

Public trust in mega event planning institutions: The role of knowledge, transparency and corruption



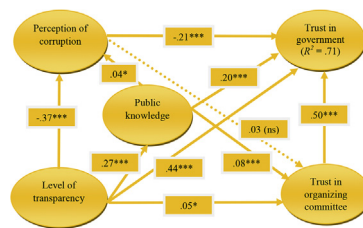
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Investigates the determinants of trust in mega-event institutions.
- Trust in government is influenced by corruption, transparency, and knowledge.
- Trust in the organizing committee also predicts trust in government.
- Transparency and knowledge are inversely related to corruption.
- Provides useful policy recommendations to host countries.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



Note: * $p > 0.05$; ** $p > 0.01$; *** $p > 0.001$
 The theoretical model of the study

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ABSTRACT

The political ramifications of hosting mega-events are huge. In this article, we investigate the relationships among corruption, transparency, knowledge, and public trust using data collected from 3786 Brazilians in the context of the 2014 FIFA World Cup Games. Findings from the structural equation modeling indicate that public trust in government is determined by the respondents' perceptions of corruption and transparency and their level of knowledge about the roles of government and the local organizing committee in the mega-event. The respondents' level of trust in the local organizing committee also exerts an influence on their trust in the government. The implications of the findings for governments planning to host mega-events in the future are discussed. This research makes an important contribution to the literature, being the first study to test a theoretical model that analyses the relationships between corruption, transparency, knowledge, and public trust in the context of a mega-sport event.

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1. Introduction

Definitions of mega events vary across disciplines and theoretical underpinnings (Horne, 2017). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that mega-events are large-scale cultural, commercial or

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sporting events which have a dramatic character, mass population appeal, and international significance (Roche, 2000). They are one-off events which are very costly and have far-reaching socio-economic implications, but have worldwide popularity and generate much media attention (Müller, 2015a). From this perspective, a mega-event is an important component of the tourism system and has important implications for the host area (Getz & Page, 2016; Jones, 2001). Mega sport tourism events such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup are perceived to have a number of positive socio-economic impacts (Arnegger & Herz, 2016; Bakhsh, Potwarka, Nunkoo, & Sunnassee, 2017; Maharaj, 2015; Potwarka & Banyai, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that governments of host countries invest large amounts of resources in bidding for and hosting such events. In the neoliberal era, the 'sport-for-good' narrative has been replaced by the 'sport-for-development' narrative to justify use of public resources for hosting mega-events (Coakley & Souza, 2013).

However, these events rarely live to the expectations of the public and empirical results on the impacts of hosting are disappointing. Not only are the economic benefits overstated and promoters failed to deliver their promises (Jones, 2001), but mega sport events also generate a number of negative externalities and social costs. Corruption and lack of transparency are probably among the most documented unethical practices inherent to mega sport events. Despite the codes of practice established by sports federations like FIFA which include such directives as accountability, ethics, anti-corruption safeguards, and respect for the rule of law (Gaffney, 2013), there is no dearth of evidence of corrupt practices and intransparency in the organization of mega sport events (see for example Maharaj, 2015; Longman, 1999). Corruption and lack of transparency represent a direct betrayal of public trust placed in mega-event planning institutions, since such practices revolve around situations where government officials and developers entrusted by the public engage in malfeasance for private enrichment (Bardhan, 1997). Distrust results in public protests against the political system, giving rise to a legitimacy crisis in mega-event planning and development.

Despite such political consequences, there is a dearth of studies on this topic in the tourism literature. Although in recent years, tourism researchers have shown a growing research interest on public trust (e.g. Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Netto, 2017; Nunkoo, 2015; Olya & Gavilyan, 2017), none of them has looked at the theoretical relationships between public trust and corruption, transparency, and knowledge. As Henne (2015) and Getz and Page (2016) argue, there is little empirical evidence on the political consequences of corruption and transparency in the mega tourism event literature. Furthermore, existing empirical evidences on trust cannot be generalized to mega events because trust is context-specific as it is "given to specific individuals or institutions over specific domains" (Levi & Stoker, 2000, p. 476). From these perspectives, this research makes some important theoretical contributions to knowledge as it connects together the research on corruption and transparency with the study of public trust in two important bodies involved in the organization of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil: the Brazilian government and the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) of the games. The research uses data collected from 3786 respondents residing in the 12 Brazilian cities that hosted the World Cup games.

The paper proposes a baseline model (BM, Fig. 1a) that predicts public trust in the government (TG) and public trust in the LOC (TOC) of the games from corruption (COR), transparency (TRA), and knowledge (KW). We then compare the BM with four competing models of public trust that reflect other theoretically plausible relationships among the variables. This approach is necessary given the alternative and sometimes conflicting theoretical relationships

among the variables revealed in previous research (Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2013). Following existing studies (e.g. Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong, & Im, 2013), CM₁ (Fig. 1b) proposes two additional path relationships between transparency (TRA) and knowledge (KW) and between KW and COR while CM₂ (Fig. 1c) includes a path between TRA and COR. In CM₃ (Fig. 1d), we investigate the spill-over effect of TOC on TG. While some studies suggest that corruption is an important predictor of public trust (Choi & Woo, 2016; Torcal, 2014), others found empirical evidence indicating that low trust leads to stronger perceptions of corruption (e.g. Morris & Klesner, 2010; Wroe, Allen, & Birch, 2013). Therefore CM₄ (Fig. 1e) investigates the theoretical postulates that COR is influenced by TG and TOC. Failure to identify such alternative theoretical propositions that can be supported by a given set of data presents a direct threat to future research (MacCallum, Wegener, Uchino, & Fabrigar, 1993). Because research on such complex relationships among trust, corruption, transparency, and knowledge in the tourism and event literature is still in its infancy, it is important to uncover the most theoretically rigorous model from other competing ones. Our approach "increase[s] the alignment of modeling results with existing knowledge and theories" and is thus an important step toward theoretical advancement (Shah & Goldstein, 2006, p. 162).

This study also has important practical implications for the development of mega sport tourism events in host countries planning to host such events in future, particularly in Brazil where anti-corruption efforts to promote the integrity of the government and sport are now more than ever ubiquitous. As Spalding et al. (2014) note "... in a country where corruption has been 'business as usual', it appears that Brazilian people have had enough ... the call for accountability and transparency has only intensified" (p. 74). As the anti-corruption movements demanding good governance and adherence to the principles of democracy in mega-event development become global, other host countries can also expect similar situations to that of Brazil and face the challenges of maintaining the legitimacy of mega-event planning bodies. Legitimacy of and public support for mega-events is central to their sustainability (Bramwell, 1997; Gursoy et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2006; Kaplanidou, Al-Emadi, Sagas, Diop, & Fritz, 2016; Lauer mann, 2016). Governments of host countries can promote good governance and gain legitimacy in and garner public support for mega-event development by fostering public trust (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011). This is important because sport organizations now consider the level of public support for the sport event as one of the key selection criteria to assess a potential host country (International Olympic Committee, 2016). Hence, an investigation of public trust and distrust in the context of mega-sport events is more than ever essential, making the findings of this research valuable to several host economies.

2. Public trust in mega event planning institutions

In this study, following Miller and Listhaug (1990), we define trust as citizens' beliefs that the institutions governing mega-event development will produce preferred outcomes for the public even in the absence of constant scrutiny. Any government and its related institutions need public trust for their policies and programs to flourish (Nunkoo, 2015; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & Smith, 2014). Public trust fosters relationships underlying economic development and promotes legitimacy of governing and planning institutions as well as produces outcomes that work in the best interests of society (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Swaner, 2017). People who consider institutions involved in mega-event planning as trustworthy are more likely to support the institutions' initiatives and follow their leadership without needing

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