



# How hot is the 2022 FIFA World Cup? Chinese sports tourism bloggers' perceived image of Qatar as a tourism destination

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** The 2022 Qatar Football World Cup is the first World Cup since COVID-19 swept the globe, and the first to be held in the Middle East. This provides a characteristic research sample for the study of the relationship between mega-event and tourism. Among them, Chinese sports tourists, who are still under strict epidemic prevention and control policies, are also worth studying.

**Material and Methods.** The main purpose of this paper is to study the interrelationship between the image fit and image extension formation between a major event like the World Cup and its host venue, and to explore the perceived tourism image of the host venue by sports tourism bloggers, using the event brand identity as a mediator. The study adopted a quantitative analysis model using SPSSAU as a tool and 315 Chinese sports tourism bloggers participated in the questionnaire survey.

**Results.** The study confirms the positive effect of image fit and image extension on perceived image and further confirms the mediating role of brand identification in the model. **Conclusions.** Its main innovative value lies in the discussion of what constitutes the tourist's perceived image of the place where a major event is held before it is held. The study integrates theories from several disciplines and is of sufficient academic value.

**Keywords:** World Cup, Image fit, Image extension, Brand identification, Perceived image

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## Introduction

The four-yearly Federation Internationale Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, as the top football tournament, has an extremely high branding effect worldwide (Nicolau & Sharma, 2018). Since the 21st century, virtually every World Cup has driven tourism industry to the host region (Gholipour, Arjomandi, Marsiglio & Foroughi, 2020; Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). For example, according to the World Bank data, almost every host country registered a significant increase in inbound tourists in their World Cup year (Tab. 1). South Africa has a dynamic legacy effect in the period following the World Cup, with an average spend of more than \$13,000 per

visitor, providing a significant impact in promoting tourism (Peeters, Matheson & Szymanski, 2014). Moreover, the influence of the World Cup also penetrated to the level of the hotel industry, with some well-serviced star hotels in the host countries expanding their popularity and being appreciated by inbound tourists (Barreda, Zubieta, Chen, Cassilha & Kageyama, 2017). It is worth noting that the host country bidding for a mega-event such as the World Cup is not only for the economic factor of tourism, but also to promote the image of the country on a global scale in the ambition of increasing international influence is additional objective.

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**Table 1.** Growth rate of inbound tourists from World Cup host countries (2002-2018)

Host Country	Years	Growth Rate of Inbound Tourists
Korea	2001	-3.4%
	2002	3.7%
Japan	2001	0.3%
	2002	8.9%
Germany	2005	6.3%

	2006	8.8%
South Africa	2009	-36.8%
	2010	13.2%
Brazil	2013	2.3%
	2014	9.6%
Russia	2017	-0.7%
	2018	0.7%

Source: The World Bank Data

The destination image enhancing effect of mega-events of each World Cup deserve to be intensively discussed. It is worth in-depth investigation, as it stimulates the growth of tourism activities (Pratt & Chan, 2016; Andersson, Bengtsson & Svensson, 2021; Lee, Lee & Lee, 2005; Deng & Li, 2013). Image is the composition of subject's perception towards the object in perceptual situation (Shepard, 1978). From the perspective of psychology, images are senses of mental schema produced by people reflecting things (Biederman, 1985). Among them, perceived image is considered to be a psychological construct or representation of a tourist's cognition and affection regarding specific destination (Gartner, 1994). The perceived image plays an important role in the tourists' travel decisions (Lee et al., 2005). It reflects the tourists' preconceived experience and thus has an impact on the tourism selection process (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). On the other hand, it can further influence the post-decisional behavior to the extent that the tourists' tourism activity changes in line with the tourists' expectations (Santana & Gosling, 2018). In some previous researches, factors influencing the formation of perceived images have been targeted (Gartner, 1994; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Santana & Gosling, 2018; Zhang, Wu & Buhalis, 2018). From a marketing perspective, the relationship between the brand image of a specific event and the image of the hosting destination is also being increasingly emphasized (Deng & Li, 2013; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Lai, 2018; Werus & Njoroge, 2021). The FIFA World Cup has the top brand popularity among the tournaments and the implications

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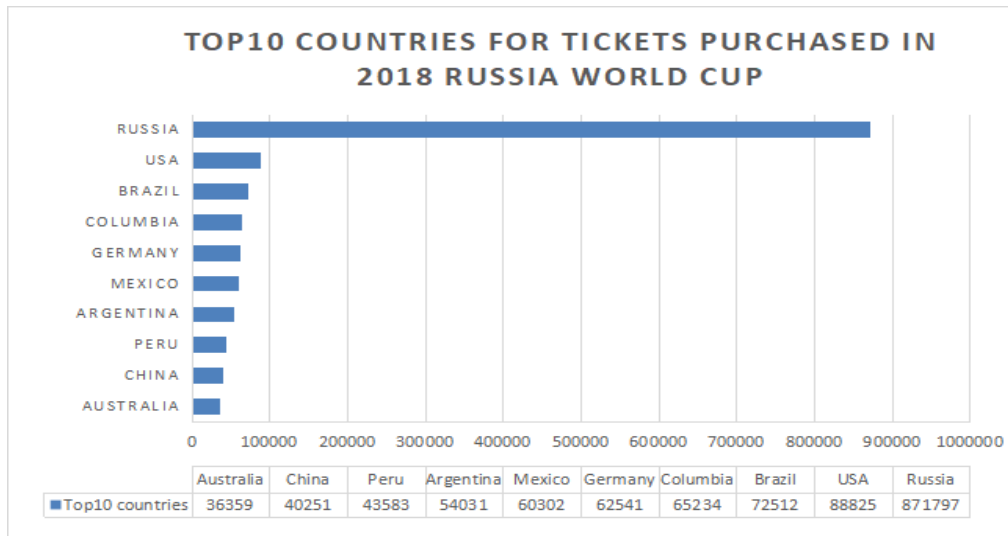


Figure 1. 2018 World Cup live viewing statistics (Source: FIFA official website)

The main objective of this paper is to design a model from the theory of match-up hypothesis, and the term regarding the image of the tourist perception of “fit” is closely related to “appropriateness” (Solomon, place where a mega-event is held. The model explores Ashmore & Longo, 1992). The term “image fit” is one of the direct relationship between the image fit and image categories of “fit”. Match-up hypothesis theory extension of the FIFA World Cup on the perceived image originated from advertising research, which studied the In particular, the model uses brand identification as an influence of advertising spokespersons on products 1547 mediator to explore the link between brand image and perceived image (Misra & Beatty, 1990). It argues that the level of perceived image. The first part of this paper analyzes the consistency between the source and the receiver of a important theoretical basis regarding the connection message positively affects the effectiveness of between brand image and perceived image of communication (Törn, 2012; Till & Busler, 2000). This destination, while the second part attempts to examine means that the image of the product spokesperson the perceived image of tourism in the host country Qatar should fit with the product or brand to ensure that the under the influence of the FIFA World Cup brand through favorable reputation of the product is effectively a quantitative analysis of a questionnaire involving 305 respondents. This research has an integrated disciplinary jewelry and luxury accessories should be endorsed by value in practice, linking theories from the tourism celebrities to endorse, while nutritional products should management discipline, the business discipline and the endorsed by relevant experts. psychological discipline. Image fit can be used in this context to describe the relevant characteristics of the brand and the product, which represents the possible attractive effect of the product under the influence of the brand image and can significantly increase consumers’ intention to purchase the World Cup and the Olympics have been studied (Bibby, 2011). This concept was gradually extended to depth (Chanavat, Martinent & Ferrand, 2010). Among the interrelationship between brand images of events them, image fit is considered to be an important factor and destinations (Hallmannb& Breuer, 2010). The image linking the relationship between the brand image of fit between a destination and event is reflected in several event and the host venue. The concept of “fit” is discussed, including destination familiarity, tourists’

**Literature review**

Mega-events have wide brand influence within their audiences, and the brand images of mega-events such as the World Cup and the Olympics have been studied (Bibby, 2011). This concept was gradually extended to depth (Chanavat, Martinent & Ferrand, 2010). Among the interrelationship between brand images of events them, image fit is considered to be an important factor and destinations (Hallmannb& Breuer, 2010). The image linking the relationship between the brand image of fit between a destination and event is reflected in several event and the host venue. The concept of “fit” is discussed, including destination familiarity, tourists’



imagery, brand personality, and experience benefits competitiveness of the host country. The rationale (Sung, Kim, Jae, Connaughton & Lee, 2011). These behind this is that the image a destination projects to factors underscore the changing attitudes of tourists travelers can have a significant impact on their travel towards the host destination by virtue of the event's choices (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Santana & Gosling, influence and further confirm that the higher the image (2018). Tourists who have a positive impression of the fit, the more inclined tourists are to accept the image projected by a destination will be more likely to destination's tourism image (Chanavat et al., 2010, consider choosing that destination in the future Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Sung et al., 2011). (Dolnicar & Grün, 2012). The success of destination Image extension is another image association the marketing depends on the composition of the tourist's that is valued and discussed in events and destinations perceived image. Even if the destination releases a well (Dragin-Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2018). Brand extension is projected image to the tourists in the target place, the used to explain the phenomenon of image shift perceived image is still subject to cognitive and affective attitude shift that occurs when two brands are matched images, which are the tourists' own psychological factors ( Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). For example, when large ( Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). For example, when large e-commerce companies promote brand images ( Mendes, 2013). Therefore, under the compounding certain products, their image authority within the effect of various factors, the brand image of the industry can make it easier for consumers to accept a destination where the mega-event is held through image purchase the recommended products (Lowry, Van der fit, and image extension needs to be studied together Moody, Beckman & Read, 2008). When discussing with the tourist's perceived image in order to be extension of the event image, similarity in characteristics is essential to the effectiveness of marketing. is one of the factors that affirm the positive effect Of the other hand, several studies have confirmed that image extension on the destination (Chalip & Costa the higher the level of the event hosted by a destination, 2005). When exploring football tournaments, the host the stronger the branding capabilities it possesses and location itself also possesses regional acceptance to be more attractive it is to tourists who travel for the football , often resulting in greater integration of the purpose of the event (Bang, Lee & Swart, 2014; Bodet & tournament image with the host location (Müller & Scassagne, 2012; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2020). One Gaffney, 2018). The extension of the event's image a in which mega-events can have an impact on the positively affects the destination's tourism industry image of a destination is through their appearance in which is supported by various studies on mega-events destination promotion advertisements. Advertising can such as Rio 2016 Olympic Games (Rocha & Fink, 2017) increase the brand identification of potential tourists 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup (Lee et al., 2005), 2008 (Greenaghan, 1995). When fit of events and tourism Beijing Olympic Games and 2010 Vancouver Winter destinations appear in advertising, which reduce the Olympic Games (Heslop, Nadeau, O'Reilly & Armenakyan cognitive effort of tourists to make choices and increase 2013). Although brand image extensions have been the salient features of the destinations, thus having relatively widely discussed in the field of event tourism direct impact on tourists' intention to visit (Chalip & the relationship between image extensions and the Guirty, 2004). The intention to pay attention is a perceived image of a destination during the cycle of reflection of the event tourists' brand identification for World Cup with its own distinctive features still deserves the event, while brand identification is a higher-order more empirical investigations. feedback for the joint brand matching (Murphy, Prior to a mega-event, host marketers work very hard Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2007). Therefore the degree develop marketing strategies that target different visitor brand identification of the mega-event itself also segments in order to enhance the region deserves to follow with interest.

Based on the above theoretical background and independent variables, brand identification is the specifically on the practical needs of this research, the mediating variable, and perceived image is the following hypotheses were proposed: dependent variable. The logical relationship between the

H1: The image fit between the World Cup and the host country has a significant impact on the perceived image of tourists.

**Measurement scale**

H2: The image extension of the World Cup in the host country has a significant impact on the perceived image of tourists.

H3: The brand identification can mediate the impact of image fit and image extension on the perceived image of tourists.

**Material and Methods**

Based on the theoretical background, the variables included in the model of this research are image fit, image extension, brand identification, and perceived image. Of these, image fit and image extension are

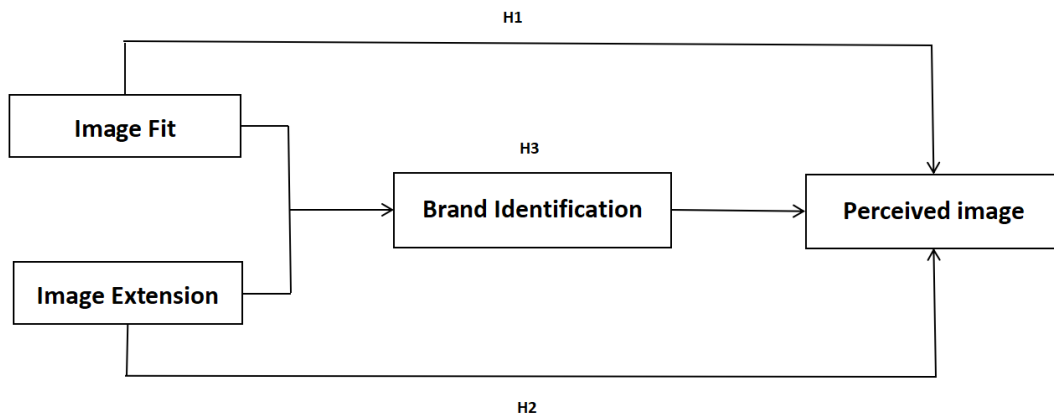


Figure 2. Research framework

Table 2. Dimensions and operational definitions adapted from literature

Dimensions	Operational Definition	Items
Image fit	level of cognitive and affective between the brand image represent the 2022 Qatar World Cup and the image of Qatar as a destination	IF1: Qatar's facilities fit to host the World Cup IF2: Qatar is suitable to host the World Cup IF3: Qatar is well known in Asia for its football level IF4: Qatar fits the image of the World Cup IF5: Qatar World Cup will be interesting IF6: Qatar World Cup will be casual IF7: Qatar World Cup will be popular
Image	emotion and change of the brand image created by Qatar's hosting of the	IE1: Qatar promote the fame of the World Cup IE2: Qatar World Cup is different and unique

extension	World Cup (Hallmann & Breuer, 2011; Agin-Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Chalip & Costa, 2005).	IF3: World Cup in Qatar reflects new cultures	IF5: Qatar has become more famous
Brand identification	Brand identity formed by China (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Tjandra, Rihova, Snelog & Theodoraki, 2020; Knott, Fry & Jones, 2017).	BI1: Willingness to learn about the World Cup	BI2: Willingness to participate in the World Cup
Perceived image	Chinese tourists' perceived image of Qatar as a tourism destination (Koo & Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).	PI1: I know a lot about tourism in Qatar	PI2: I thought it will be fun to travel in Qatar
		PI3: I am willing to visit Qatar in the future	PI4: My overall impression of Qatar tourism is good

This study uses methods of data analysis such as reliability testing, validation factor analysis, structural equation modelling, and path analysis. Thereinto, it uses SPSSAU to test the stability and reliability of the measurement instruments, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  to verify their reliability (Cronbach & Amvelson, 2004). The test results showed that each variable matched the reference values. This indicated the research model to be judged as reliable, as model to the data, and the significance of the

**Table 3.** Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value testing

Variables	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Image fit	7	0.982
Image extension	5	0.956
Brand identification	5	0.932
Perceived image	4	0.872

**Sample structure**

The sample consists of sports tourism bloggers from China. The sampling procedure was using convenience random sampling. According to Krejcie and Morgan, the effective sample size for a total frame of 1600-1700 people should be 313. After the questionnaire collection during January-March 2022, 367 samples were collected in this study, of which 315 met the validity criteria.

**Table 4.** Structure of respondents

Indicators	Items	%
Gender	Male	49.21
	Female	50.79
Age	18-23	10.16
	24-30	38.41





	31-44	30.79
	45-59	13.97
	Over 60	6.67
Education	High school, junior college and below	20.31
	ialized college	5
	elor's degree	2
	er's degree and above	
Monthly income	≤ RMB 10,000	2
	1,0001-20,000	3
	20,001-50,000	1
	50,001 and above	3
Number of sessions watched of World Cup	1	7
	3	3
	4	4
	≥ than 5	5

Of the 315 questionnaires, the proportion of female (160) and males (155) was 50.79% and 49.21% respectively, with an approximate ratio of 1:1. The age group is mainly between 24 and 44 years old, with a share of 69.20%. In terms of education, respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher differ little from the rest, with rates of 50.23 and 49.77, respectively. Monthly income was mainly concentrated within RMB 10,001 to 50,000, accounting for 73.9%. It is noteworthy that the majority of respondents, 34.13% and 31.34%, have watched sessions of the World Cup for 1-3 times and 3-5 times respectively. This is a convincing indication that the sample structure is in line with the objectives of the research targeted. Table 3 shows the socio-demographic characteristics.

### Data Analysis

The factor loading coefficient table shows the correlation between the factor and the measurement item, usually using the standard loading coefficient values to indicate the correlation between the factor and the analyzed term. The analysis mainly looks at the standard loading coefficient values and the p-values. A strong correlation is indicated if significance is shown and the standardized load coefficient value is >0.70. The table below shows that all of the measures show significance at the 0.001 level ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the standardized loadings coefficient values are greater than 0.7 (Tab. 5), with the criteria taken in this study being between [0.752, 0.907], thus indicating a good correspondence between the factors and the measures and good convergent validity.

**Table 5.** The results of factor loading analysis

Factors	Items	Std.Estimate	Items	Std.Estimate
Image fit	IF1	0.852	IF5	0.886
	IF2	0.871	IF6	0.863
	IF3	0.844	IF7	0.886
	IF4	0.876		
Image extension	IE1	0.894	IE4	0.904
	IE2	0.906	IE5	0.899
	IE3	0.907		





Brand identification	BI1	0.852	BI4	0.880
	BI2	0.790	BI5	0.878
	BI3	0.880		
Perceived image	PI1	0.817	PI3	0.810
	PI2	0.800	PI4	0.752

Discriminant validity is a way to assess whether scale variables are greater than the correlation coefficients different from each other across dimensions, and when between the factor and the other factors, indicating that the correlation between model factors is not equal to the scale in this study has good discriminant validity. It means that the variables are different from each other.

**Table 6.** Pearson correlation with AVE square root value

<b>IF</b>	<b>0.864</b>			
<b>IE</b>	0.336	<b>0.902</b>		
<b>BI</b>	0.407	0.481	<b>0.856</b>	
<b>PI</b>	0.399	0.426	0.371	<b>0.794</b>

Note: Diagonal numbers are AVE square root values

In this study, the degree of fitness between the observed model and the data is examined using the value of CFI, which is slightly lower than the standard of structural equation modeling (SEM). Through the SPSSAU, the fit indexes, which including:  $\chi^2/df$ , goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) were analyzed as follows:  $\chi^2/df = 2.624$ , GFI = 0.838, NFI = 0.906, CFI = 0.939, RMSEA = 0.0072. Except for the value of CFI, which is slightly lower than the standard of structural equation modeling (SEM), all other fitness indicators satisfied the requirements of the basic standard. Therefore, the fitness of the observed data to the model is high and the model structure is relatively robust. The specific measurement criteria are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Model fitting standards and results

Fitness	Standards	Results
$\chi^2/df$	<3	2.624
GFI	> 0.9	0.838
NFI	> 0.9	0.906
CFI	> 0.9	0.939
RMSEA	< 0.1	0.072

The research model measures image fit and image dimension as antecedent variables, brand identity as an



intermediate variable, and tourism destination image accompanied by SE and CR values of 0.055 and 5.298, as an independent variable. When X has an effect on Y, respectively. therefore, its standardized regression the unstandardized regression coefficients are all coefficient was 0.331 and image extension had a greater than 0,  $p=0.000\sim 0.007 < 0.01$ , and the positive effect on perceived image, and hypothesis H2 standardized regression coefficients are all positive as confirmed.

indicating that there is a positive correlation between X and Y there is a positive correlation between X and Y. The non-standardized regression coefficients of image X and Y were 0.306 and image extension on brand identity were 0.306. Specifically, when image fit was used as the X value and 0.412, respectively, while the standardized and perceived image as the Y value, the regression coefficients were 0.320 and 0.449, unstandardized regression coefficient was 0.278, respectively, both of which met the reference standard. SE value was 0.054, and the CR value was 5.174. The non-standardized regression coefficient of brand standardized regression coefficient was 0.300 and brand identity on perceived image is 0.169 and the the condition of significance at  $p < 0.01$ , which indicates standardized regression coefficient is 0.175. Therefore, that image fit has a positive effect on perceived image, and brand identity also positively affects perceived image. and hypothesis H1 was confirmed.

Moreover, the non-standardized regression coefficient of image extension on perceived image was 0.293, Hypothesis H3 was confirmed. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Analysis of model regression coefficients

X→Y	NSRC	SE	Z(CR)	p	SRC	Results
IF→PI	0.278	0.054	5.174	<0.01	0.300	Positive influence
IE→PI	0.293	0.055	5.298	<0.01	0.331	Positive influence
IF→BI	0.306	0.051	6.053	<0.01	0.320	Positive influence
IE→BI	0.412	0.050	8.284	<0.01	0.449	Positive influence
BI→PI	0.169	0.063	2.695	<0.01	0.175	Positive influence

**Discussion**

The results of this study validate the proposed research framework and the analysis supports the hypothesis of the relationship between the variables. First, image fit (standardized regression coefficient 0.300,  $p < 0.01$ ) and image extension (standardized regression

coefficient 0.331,  $p < 0.01$ ) directly affect the perceived image of sports tourism bloggers. One possible explanation for these findings lies in the fact that the brand image of the World Cup brings greater tourism benefits to the host country. It is in the commercial interest of travel bloggers to promote their Qatar as a potentially popular tourism destination. To produce this effect, the event brand must first have sufficient image value and a corresponding industry value in the tourism industry of the host country. In this case, the image of the event will fit well with the image of the host country and form an extension. This will form the basis for the promotion of the emerging tourism destination (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Koo et al., 2006). Furthermore, the model supports that image fit, image extension and brand identity are strictly related. These results are consistent with some of the literature that the image of the event can deepen the brand impact that the mega-event itself has when it is better integrated with the image of the host country (Lee et al., 2005; Lai, 2018; Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). As a result, fans of major events are able to identify more deeply with the brand image of the event from the



preparation, planning, marketing and promotion of the host venue. In this regard, there is a deep interconnection between the major event and the tourism service providers working on tourism venue, and the promotion of the overall combined image is done by both parties, with the host venue taking the lead. Prestigious events such as the World Cup give host regions the opportunity to enhance their international prestige and further increase their perception of potential tourism possibilities for tourists.

In fact, the positive brand identity impact of major events comes from the perceived image of the destination being further confirmed (standardized regression coefficient 0.175,  $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, World Cup host country such as Qatar can further leverage the global branding of the World Cup to boost its tourism industry. This could make Qatar a potentially popular tourist destination in the years to come and use it as an opportunity to promote the upgrading and smoothing of its tourism industry.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study support the combination of multiple theories based on destination image, destination marketing, and event tourism. The destination marketing, and event tourism. The interconnection between mega-events, host-based destinations, and the perceived image of tourists is again confirmed. It is worth noting that this study focuses on the perceived image of a representative group of tourists prior to the mega-event, rather than the impact after the event as argued in some previous studies (Lee et al., 2005; Lai, 2018; Koo et al., 2006). This has enriched the empirical application of the theories to some extent.

In particular, the results of the survey provide valuable insights. Even before the start of a major event, the branding effect of the host venue and the major event through image fit and image extension has already created an impact among the event's group of followers. This means that some travelers who afford to make the trip will plan their trip to the event venue much earlier.

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