Exploring the determinants of 2022 FIFA World Cup attendance in Qatar

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Abstract: This study investigates the determinants of attendance at the upcoming FIFA World Cup in Qatar. It considers pull and push factors as antecedents of desirability to attend this mega-event, and particularly sheds light on the perception of the host country as a pull factor. Data from 228 potential visitors were collected. Consistent with previous research, results show that the factors of passion, novelty and escape have positive impacts on desirability. The perception of the host country has a positive impact on desirability and is a better predictor than travel motives or event motives. No significant effect of the support for the national team on desirability was found. The results additionally show that the constraints of time or money have no impact on the relationship between desirability and attendance intent. The findings of this research offer insights into sport marketing and show promise for event management committees, event marketers and researchers alike to develop an understanding of mega-event marketing.

Keywords: mega-events; sport marketing; pull factors; push factors; Qatar.

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1 Introduction

The recent FIFA ‘World Cup’ events have received a massive increase in interest from football playing nations from all over the world (Walker et al., 2013). This is mainly because countries perceive these events as potential re-branding opportunities (Cornelisson, 2008). Mega-events such as the World Cup provide hosting nations with opportunities to redefine or enhance their global status, enhance their socio-political composition (Hiller, 2006) and attract tourists from all over the world. Researchers have suggested that the impacts of mega-events can be perceived in terms of the social, political and economic gains of the hosting country (Moll, 2009). Particularly, there is much debate in the literature about how mega-events such as the World Cup influence the overall image of the hosting country (Duke and Crolley, 2014). A large number of these studies highlight the growth of tourism activities within the host country after the World Cup. Mega-events such as the World Cup assume even greater importance for developing nations as they seek to turn their fortunes around. For instance, the 2010 World Cup held in South Africa was an opportunity not only for the country to achieve its social and economic goals but also for the entire African continent to redefine its international image (Walker et al., 2013).

Previous research has largely supported the social and image outcomes of mega-event attendance (Swart et al., 2017; Arnegger and Herz, 2016; Barajas et al., 2016; Collins et al., 2009; Kim and Chalip, 2004; Moll, 2009; Hiller, 2006). However, a limited number of studies have investigated the determinants of attendance at mega-events (Hall et al., 2010; Kim and Chalip, 2004), whereas the outcomes of a mega-event depend undoubtedly on attendance. According to Kim and Chalip (2004), the desire that leads people to attend sport events may be complex. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the factors that determine the attendance to a mega-event.

With regard to mega-events, sport marketing and tourism marketing are closely related. Research on tourism marketing has distinguished between push factors and pull factors (Kozak, 2002; Zhang and Lam, 1999). Pull factors describe the attractions of the destination, while push factors describe the intangible motives of travelers in relation to events and to the travel itself. Despite the importance of the perception of the destination in mega-events marketing, previous research did not consider destination perception when exploring determinants of attendance. For example, Kim and Chalip (2004) and Walker et al. (2013) emphasised that the general atmosphere of the event is important as a determinant of attendance. Nevertheless, they did not consider the perception of the host country in their conceptual framework.

Consequently, the objective of this paper is to explore how push factors – factors related to the event and to the travel and pull factors – reflected by the perception of the host country – may influence desirability and intent to attend the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

From an academic perspective, this research attempts to strengthen event marketing and to offer a further understanding of sport marketing. It builds on previous studies on tourism and sport in order to develop a conceptual model that uses pull and push factors to better understand the determinants of mega-event attendance. From a practical perspective, this research helps marketers and promoters foster fan participation in the 2022 FIFA World Cup. This research will be useful for FIFA and its local organisation committees to implement effective campaigns.
This paper begins by reviewing the factors that drive tourism and then focuses on the role that mega-events play in influencing tourism. Afterwards, it develops the conceptual framework, describes the methodology and discusses results. Finally, it presents the contributions and limitations of the research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Factors driving tourism growth

Over the past few decades, tourism has grown considerably from “an activity enjoyed by a relatively small group of people” to a mass phenomenon causing movement of a large number of people (Collins, 1999). Since the globalisation of the 1990s, which eliminated cross-cultural borders, international tourism has gone on to become one of the fastest developing sectors in the global economy. A 1999 survey showed that international tourism accounted for nearly 8% of total export earnings, which were concentrated mainly in Europe, East Asia and America (UN, 1999). This remarkable trend has opened new doors by creating economic activities for developing nations with relatively scarce resources. Recent trends have shown that tourism contributes to as much as 10% of GDP worldwide and 6% of total world exports, which amount to 1.4 trillion US dollars (UNWTO, 2015).

Despite the fact that tourism is mainly concentrated in industrialised countries, it is the only major sector in which developing countries have recorded trade surpluses on par with those of developed countries. For instance, UNWTO statistics show that in 2013, Asia and the Pacific regions had a market share as high as 22.8%. Similarly, Asian and African regions recorded the highest average annual growth percentages with 6.2% and 6.1%, respectively. These trends are indicative of the opportunities provided to developing regions by tourism. Furthermore, UNWTO forecasts show that market share is bound to increase in the regions of Asia and the Pacific (30% in 2030 from 22% in 2010), Africa (from 5% to 7%) and the Middle East (from 6% to 8%).

The tremendous growth of the tourism industry as a key driver of economic development has led researchers to explore the factors that help ignite a cycle of tourism growth. Security is one such factor. Tourism flourishes when countries implement strategies that reduce crime and violence and ensure that enough resources are provided for the safety of tourists (Maitland, 2014). Another factor that determines the success of tourism in a region is the local citizens’ education and awareness level (Frew and White, 2011). Leslie (2010) argues countries that spend resources on creating tourism awareness tend to have better tourism growth. The quality of infrastructure depends on the level of importance policy makers give to the tourism industry (Martins and Serra, 2007). Tourism also strongly depends on how well a country preserves its cultural resources such as museums and national heritage sites. In the same line, Park (2013) argues that with advances in technology, tourist destinations from all over the world can be promoted by highlighting their advantages, such as their scenic beauty and low cost of living.

Over the past two decades, extensive research has been done on the use of mega-events to drive regional tourism. Studies (Martins and Serra, 2007; Preuss, 2007) have shown that mega-events impact tourism by promoting a positive image of a country, enhancing the socio-political composition, and highlighting the strengths of a region. The passage below attempts to assess the impact of mega-events on tourism in further detail.
2.2 Impacts of mega-events on tourism

Tourism is often defined as the process of ‘commoditisation and consumption’ inherent in the modern economy and involving the flow of goods, people and cultures (Meethan, 2001). In the past few decades, mega-events have been perceived as critical in increasing tourism within the host countries. The global media attention surrounding the mega-event enables the host country to display its strengths as a nation and to present itself as an attractive destination for tourism (Martins and Serra, 2007). Preuss (2007) has highlighted various reasons a country may want to host a mega-event: showcasing the region, developing new trade partnerships, encouraging foreign investment, increasing tourism, creating new jobs, improving the country’s global status and building a legacy for further sport events.

On these lines, various studies (Preuss, 2007; Moll, 2009) have focused on the intended and unintended impacts of hosting mega-events. The intended impacts refer to the direct corollaries of mega-events such as economic growth and infrastructure development. On the other hand, the unintended impacts of mega-events refer to intangible outcomes such as effects on national pride and the host country’s image (Chalip, 2004). Hiller (2006) and Smith (2005) have argued that the events such as the World Cup provide countries with the opportunity to rebrand their international image and boost their tourism industry. Cornelissen (2008) argues that these events are integral to re-defining the economic and socio-political composition of the host nation. This is especially true for developing countries where resources and opportunities are relatively scarce (Cornelissen, 2008).

Globally, there is a widespread consensus about the perception of tourism within the host country with regards to mega-events. In their study, Bob and Potgeiter (2013) concluded that the 2010 World Cup in South Africa had a positive impact on the image of the country as a good tourist destination, albeit concerns about local crime. Other studies have indicated similar results. Bob and Swart (2010) stated that the 2010 World Cup in South Africa provided Germany with the chance to change its long-established perception of a ‘Nazi-divided Germany’. Similarly, mega-events such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup, 2003 Cricket World Cup and 2010 World Cup helped change the perception of South Africa from an apartheid state to a modern developing economy (Bob and Swart, 2010).

However, scholars have differing opinions on the long-term impact of mega-events on tourism. Researchers attribute this contrast of opinions to three main reasons. First, hosting a mega-event is a complex activity and requires an inter-disciplinary approach to understand the long-term implications (Bob and Swart, 2010). Second, as Getz (2005) stated, there are a number of social, political and environmental factors in play which need to be considered when considering the long-term impacts of mega-events on tourism. Finally, mega-events are highly context-specific. Changing benefits and costs may impact tourism in a country over the long term (Cornelissen, 2010).

The aforementioned studies develop sufficient evidence of a positive impact of mega-events on a country’s image and tourism. However, the extent to which a country is able to achieve the objectives of increasing tourism, creating new trade patterns, putting itself ‘on the map’ and redefining its global status depends largely on the attendance the event generates. Therefore, the following sections address the factors that influence the desirability of and attendance at such events.
3 Conceptual framework

Recent work (Kim and Chalip, 2004) has suggested that push factors, pull factors and travel constraints may combine to determine attendance at a mega-event. Push factors relate to the traveler’s own interest and motives, while pull factors relate to the destination itself and the attractions offered by it. In line with this trend, the present framework (Figure 1) takes into account all those factors to effectively model the 2022 FIFA World Cup attendance.

Figure 1  Predicting desirability and intention to attend the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar

3.1 Push factors

Push factors are most commonly associated with travel motives. These kinds of motivations can be ascribed to biological/psychological needs and wants including forces that influence a person’s behaviour (Pearce, 1982). Various theories have been proposed to describe the different characteristics and phenomena relating to motivation. In essence, however, these characteristics originate from human nature and are thus very difficult to predict (Chon, 1989).

Push factors are often classified into two subclasses of motives: internal and external motives. Internal motives involve feelings, instincts and individuals’ internal drives and emotions, whereas external motives are commonly associated with knowledge and beliefs (Gnoth, 1997). Hennessey (2003) notes that internal motivation influences individuals to participate in events because those events are naturally interesting and likeable. In contrast, external motivation influences individual behaviour because the event leads to certain dependent outcomes such as family commitments or social needs. Tourists’ goals and motivations may fall into one of the aforementioned groups.

The leisure motivation scale model by Beard and Ragheb (1983) classifies different motivators into four subtypes based on Maslow’s (1943) theory. The first component of the model represents intellectual activities, which determine the extent which tourists are
willing to involve themselves in mental work such as learning, exploring or discovering. The second component represents social activities, which determine the extent to which tourists engage in tourism for social pursuits such as friendship or interpersonal activities. The third component is competence-mastery, which assesses the extent to which tourists engage in tourism in order to master skills or gain competence. Finally, the fourth component is stimulus avoidance, which examines the desire to escape the everyday work environment and seek solitude (Beard and Ragheb, 1983).

Berlyne (1960) postulated that individuals tend to participate in events that match their threshold levels for stimulation. Iso-Ahola (1982) argued that the threshold is defined by a balance of two factors: seeking and escaping. He suggests that seeking is the way to explore new opportunities and activities, whereas he conceptualised escaping as the predominant force within individuals to leave the everyday work environment. Individuals who choose to take part in sport would most likely be the ones for whom mega-events match their optimal level of stimulation. Their travel motives would be novelty and escape. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H1** The stronger the travel motives of escape and novelty, the stronger the desirability of attending a mega-event.

Other researchers (Funk et al., 2001; Kahle et al., 1996) have argued that travel motives are insufficient when determining the push factors associated with a mega-event. They note that push factors have not only to be defined in terms of travel motives but also in terms of event motives. Based on this notion, Wann et al. (2001) developed a model in which they identified various dimensions of event motives such as affiliations, sharing, and gambling on sports. In the same line, Funk et al. (2001) provide dimensions such as excitement, aesthetics appreciation, being a fan of sport and being a fan of specific players. Their research showed a positive correlation between event motives and intention to travel. Similarly, Kim and Chalip (2004) showed that event motives, such as support of the national team and interest in players, had a positive impact on attendance. In the same line of thoughts, we posit that support of the national team and a passion for football will have a positive impact on the desirability of attending the World Cup. Consequently, the following hypothesis is presented:

**H2** The stronger the event motives of support and passion, the stronger the desirability of attending a mega-event.

### 3.2 Pull factors

According to Chalip (1992), pull factors include, but are not limited to, the atmosphere of the event, such as the festivities surrounding it and the symbols and decorations used. In effect, Chalip’s model (1992) uses the atmosphere of the event to predict the interest level of potential tourists to attend the event. MacAloon (1989) showed that the atmosphere surrounding the event significantly affects event attendance. This atmosphere may include symbols and decorations that help tourists construct a direct relationship with the event and develop a sense of loyalty to it. Scholars such as Dann (1977) and Klenosky (2002) further argue that pull factors are related to the external attributes of destinations such as their ‘overall attractiveness’, ‘natural and cultural events’, ‘night life’, ‘amenities’, ‘social opportunities’ and ‘physical facilities’. Kozak (2002) found that these attributes may, however, be different for different destinations and cannot be taken
for granted. Similarly, Kim and Chalip (2004) used festival surroundings as a factor to predict the attendance of a mega-event.

However, pull factors may go beyond the immediate surrounding atmosphere of the event. Klenosky (2002) noted that pull factors derive their importance from very different sources. Crompton (1979) argued that the tourism environment in a specific destination can be classified as a pull factor since it pulls tourists to the event. According to Crompton (1979), tourists’ sense of safety in a particular destination will directly correlate to a positive desirability to attend or recommend mega-events. The sense of safety may primarily be linked to the absence of crime and terrorism in the host country but it may be linked to the safety of the roads as well. Park (2013) argues that tourism destinations can be promoted by highlighting their uniqueness and strengths such as the scenic beauty and cultural attractions. Quality of infrastructure is important as well (Martins and Serra, 2007). Infrastructure includes not only the different means of travel such as roads, airports and seaports but also facilities such as hotels and resorts (Maitland, 2014). Countries with good infrastructure tend to have an increased likelihood of attracting more tourists. In line with the findings of this research, we posit a positive relationship between the perception of the host country in terms of security, attractions, facilities etc. and the desirability of attending the mega-event.

Therefore, the following hypothesis:

H3 The perception of the host country has a positive influence on the desirability of attending a mega-event.

3.3 Perceived constraints

Previous research has found desirability to be a prerequisite for or even a dimension of intention (Whitelegg, 2000). Desirability is further considered to be an affective dimension of intention (Kim and Chalip, 2004). However, even if the desirability level is sufficiently high, tourists may not develop the intent to attend a mega-event due to various constraints (such as the cost of travel and lack of time). Recent studies have found multiple factors that play a pivotal role in shaping the decisions of individuals to attend mega-events (Jackson and Scott, 1999). For example, Um and Crompton (1992) found that monetary costs were important inhibitors in tourists’ decisions to travel. Therefore, the following hypothesis:

H4 Desirability is positively related to the intent to attend the mega-event.

H5 The positive influence of desirability on the intent to attend the mega-event is weaker when perceived financial and time constraints are high.

4 Research methodology

4.1 Participants and procedures

To test the research hypotheses, a questionnaire was prepared and posted on SurveyMonkey. All scale measures were obtained and adapted from previous studies: push and pull factors (Kim and Chalip, 2004); desirability and intent to attend (Kim and Chalip, 2004); behavioural constraints (Kim and Chalip, 2004; Um and Crompton 1992).
The survey uses a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree to measure the constructs used by the model. The content and wording of all questions were checked and corrected by marketing faculty. Finally, the questions were checked by independent judges who did not have prior knowledge of the study aims. The independent judges gave an evaluation of the overall questionnaire and ensured content validity.

A targeted campaign was run to attract respondents who already had a relationship with soccer in some way and would therefore be reasonable targets for a marketing campaign for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. After purifying the data and removing the outliers from 287 responses, 228 completed responses were recorded.

A significant percentage of the respondents (73.4%) were males. The largest age group in the survey (49%) was 25–35 and the majority of the population (84%) was below the age of 35.32% of the participants had previously taken part in a FIFA event and 93% of those respondents described that experience to be either positive or neutral. In terms of earning status, 54% are employed, 29% are students and 8% are unemployed. An overwhelming majority of the population was located in Europe (46%), followed by Asia (20%), the Middle East (9%) and North America (9%).

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Measurement model

Before testing the model, the normality of all data was checked and confirmed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Schapiro-Wilk tests. Multiple PCA were then conducted on the different variables of the model. All extracted variance exceeded 60%. Tests of reliability for all variables were satisfactory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Items, Explained variance and reliability of the model variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Escape</strong></td>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to avoid the hustle and the bustle of daily activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to get away from the responsibilities of my everyday life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Explained variance | 67%  
| Alpha Cronbach    | 0.6 |
| **Novelty**     | I want to experience a different life style by attending the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar. |
|                 | I want to learn about a different culture by attending the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar. |
|                 | Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will give me the opportunity to experience something unique. |
| Explained variance | 70.248%  
| Alpha Cronbach    | 0.788 |
| **Support**     | Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to support my team. |
|                 | Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to feel a sense of personal achievement when the team that I support participates/wins. |
| Explained variance | 75%  
| Alpha Cronbach    | 0.67 |
Table 1  Items, Explained variance and reliability of the model variables (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explained variance</th>
<th>Alpha cronbach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to share my passion to football with others.</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to experience the grace and beauty associated with football.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide me with the opportunity to get a level of satisfaction and personal stimulation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desirability</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending 2022 FIFA World Cup is a dream for me.</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I desire to attend 2022 FIFA World Cup.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel cost (ticket, accommodation, etc.) would pose me a problem in attending FIFA World Cup.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of football tickets would pose me a problem in attending FIFA World Cup.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time constraints</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being busy with life (work, family, other commitments) would pose me a problem in attending FIFA World Cup.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Event atmosphere</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar has rich cultural attractions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar is a safe and secure country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar is endowed with lovely sceneries.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The roads of Qatar are safe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar is a unique touristic destination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar has an impressive image.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar will become a well-developed country by 2022.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar hosts a wide variety of festivals and events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Structural model

To test the hypotheses, multiple regression models were performed. VIF and tolerance tests confirmed the absence of multicollinearity between variables. Assumptions of implemented statistical procedures were also checked. Due to the relatively large number of participants and Zimmerman’s rule of thumb (1986, 1987), it can be concluded that all of the distributions are asymptotically normal. Since the data contained no outliers, the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation was used to assess whether the factors of passion, support, novelty and escape are correlated with desirability to attend the World Cup.
Exploring the determinants of 2022 FIFA World Cup attendance in Qatar

Table 2  Correlations of desire to attend FIFA World Cup 2022 and selected combinations of variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$R$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>0.352**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>0.520**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football passion</td>
<td>0.511**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>0.339**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < 0.01.

According to the results (Table 2), escape is positively correlated with desirability to attend the World Cup ($r = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$) and explains 12.4% of this desirability. The results also indicated the positive relationship between novelty and desirability ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$). Passion is also positively related to desirability ($r = 0.511$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, the commitment to support the national team as also positively related to the desire to attend the World Cup ($r = 0.339$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3  Multiple regression analysis for variables related to motives of travelling and event predicting desire to attend World Cup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>Zero-order $r$</th>
<th>Semipartial $r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>2.33*</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>3.70***</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>0.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>3.22**</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>0.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>–0.001</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>–0.007</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the host country</td>
<td>0.627</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>7.25***</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

A multiple regression analysis including escape, novelty, passion, support and the perception of the host country as independent variables was conducted. The overall model (Table 3), significantly predicted the desirability to attend the World Cup ($F = 27.357$, $df_1 = 4$, $df_2 = 215$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 33.7% of the variance of the desirability to attend the World Cup ($R^2 = 0.337$, $R^2_{adj} = 0.325$). The most relevant predictor in this model is perception of the host country ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$), followed by novelty ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$), passion ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.01$) and finally escape ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.05$). In this model, support of the national team is not a significant predictor of the desirability to attend the World Cup ($\beta < 0.001$, $p > 0.05$). As can be noted from the column, Semi partial ‘$r$’ in Table 1, when all other predictors were partialised from the factor of support, its correlation with desirability dropped drastically ($r < 0.001$). Therefore, $H1$ and $H3$ are accepted. $H2$ is partially accepted.

To test the moderating effects of perceived constraints on the relationship between the desirability and intent to attend the World Cup, a multiple regression analysis with
interaction effects has been processed (Table 2 and Table 3). The results show desirability (B = 0.947, p < 0.01) has a strong positive impact on intent. However, time and financial constraints have no effect on intent to attend the World Cup. Moreover, no moderation effect was revealed. Therefore, H4 is accepted and H5 rejected.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This study investigated the determinants of attendance at the upcoming FIFA World Cup in Qatar. It considered pull and push factors as antecedents of desirability to attend this mega-event, and particularly sheds light on the perception of the host country as a pull factor. Consistent with previous research, the factors of passion, novelty and escape have positive impacts on desirability. As expected, the results confirm that the perception of the host country has a positive impact on desirability to attend a mega-event. Furthermore, the results highlight that the perception of the host country is a better predictor of desirability than travel motives or event motives. Previous research emphasised the positive impact of the attendance on the country image. The results of this study draw attention to the importance of promoting the image of the host country in order to foster attendance at the mega-event.

The results additionally show that the factor of novelty strongly predicts desirability. Event management committees can combine push factors related to travel and pull factors related to perception of the host country in order to foster attendance. In other words, promoters may tap into customers’ desires by associating novelty with the uniqueness of the host country. They may for instance promote the 2022 World Cup as a unique and once in a lifetime experience in a unique host country such as Qatar with its visual and cultural attractions, improved road safety, and event facilities. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the social campaign ‘Win in Africa’ that was conducted in 2010 by FIFA to promote a unique tourism experience.

Surprisingly, the support of the national team has no significant effect on attendance. This result may be explained by the modern technologies that provide fans with the opportunity to virtually support their teams without physically attending the World Cup. In a globalised, high technology world, the factor of support is consequently not relevant to fostering attendance.

Finally, the results show that the relationship between desirability and intent to attend is not affected by constraints of time or money. This finding shows that when desirability is strong, one is willing to pay higher sums of money to attend and manage one’s schedule to be available to attend at any time. This result increases the importance of the pull and push factors in fostering attendance.

At a managerial level, the results show promise for event management committees, event marketers and researchers alike to develop an understanding of the theory of sport tourism.

Several limitations are inherent to this research. First, this paper investigates some antecedents of desirability and intention. Future research may provide more insights by considering the role of gender and individual variables such as risk aversion that may moderate the effects of the pull and push factors on desirability. The results show insignificant effect of support of the national team on attendance. Future research may explore the reasons of this insignificant effect. A possible research track would be the
effect of the internet and other virtual worlds on attendance. Finally, the research highlights the importance of the host country perception. To round out the results of this study, the challenge for future studies is to investigate the features of the host country image that enhance most sport tourism.

References


