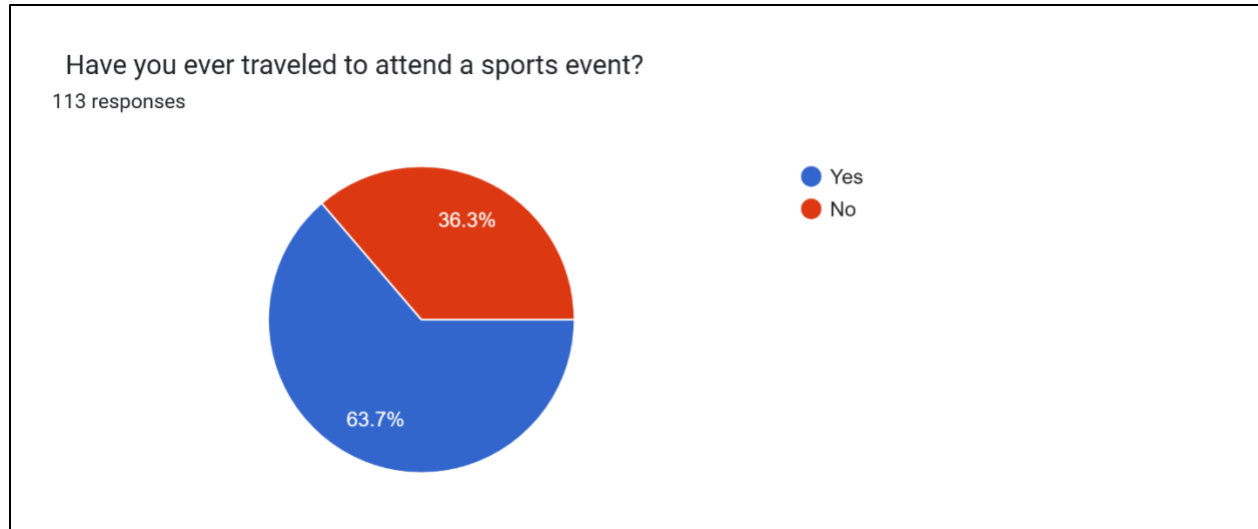The total number of participants was 113 (n = 113).



61.1% of the sample population belongs to the age group of 18 to 30, 23.9% to the age group of 31 to 45, 8.8% to the age group of 46 to 60 and the remaining below the threshold of 18 or above the threshold of 60. The age group distribution of the target population indicates that the results of the survey might be slightly skewed towards perceptions of the 18 to 30 age group.

What is your gender?

111 responses

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

36.9%

57.7%

57.7% of the sample population are male, and 36.9% of the sample population are female, and the remaining participants did not provide information regarding their gender orientation. The distribution of the sample population between the male and female group is approximately equal, however, the slightly larger male population indicates that the results might be skewed based on the behavioural patterns and perceptions of the male population.

What is your highest level of education?

112 responses

- No formal education
- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Undergraduate degree
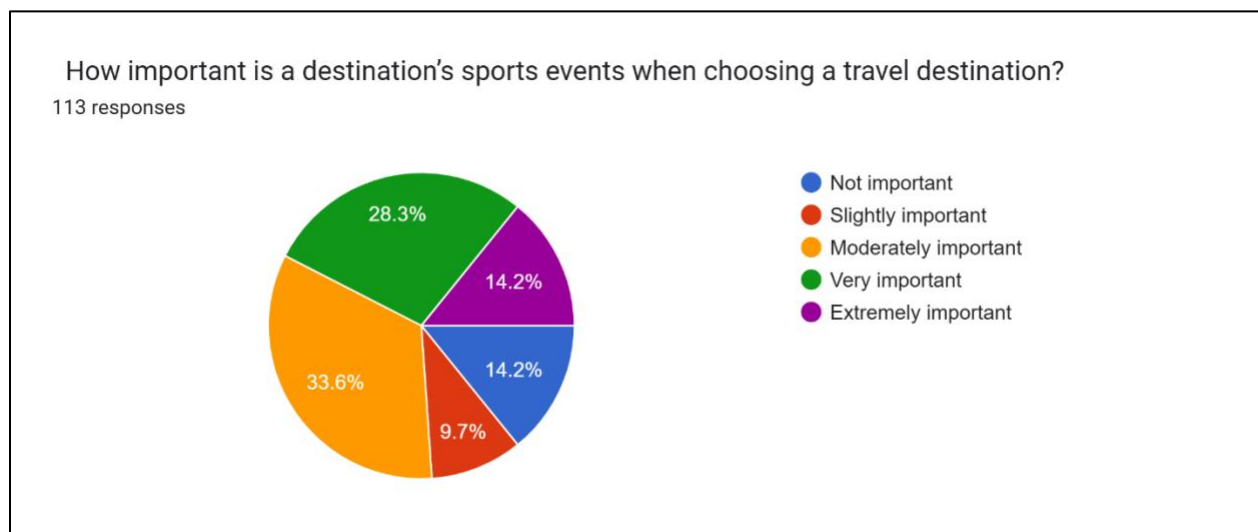- Postgraduate degree

24.1%

52.7%

17.9%

52.7% of the sample population has an undergraduate degree, 24.1% has a post-graduate degree, and 17.9% has a secondary education degree. The distribution of the sample population based on the highest level of education indicates that the sample population is highly educated, with the majority of the population belonging to the undergraduate or postgraduate level.

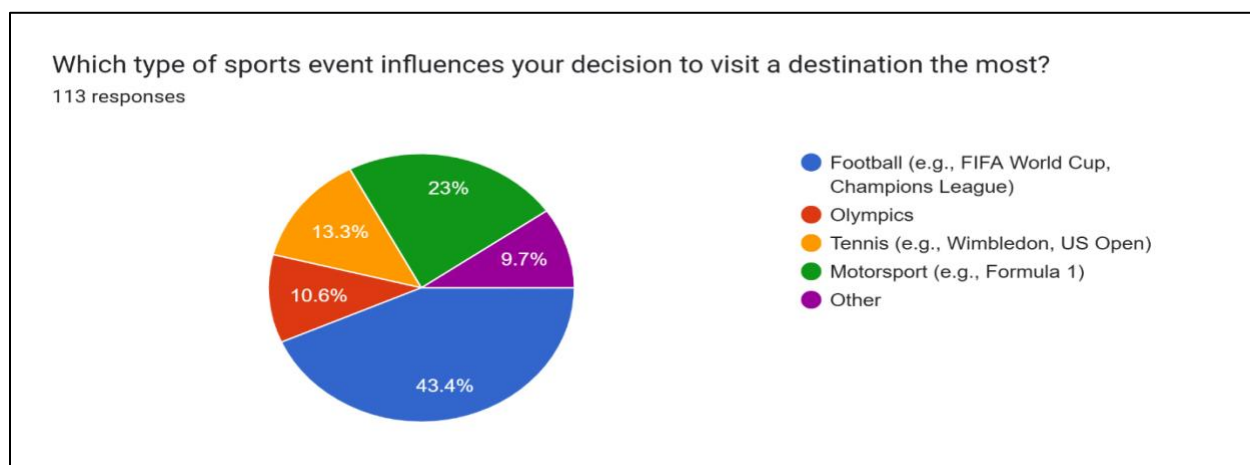Have you ever traveled to attend a sports event?
113 responses

63.7% of the population highlighted that they have travelled to destinations for a particular sports event, and 36.3% indicated that they have not travelled to any destination particularly for a sports event. This demographic data suggests that there is a potential relationship between sports event attendance and destination branding and an increment in sports tourism.

*4.2.2. Graphical Analysis:*



How important is a destination's sports events when choosing a travel destination?
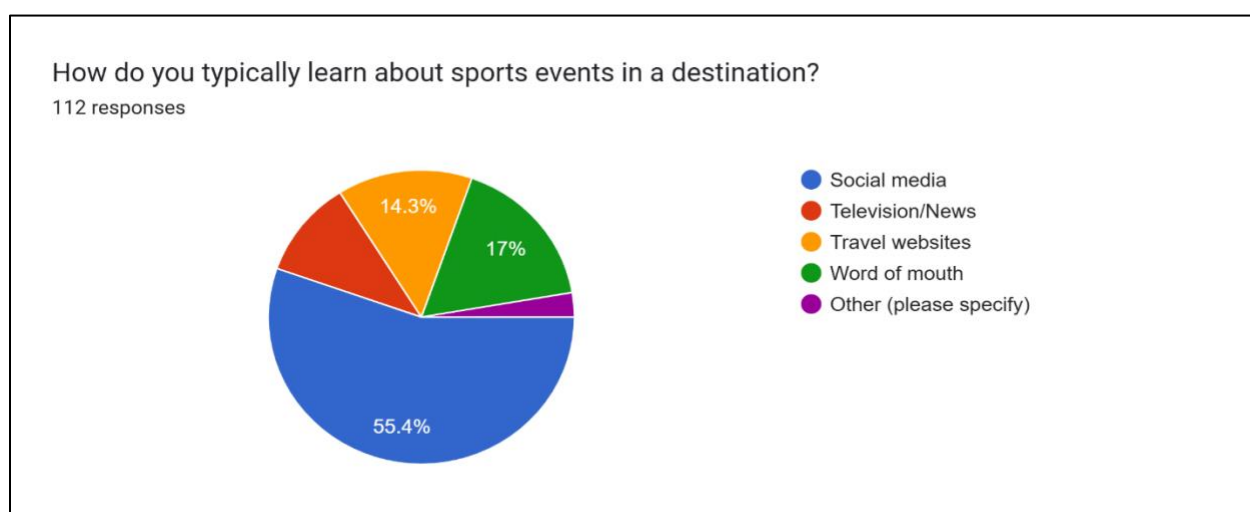113 responses

According to the survey results, the majority of the sample population (33.6%) indicates that sports events are moderately important when selecting a travel destination. Around 14.2% indicates that it is extremely important, while 28.3% states that it is very important. The proportion of the sample population indicating a positive relationship between sports event destination and selection of travel destination is considerably higher than the proportion of the population indicating a negative relation between the two variables. This result can be attributed to the fact

that, over the years, sports events have become important components of human societies, fulfilling multiple functions. They not only provide entertainment but also social value, as a result of which the organisation of a major sports event increase the Global population to have a tendency of selecting the sports destination for travelling.
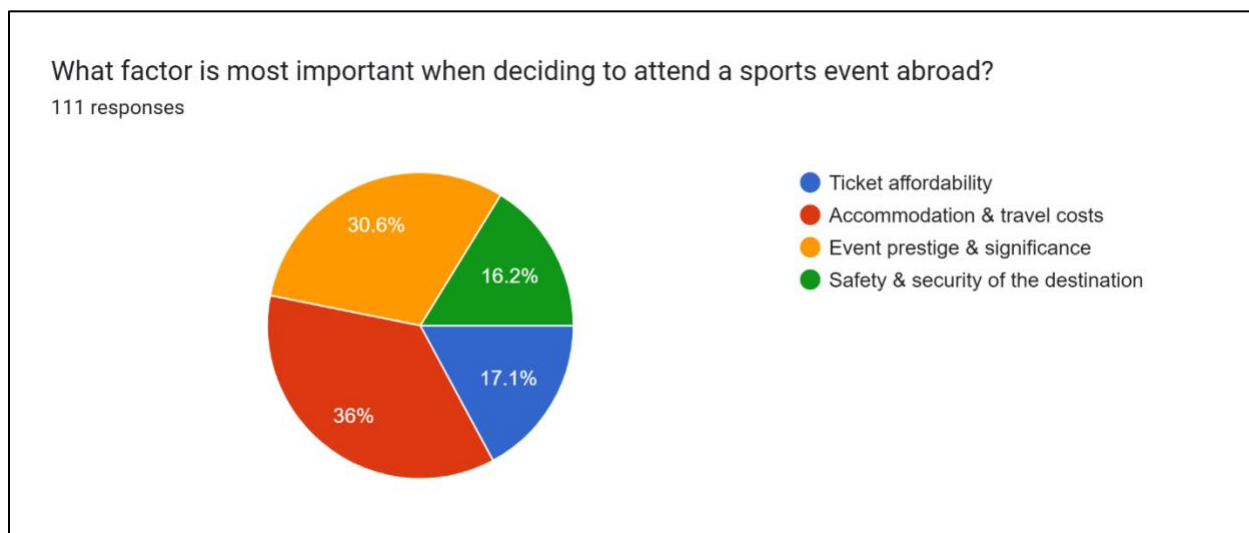


The survey results provide empirical evidence that football is the most influential sporting event that induces decisions regarding visiting a destination. Around 43.4% of the population stated football to be the major sport event that influences their travel decisions, followed by motor sports like Formula 1, supported by 23% of the population, tennis, supported by 13.3% of the population and the Olympics, indicated by 10.6% of the population. The increased attractiveness toward these sports, particularly football, can be associated with significant investments made by governments and tourism agencies in marketing the sports destination for these events.

55.6% of the population have indicated that their knowledge regarding the sports event at a destination comes from social media, while 17% highlight word of mouth to be the primary marketing channel. The majority of the sample population agrees that
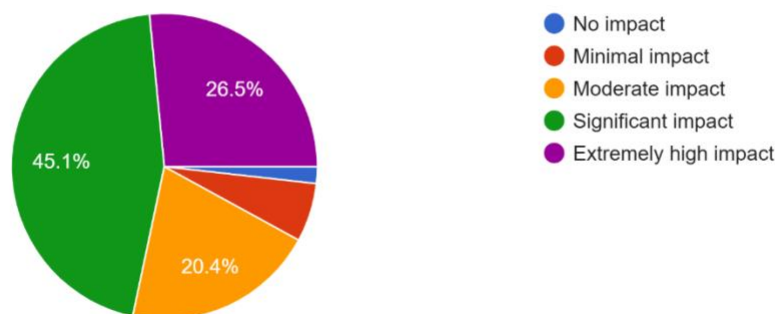
Social media to be the primary marketing channel from where they learn about the sports event in a destination highlights that it is one of the most influential and effective tools for improving sports tourism awareness and encouraging participation of the population in the sports event.



What factor is most important when deciding to attend a sports event abroad?
111 responses

- Ticket affordability
- Accommodation & travel costs
- Event prestige & significance
- Safety & security of the destination

30.6%
16.2%
17.1%
36%

Assessment of the survey results will reveal that 36% of the population highlights that accommodation and travel costs have an extensive impact on their travel decision when attending a sports event abroad. 30% highlight events' prestige and significance as the major factor influencing their travel decision, while 16.2% indicate safety and security of the destination, and 17.1% highlight ticket affordability of the sports event to be the major deciding factor. Based on this, it is evident that the quality of the event has a perceived impact on the brand image of the destination. Tourist satisfaction concerning the Sporting event has recreation for the brand identity and destination. The efficiency or failure of hosting or organising a major sporting event in terms of improving the brand perception of the destination might be dependent on the degree to which the event and the nation can develop brand strategies that correspond to proper accommodation and travel prices and event prestige and significance.
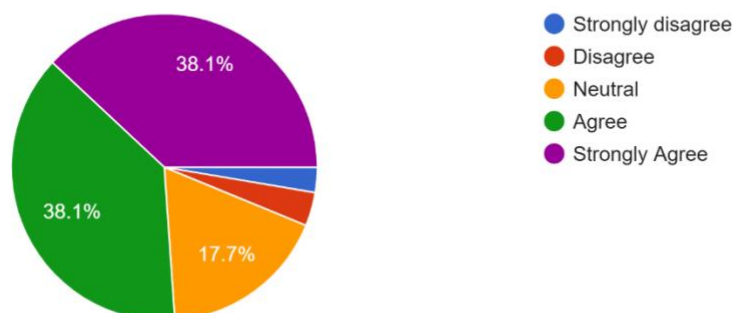
According to the survey results, 45.1% of the population highlights that measure Sporting events have significant impact on the economy of a destination, 26.5% believe start it has extremely high impact on the economy of the destination and 20.4% perceives it to have moderate impact. In other words, the majority of the sample population links the improvement in the economy of the destination with the hosting of major sports events, which is indirectly related to consumer perception and tourism feasibility.
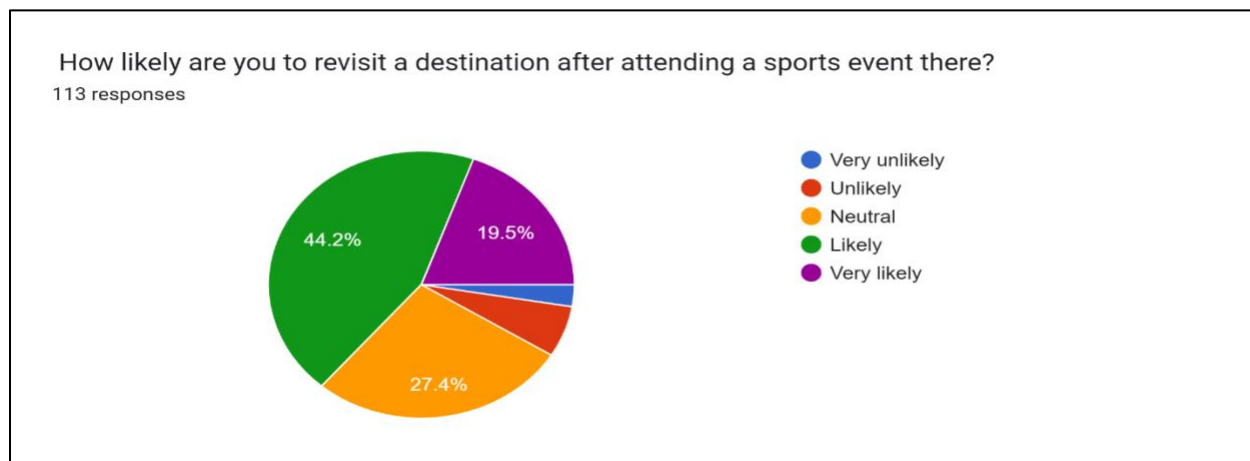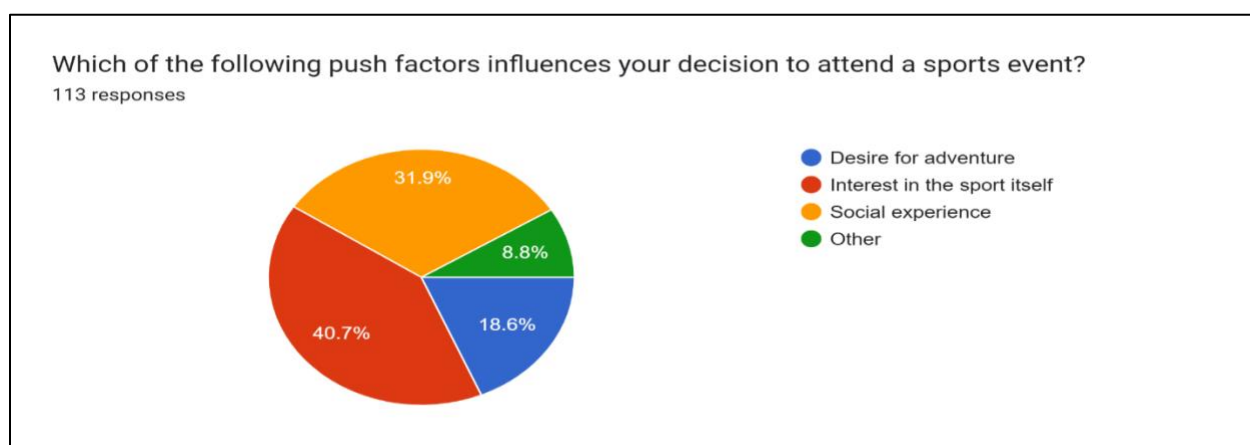


38.1% agree that a major sporting event enhances the Global reputation of a destination hosting the event, 38.1% strongly agree that hosting a major sporting event improves the Global reputation of a destination, and 17.7% are neutral about the relationship between the two variables. Considering that the majority of the population have attendance see of relating both of the variables

positively, it can be inferred that major spot even enhances the consumer perception of a particular tourism destination.
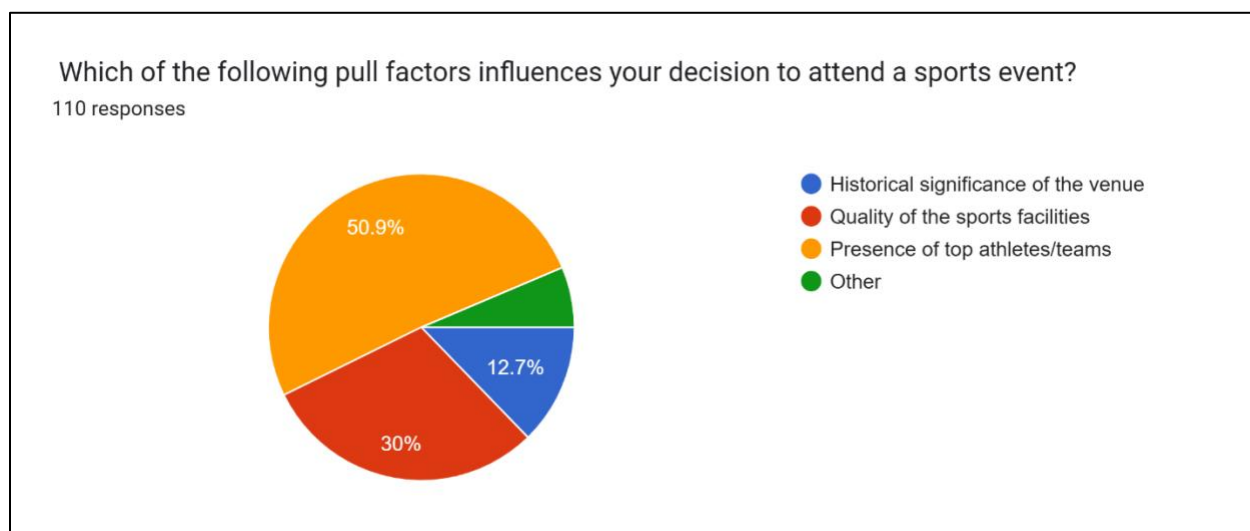


The majority of the sample population, 44.2%, highlighted that they have a greater likelihood to revisit a destination after attending a sports event, and 19.5% indicates that day are very likely to revisit the destination. This highlights that there is an extensive relationship between tourism destination perception among the consumer and sport events. Major sports events, irrespective of their type and size, can encourage tourism by creating an emotional relationship between the consumer and the destination. Consumers tend to have an emotional association with the destination after visiting a major event, particularly if they are passionate about the sports event, leading to greater potential for revisiting the destination because of improvement in consumer perception, development of enhanced destination branding and increment in destination awareness.
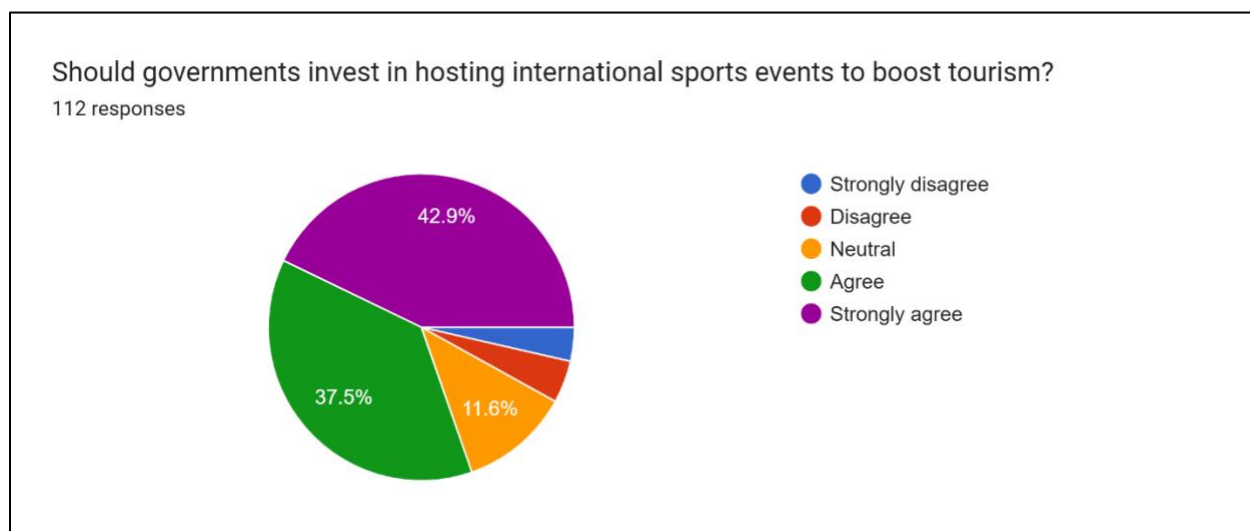


40.7% of the population highlights that the interest in the sport itself is the primary push factor that influences their travel decision to attend a particular sports event. 31.9% highlights the

social experience of a sports event to influence their decision, and 18.6% indicates a desire for adventure. These factors need to be considered during the development of sports tourism marketing in order to develop feasible strategies that are able to improve consumer perception and destination branding of a particular sports destination.



A major proportion of the population, amounting to 50.9%, indicates that the presence of top teams or athletes is the primary full factor that influences their decisions to attend a sports event. Around 30% highlight the quality of the sports facility to have an extensive impact on the travel decision, and 12.7% highlight the historical significance of the venue to influence that travel decision. These factors can be considered to be primary bases of developing marketing strategies to ensure that consumer perception and destination branding are positively impacted by sports events hosting at a destination.

42.9% and 37.5% of the sample population strongly agree and agree (respectively) with the concept that the government needs to invest in hosting international sports events to boost tourism. This belief of the sample population highlights that there is a positive relationship between consumer perception and sports events hosting at a destination based on which they perceive that it is important for the government to invest in hosting international sports events for boosting tourism.

*4.2.3. Inferential Analysis:*

**Regression analysis 1 - Sports Event Attendance vs. importance of a destination's sports events when choosing a travel destination (Media Influence on Perception)**
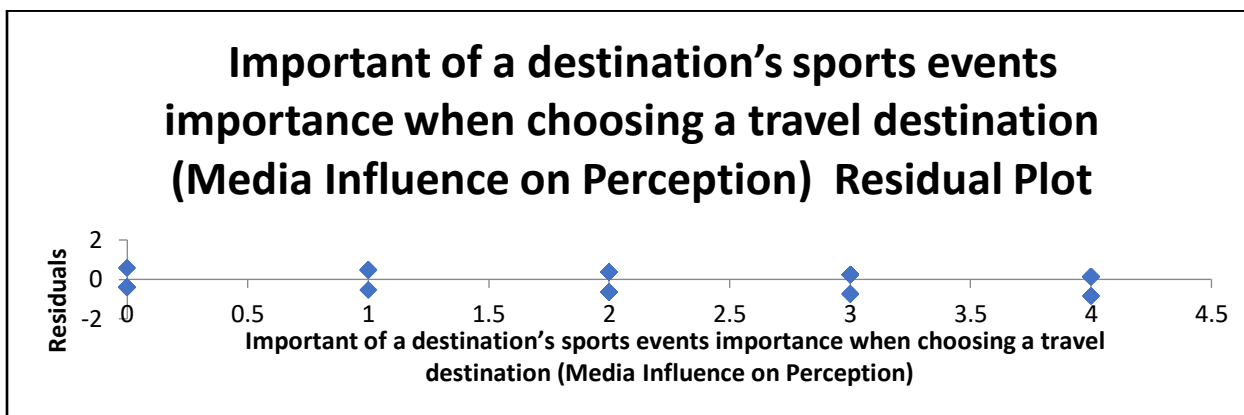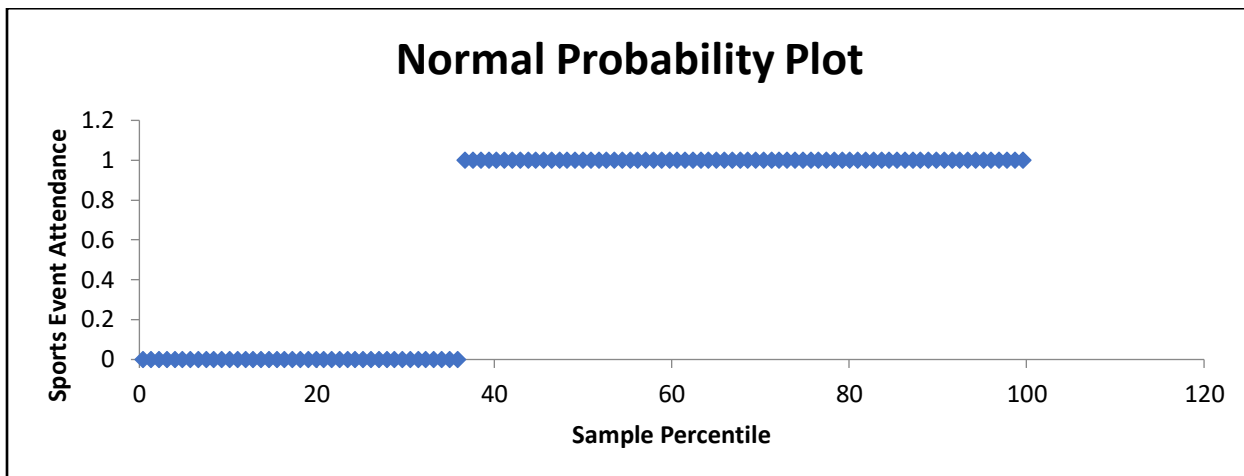
The independent variable is the importance of the sports event when selecting a travel destination (which represents media influence), and the dependent variable is sports event attendance (which represents consumer perception). The null and alternate hypothesis for the regression analysis is:

H0: There is no relationship between a sports event being hosted at a travel destination and sports event attendance

H1: There is significant positive relationship between a sports event being hosted at a travel destination and sports event attendance

| *Regression Statistics* | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Multiple R | | | 0.281815 | | | | | |
| R Square | | | 0.079419 | | | | | |
| Adjusted R Square | | | 0.071126 | | | | | |
| Standard Error | | | 0.465466 | | | | | |
| Observations | | | 113 | | | | | |
| **ANOVA** | | | | | | | | |
| | *df* | *SS* | *MS* | | *F* | | *Significance F* | |
| **Regression** | 1 | 2.074746 | 2.074746 | | 9.576092 | | 0.002495 | |
| **Residual** | 111 | 24.04915 | 0.216659 | | | | | |
| **Total** | 112 | 26.12389 | | | | | | |
| | *Coefficients* | *Standard Error* | *t Stat* | *P-value* | *Lower 95%* | *Upper 95%* | *Lower 95.0%* | *Upper 95.0%* |
| **Intercept** | 0.393602 | 0.090069 | 4.370022 | 2.81E-05 | 0.215125 | 0.57208 | 0.215125 | 0.57208 |
| **Importance of a destination's sports events importance when choosing a travel destination (Media Influence on Perception)** | 0.111429 | 0.036008 | 3.094526 | 0.002 | 0.040076 | 0.182782 | 0.040076 | 0.182782 |

| | | | | 49 5 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## Normal Probability Plot



## Important of a destination's sports events importance when choosing a travel destination (Media Influence on Perception)  Residual Plot



Based on the regression analysis results, it can be indicated that the null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted, considering that the p-value is 0.002495, which is less than 0.05. In other words, it can be indicated that the independent variable is positively related to the dependent variable, meaning that the sports event of a destination when choosing a travel destination strongly influences sports event attendance. Considering that media is the primary platform for increasing awareness regarding the sports event that is being hosted as the particular tourism destination, it indirectly reviews that media influence on consumer perception and sports event of attendance is directly and positively related to each other.

**Correlation analysis**

| | Particip ant number | Sports Event Attenda nce | Importance of a destination's sports events when choosing a travel destination (Media Influence on Perception) | Impact of major sports events on destination's economy (Economic Impact of Sports Events) | Impact of Major Sports Events on a Destination's Global Reputation (Media Influence on Perception) | Likelihood of revisiting a destination after attending a sports event there (Media Influence on Perception) | The importance of governments to invest in hosting international sports events to boost tourism (Economic Impact of Sports Events) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Participant number** | 1 | | | | | |
| **Sports Event Attendance** | -0.05642 | 1 | | | | |
| **Importance of a destination's sports events importance when choosing a travel destination (Media Influence on Perception)** | 0.216856 | 0.281815 | 1 | | | |
| **Impact of major sports events on destination's economy (Economic Impact of Sports Events)** | 0.069219 | -0.13309 | 0.261792 | 1 | | |
| **Impact of Major Sports Events on a Destination's Global Reputation (Media Influence on Perception)** | -0.05152 | 0.174329 | -0.17109 | -0.49116 | 1 | |
| **Likelihood of revisiting a destination after attending a sports event there (Media Influence on Perception)** | 0.235431 | -0.13003 | 0.341792 | 0.288322 | -0.41695 | 1 |
| **The importance of governments to invest in hosting international sports events to boost tourism (Economic Impact of Sports Events)** | 0.005463 | -0.0409 | 0.194826 | 0.541974 | -0.45159 | 0.281436 | 1 |

According to the correlation analysis, there are several dimensions associated with the relationship between sports destination branding, consumer perception and sports event hosting m there is a moderate positive correlation between sports event attendance and the importance of the sports event that has been held at a destination, indicating that sports tourist have a tendency of selecting destination that hosts well known sports events or popular sports events. There is a strong positive correlation between the perception of the economic impact of a sporting event and government investment importance, indicating that respondents recognise that there is an economic benefit associated with the Government of the UK supporting sports events through public investment in event hosting. There is also a positive correlation between the importance of the destination of the sports event selection and the likelihood of revisiting, indicating that sports events can improve initial as well as return tourism. There is, however, a negative correlation

between Global reputation impact and economic impact, indicating that responses differentiate between consumer perception, reputation improvement and economic benefits.

## *4.3. Thematic analysis Results:*

The meta-analysis results highlight several aspects regarding the topic of 'the impact of sports events on shaping destination branding and tourist perception in United Kingdom'. Analysis of the selected research sources will indicate that 5 primary themes can be identified - theme 1 - Mega sports events and destination image formation, theme 2 - league based sports tourism and economic development, theme 3 - tourist perception and behave your within the sports tourism industry, theme 4 - digital media and sports event branding and theme 5 - strategic destination branding through sports.

**Theme 1: Mega-Sports Events and Destination Image Formation**

| Author(s) & Year | Key Findings | Methodology | Theoretical Framework | Limitations | Relevance to Research Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kobierecki & Strożek (2021)** | Sports mega-events significantly affect international interest in host nations, measurable through increased Google searches and Wikipedia page views. | Quantitative analysis of web metrics | Nation branding theory | Limited to digital indicators of interest | Directly addresses how major events shape international perceptions (Objective 2) |
| **Rookwood & Adeosun (2023)** | Japan's Rugby World Cup and Olympics served as nation branding tools amid economic challenges and the pandemic. | Case study analysis | Public diplomacy and nation branding theories | Limited to Japanese context during pandemic | Comparative framework for analyzing UK mega-events (Objective 1) |
| **El-Dabt et al. (2025)** | Mega-event hosting leverages soft power for sustainable nation branding, creating lasting impact. | Literature review and conceptual analysis | Soft power theory, sustainable development | Primarily conceptual rather than empirical | Connects to sustainable event leveraging strategies (Objective 5) |
| **Dubinsky (2024a)** | Cultural clashes at FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 affected nation branding efforts. | Case study analysis | Cultural diplomacy and sportswashing concepts | Focused on one event in a non-Western context | Offers insights on cultural considerations in sports event branding (Objectives 1 & 4) |
| **Duignan (2021)** | Tokyo 2020 Olympics used to reimagine Japan post-Fukushima | Case study | Place reimaging theory, crisis recovery | Limited to post-disaster context | Lessons for leveraging mega-events for image recovery (Objectives 1 & 5) |

Following the meta-analysis, the majority of the research supports that major sporting events have significant power in defining international perceptions of the host destination. The research highlights that sports mega-events increase interest towards tourism by creating a lasting impact on the tourists. Researchers have stated that empirical evidence highlights that international interest and destination branding associated with a particular destination shows measurable improvement due to major sports events, particularly considering the UEFA Champions League and the Olympics events in the UK. This can be attributed to the generation of Greater awareness about the destination and a potential cognitive linkage of the destination with sports or entertainment.

**Theme 2: League-Based Sports Tourism and Economic Development**

| Author(s) & Year | Key Findings | Methodology | Theoretical Framework | Limitations | Relevance to Research Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Proctor et al. (2023)** | Model for leveraging sports franchises for destination marketing | Conceptual framework development | Marketing leverage theory | Theoretical without empirical testing | Directly applicable to analyzing Premier League's tourism impact (Objective 3) |
| **Vila-López et al. (2024)** | Bibliometric analysis showing sports' growing significance in destination branding literature | Bibliometric analysis | Knowledge mapping | Limited to published literature | Provides theoretical foundation for examining sports tourism (Objective 3) |
| **Dubinsky (2024b)** | Conceptual model for branding a city as a "sports town" based on Track Town USA | Case study and model development | Place branding theory | Limited to single case study | Framework for examining how UK cities brand through sports (Objectives 1 & 3) |
| **Swart et al. (2021)** | Dubai's sustainable sports events strategy as a branding mechanism | Case study analysis | Sustainable tourism development theory | Limited to the Dubai context | Comparative perspective for analyzing Premier League sustainability (Objectives 3 & 5) |

League-based sporting competitions, like the premier leagues, have also been identified to have an extensive impact on the sports destination branding and economic development. The majority of the previous literature has supported the context that growth in league-based tourism

is inherently connected to economic development because it helps in increasing tourism activities, awareness about the destination and development of franchises for destination marketing.

**Theme 3: Tourist Perception and Behavior in Sports Tourism**

| Author(s) & Year | Key Findings | Methodology | Theoretical Framework | Limitations | Relevance to Research Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kim et al. (2021)** | Tourist risk perceptions significantly influence travel intentions to sporting event destinations. | Quantitative survey | Risk perception theory, travel behavior models | Limited to risk perception element | Addresses how risk affects UK sports tourism decisions (Objectives 2 & 4) |
| **Kumail et al. (2022)** | Destination brand equity and authenticity influence visit intention | Structural equation modeling | Brand equity theory | Limited to UAE context | Framework for analyzing how sports affect destination perceptions (Objective 4) |
| **Weru & Njoroge (2021)** | Business events experience influences international visitors' destination image. | Mixed methods approach | Experiential marketing theory | Focused on business rather than sports events | Methodology for examining event experiences' impact (Objective 2) |
| **Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024)** | Challenges and opportunities in destination brand identity development | Systematic literature review | Brand identity theory | Conceptual rather than empirical | Framework for analyzing sports-related destination identity (Objective 4) |
| **Ekinci et al. (2023)** | Extension and validation of the destination brand equity model | Scale development and validation | Brand equity theory | Not specific to sports contexts | Measurement framework for sports events' contribution to brand equity (Objective 4) |

Tourist behavior and perception have also been indicated to be influenced by sports marketing and sports tourism. The commitment of tourists towards the destination, which is also known as destination loyalty, has been identified to be an essential factor associated with the survival of the fittest and the future success of the sporting destination. Destination hosting major sports events are able to build long term relationships with the students, which are considered to be less costly approach than attracting new tourists. Moreover, according to the meta-analysis, the fundamental purpose of tourist participation in sports tourism is to improve physical and mental health, improve self-confidence, relieve stress, feel refreshed, meet personal goals and compete with others. Major sports events have been recognized to help in fulfilling all of these goals and

objectives, and as a result, it acts as an essential source of positive consumer perception towards sport tourism and destination branding.

**Theme 4: Digital Media and Sports Event Branding**

| Author(s) & Year | Key Findings | Methodology | Theoretical Framework | Limitations | Relevance to Research Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Taberner & Juncà (2021)** | Small-scale sports events serve as place branding platforms through Instagram content. | Content analysis of social media | Digital place branding theory | Limited to small-scale events and one platform | Framework for analyzing social media impact of UK sporting events (Objectives 1 & 2) |
| **Dubinsky (2022)** | Sports events (Super Bowl) as cultural diplomacy tools during COVID-19 | Case study analysis | Cultural diplomacy theory | Limited to the American football context | Insights on sports events as cultural diplomacy tools (Objective 1) |
| **Sorokina et al. (2022)** | Smart destination framework from a destination marketing organization perspective | Qualitative interviews and framework development | Smart tourism theory | Not specific to sports tourism | Digital strategies for leveraging sports events in marketing (Objective 5) |
| **Chi et al. (2022)** | Festival image cultivation and dissemination strategies | Mixed methods approach | Image formation theory | Focused on beer festivals rather than sports | Applicable to how UK sporting events cultivate images (Objectives 1 & 5) |

Digital platforms have been identified to have a significant impact on tourist perception and sports event destination branding. Previous literature has suggested that social media is becoming an increasingly important marketing channel which allows businesses integrated in the sports tourism industry to communicate or interact with the prospective customers or customers. Social media has infiltrated the lives of the majority of the population in the Global community, particularly in the context of social communication. It has been proven that social media sites and other digital media marketing tools have induced grammatic changes in relationships between sports brands, destination awareness and consumer perception. Digital media and social media marketing have impacts on both the sales goals of the sports destination and consumer attitude. According to the metadata analysis, digital platforms can build destination image awareness and also help in acquiring data for determining the potentially unexploited markets in the United Kingdom tourism industry.

**Theme 5: Strategic Destination Branding Through Sports**

| Author(s) & Year | Key Findings | Methodology | Theoretical Framework | Limitations | Relevance to Research Objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Qiu & Zuo (2023) | Effectiveness of "intangible cultural heritage" labeling in destination marketing | Experimental design | Cultural heritage theory, marketing effectiveness | Not specific to sporting events | Application to traditional sporting events as cultural heritage (Objectives 4 & 5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dube (2024) | Evolution of narratives in tourism research, including sustainability concerns | Narrative literature review | Climate change discourse theory | Broad focus on climate rather than sports, specifically | Framework for analyzing evolving sports tourism narratives (Objective 5) |
| Dubinsky (2022) | Country image and cultural diplomacy through sports during a pandemic | Case study analysis | Nation branding and cultural diplomacy theories | Limited to the Super Bowl context | Insights on sports events as diplomatic tools in crisis contexts (Objective 1) |

The meta-analysis reveals that sports events are being used increasingly frequently for building the brand of the host destination. Events are taking different rows relative to the destination brand such as co-branding partners with the destination brand, features of the destination brand or as an extension of the destination brand. The feasibility of the role is dependent on the nature of the brand of the event. The analysis also reviews that each role is associated with different risks, opportunities, and requirements, making it important for sports tourism operators to incorporate them strategically into the marketing plan of the destination. The strategic incorporation of sports events into the destination branding has been indicated to be successful in developing positive sports destination branding and consumer perception.

## 4.4. Cross Method Analysis:

The survey findings corroborate the meta-analysis findings. The importance of sports events like football and motor sports is in alignment with the meta-analysis results, which suggest that league-based sports are feasible in attracting the tourists towards a sports destination in the UK. Similarly, the survey results also highlight that social media has become one of the most dominant tools in increasing awareness about a sports destination and sports event being hosted in the destination. It confirms the findings in the meta-analysis, which highlights that digital platforms are the primary foundation of building positive sports destination branding. The strong correlation between revisiting a destination where the consumers have visited because of a major sports event is in alignment with the meta-analysis regarding tourist behaviour patterns.

## 4.5. Recommendations to the tourism sector

| Recommendation Area | Specific Recommendation | Rationale from Findings | Implementation Strategy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Digital Marketing | Stakeholders should invest in targeted social media campaigns showcasing both the | 55.6% of respondents identified social media as | Integrated content strategies should be developed, |

| | sporting event and the destination. | their main information source. | highlighting authentic user-generated content. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cost Management** | The development of transparent, value-driven sports tourism packages is recommended. | 36% of respondents expressed concern over accommodation and travel costs. | Partnerships with hotels, transport services, and venues should be formed to offer bundled packages. |
| **Football Tourism** | It is advised that Premier League-themed experiences be created beyond match attendance. | 43.4% of respondents were influenced by football when making travel plans. | Stadium tours, fan events, and football-themed cultural experiences should be introduced. |
| **Star Power Engagement** | The use of star athletes and top teams in destination marketing should be prioritized. | Notably, 50.9% of respondents were drawn to destinations by notable teams or players. | Marketing should feature athletes as ambassadors and include exclusive fan experiences. |
| **Sustainability Focus** | Sports event organizers should adopt and promote environmentally responsible practices. | Tourists are becoming increasingly conscious of sustainability issues. | Green initiatives such as carbon-neutral events and eco-friendly transport should be implemented and communicated. |

## *4.6. Chapter Conclusion:*

Assessment of the results of both analyses will indicate that sports events have transformed into a global phenomenon with countless events involving many people and having the potential to achieve positive consumer perception and improve destination branding in the UK. Major sports events like the UEFA, football leagues, Premier Leagues and Olympics positively impact tourist perception in the United Kingdom and act as a primary driver of economic development. Destination branding through the use of viable mediums like social media also positively influences tourist behaviour and perception and encourages repeat visiting.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION:

### 5.1. Key Findings and Research Summary:

Evaluation of the findings from both meta data and survey analysis will show that sports events have evolved into a worldwide phenomenon featuring numerous occasions with widespread participation, capable of fostering positive consumer perceptions and enhancing destination branding in the UK. Significant sporting events such as UEFA, football leagues, Premier Leagues, and the Olympics enhance tourist perceptions in the United Kingdom and serve as a key catalyst for economic growth. Destination branding utilizing effective platforms such as social media also positively impacts tourist behaviour and perception, fostering repeat visits.

### 5.2. Research Implications

| Stakeholder | Implication | Application |
|---|---|---|
| Tourism Marketers & DMOs | Events boost destination image and revisits | Link sports with local attractions in marketing |
| Government Bodies | 80.4% support public event funding | Justify spending via economic and branding benefits |
| Premier League Clubs | Football drives travel choices (43.4%) | Target global fans with tourism-centered campaigns |
| Hospitality Industry | Cost is a barrier (36%) | Offer value-driven sports packages |
| Event Organizers | Prestige & stars matter (30%, 50.9%) | Secure elite teams, build prestige narrative |
| Digital Marketers | Social media is key (55.6%) | Invest in emotion-driven social campaigns |
| Regional Tourism Bodies | Growth beyond London possible | Leverage local sports heritage in regional strategies |

### 5.3. Summary of Limitations

| Limitation Type | Specific Issue | Impact |
|---|---|---|
| Sampling | Age skew (18–30 = 61.1%) | May exclude older tourists' views |
| Gender | Male-dominant (57.7%) | Bias toward male interests |
| Geographic Focus | UK-only | Limited global relevance |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Timeframe** | Specific period only | Seasonal/trend shifts missed |
| **Methodology** | Self-reported behavior | Risk of biased/inaccurate responses |
| **Event Scope** | Focus on major events | Small events underexplored |
| **Culture** | Minimal cultural analysis | Lacks global perspective |
| **Economic Depth** | Perception-based data | No hard ROI data |
| **COVID Impact** | Pandemic-era responses | May not reflect typical behavior |

### 5.4. Future Research Recommendations

Future research should focus on developing longitudinal studies to show the long-term branding impact of sports event hosting at a tourism destination. On top of this, future studies can also develop regional analysis for comparing the impact of sports events across different UK areas.

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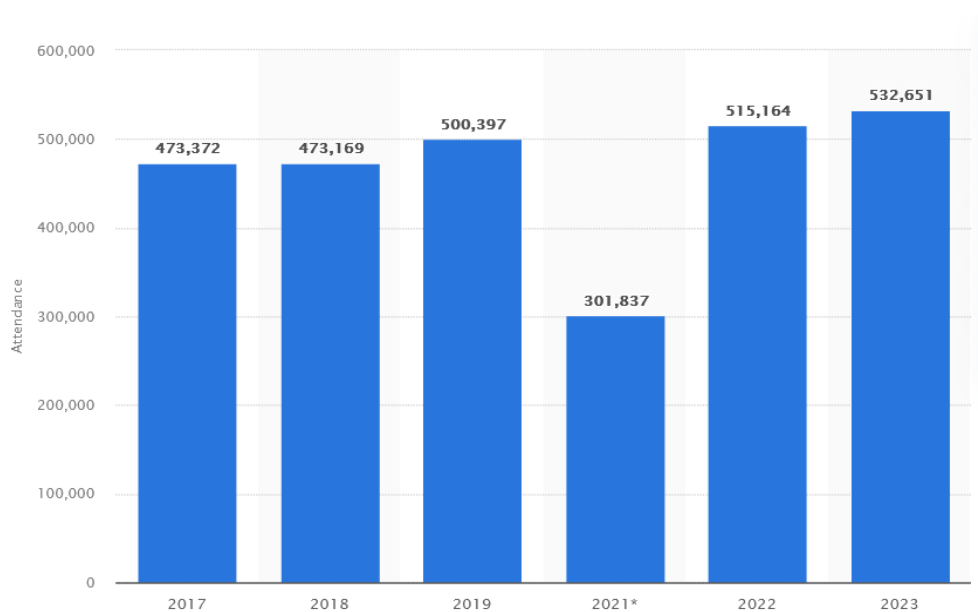
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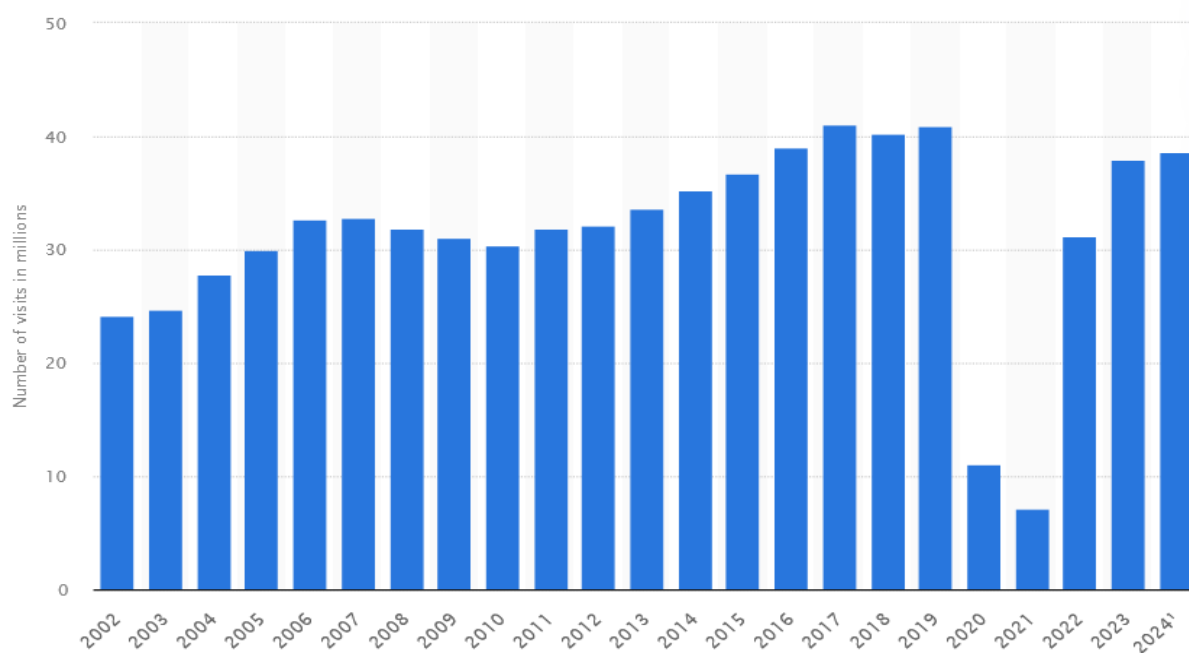
## Appendix

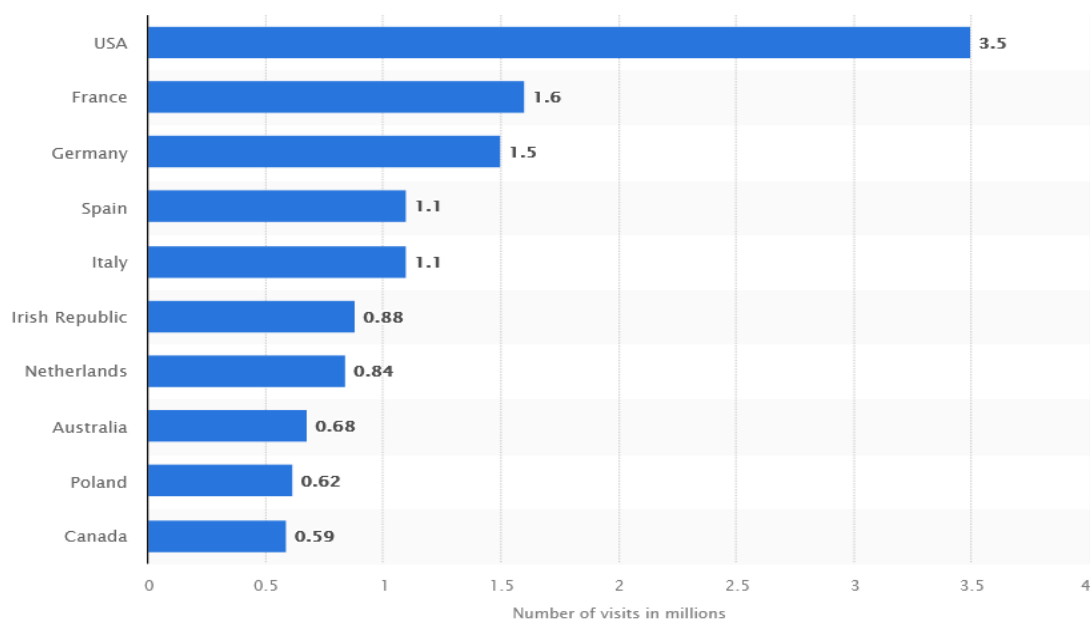Figure 1: Wimbledon championship attendance 2017-2023.



Source: Statista Research Department, 2024.

Figure 2: UK visitors from 2002 to 2024.



Source: Statista Research Department, 2024.

Figure 3: UK visitor numbers by country.



Source: Statista Research Department, 2024.