

The Role of Sports Intellectual Property in Building Tourism Destination Attractiveness

Huipeng Zhang

Tisch Institute for Global Sport, New York University, New York, NY 10003, United States

hz3641@nyu.edu

Abstract. This paper focuses on how Sports IP can help to enhance the attractiveness of tourist destination, since the sportstourism industry is becoming more integrated: major sports events have been not only temporary leisure and entertainment activities but also developing into the important long-term cultural and tourism resource of local area. Sports IP has an important impact on destination image, enhancing the emotional bond, and attracting tourists. Adopting an approach based on quality research through a combination between the review of literature and case studies, this paper analyzes the principal motives in terms of usage of Sports IP towards increasing the appeal of tourist attractions, such as better destination image, a better tourism experience, improvements in infrastructure or positive word of mouth effects. Taking the 2010 FIFA World Cup held in South Africa as an example, this paper concludes that mega sport events (as a type of Sports IP) are able to promote global visibility with a substantial boost in tourist arrivals. This suggests that Sports IPs will deliver their full potential only when they become part of broader tourism and city planning strategy.

Keywords: Sports Intellectual Property, Sports Tourism, Mega Sporting Events, Destination Image.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, with the development of the global sports industry and the increase in its commercialization, sports events have also undergone changes. People no longer view major sportsevents as entertainment or competitive competitions [1]. Instead, more people regard them as important cultural assets. In these cities and countries, large-scale sports events are used to change people's perception of the destination and enhance their global visibility, significantly improving their appeal to tourists, and serving to promote the long-term development of cities and tourism [2]. This change is also strongly connected with a fast growing trend of sports tourism that nowadays represents the driving force behind tourism demand and should generate more than 1.4 trillion US dollars per year [3]. This indicates that sports tourism has become very important to world tourism. However, at the same time, competition in the tourism market has also become intense, and various places are using new methods to attract tourists. Sports-related resources have become a common method to attract tourists and promote tourism consumption. The FIFA World Cup, Formula One racing, and the Olympic Games are all done in this way. Their influence goes far beyond the sports venues themselves, as they receive extensive media exposure and enhance people's sense of connection with the host location. Some sports resources also change people's perception and feelings of the host location. Large scale sport often has high media exposure and builds up specific region identity, which can help organizers to improve their profile and competitiveness on tourism market, therefore sports events and tourism as an important component of destination brand building which is changing how sports ,culture, and tourism [4].

An increasing number of researchers have pointed out that sports organizations should not merely focus on the operation and organization methods of sports events. Instead, they should view sports events as broader social and cultural phenomena [2]. People's views on sports events are evolving in a more comprehensive direction, not only focusing on the operation of the events but also considering their economic and social impacts [5]. Some have proposed that the triple bottom line approach helps people better understand how things create value in non-directly profitable ways. Thus, sports tourism is a significant area of study since this allows scholars to grasp better on the way in which sports

events increase destination attractiveness and drive tourism industry development. Given this, this study focuses on sports intellectual property (sports IP), as it is a key for sports events to enhance the attractiveness of tourism destinations. This paper does not see sports events as temporary profits target, instead it views sports event as a long-term culture and tourism weapon. This research aims at getting full understanding about the effect of sport event on tourism through exploring how sport IP affects destination's popularity, affective bond, and experience. The research methodology of this paper is a combination between literature search and case study, the latter being done in this article by reviewing existing research concerning sporting IP and tourist destination lacking an obvious relationship between sports IP and the attractiveness of the destination. This paper also analyzes some popular international sporting events to illustrate how such relationships work in practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Sports Intellectual Property (Sports IP)

The term Sports intellectual property (Sports IP) refers to myriad sports-related subject matter covered under the rubric of intellectual property law, including event names and logos, sports team logos, players' likenesses, or novel concepts in a sporting context [6]. This is a legal definition. The value of a sports IP is that it can constantly capture people's eyes and hearts, and through multiple events, media exposure, and telling an attractive story, sports intellectual property may create an identity apart from the event itself, like the logos of NBA and the World Cup, which makes it become a cultural symbol integrated with social context and influence the audience's cognition on such sports IP. But on the cultural tourism side, the value of sports IP is not just about who owns it legally, but whether or not it can generate an emotional connection. Sports IP imbues facilities with character, which would enable them to escape the confines of an individual incident. New York's Madison Square Garden, for instance, is hallowed ground for the sport of basketball. Such places have altered how people perceive them as well as the interactions within those spaces due to their ability to create an emotional bond between its audience members and the feelings that accompany events hosted there annually.

The sports IP also possesses a common characteristic across various fields. The influence of the sports IP extends beyond the actual competitions. People can see its presence in products, media platforms, destinations, and brand promotion of tourism products. Its ability to function in various fields enables it to have greater social significance. The sports IP is not merely related to sports. It is a resource that connects sports, culture, and tourism in many different aspects [6].

2.2. Sports Tourism

Sports tourism is a social, economic and cultural phenomenon that stems from the unique interaction among activities, people and locations [7]. However, in recent years, people have increasingly regarded sports tourism as an experience of the sports event itself rather than merely an economic activity. People participating in major sports events not only enjoy the event itself. They also enjoy the atmosphere, national identity and meaning brought by the event and the host city. For example, at every World Cup, fans from various countries gather to travel to the venue to cheer for their own countries. This is a strong sense of national identity.

Sports IPs play a core role in this process. Mature sports IPs can provide highly recognizable brands and stories, thereby attracting tourists to watch the event and enhancing the attractiveness of the destination. When a destination is closely associated with an important sports event IP, this event becomes a powerful attraction, just as people think of the Los Angeles Lakers when they think of Los Angeles, or of their football team when they think of Barcelona. In this sense, sports tourism is the key mechanism for converting sports IPs into tourism value

2.3. Tourism Attractiveness

Tourist attraction (attractiveness) means how attractive a destination or an area for tourists in terms of satisfying travelers' requirements during their trip. It consists of several aspects, and various researches hold different views on it. Some research suggests that the impact of tourism depends on the conditions of the tourism area, the services provided, the type, and the existing facilities [8]. Others point out that tourism attractiveness has a clear personal preference. This indicates that the attractiveness of tourism is influenced by different factors [9]. In the context of sports tourism, the attractiveness of a destination and general tourism are more complex. Sports tourists are more likely to be influenced by multiple motivations, such as participating in sports activities, engaging in social interaction, and experiencing emotional experiences, rather than being determined by a single factor [10]. Thus, the competitiveness of a location as an attractive place for sports tourism is not only influenced by its appeal to general tourists but also affected by the conditions specifically associated with the sport itself. Development in the field of sports will also influence the composition and type of tourism. Studies have shown that sporting activity can alter tourist destination preferences, making certain areas more attractive to visitors because of sports-related resources and thus promoting the development of tourism [11].

Here, sports intellectual property or sports IP play an extremely important role in boosting the appeal to a tourist destination. Once a sporting event becomes sports IP, it does not just change the event but also changes people's view on the place. Sports IP makes a place better and more valuable, or when this place was previously not very positive in terms of stereotypes for many people, then through sports IP it is possible to preserve its popularity over time and increase people's attitude towards the area.

3. Case Analysis

3.1. 2010 FIFA World Cup and Destination Awareness

This case was chosen because it clearly demonstrates how large-scale sports events, as a form of sports intellectual property, can enhance a destination's reputation and change the global public's perception of the place.

Before the 2010 FIFA World Cup, foreign media coverage of South Africa was mostly negative, mainly focusing on crime, AIDS, and social unrest [12]. These reports created a negative image of South Africa, making many tourists reluctant to travel to South Africa or choosing not to make it their travel destination. This was not a problem of its own for South Africa; many other developing countries had hoped to be able to host big sporting events as part of improving their international image back then. What made this case special is that it was the first time ever that the 2010 FIFA World Cup would take place on African soil. Therefore, this event was not only of great significance to South Africa but also to the entire African continent [13]. From the perspective of sports organizers, FIFA clearly stated that the World Cup would help the host country enhance its national and destination brand [14]. According to most of these researches, it is believed that the organization of the World Cup by South Africa has been one of the major ways through which this country could have enhanced their image abroad and improved the external perception about them. In fact, the 2010 FIFA world cup can be considered as a significant worldwide sporting event which was covered widely by the media and watched by numerous spectators. Furthermore, it was also a factor for altering the image of the host nation amongst the public. Earlier studies suggest that this tournament had increased international knowledge about South Africa through promoting messages like multiculturalism, organizational ability, and national pride [15]. Besides the symbolism of such an achievement, it was also a demonstration of its enormous economic value. According to the International Football Federation's finances, it made more than 3.7 billion US dollars at this event, mainly in international broadcast and marketing rights [16]. This also suggests that the South African World Cup was an example of sport intellectual property, turned out to be an extremely successful

experiment. South Africa's experience shows that leveraging these large-scale sports events can help a country improve its economy and national image, especially when these developing countries are striving to establish their own national image. The 2010 FIFA World Cup was also an excellent case study in terms of the use of sports IP for enhancing the desirability of a tourist destination: according to a survey on South Africa's tourism, the amount of international tourist visits to South Africa rose from 7 million in 2009 to 8.1 million in 2010 (up by 15.1%). The report clearly states that this growth was mainly due to South Africa's successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup. At the same time, the consumption of foreign tourists in South Africa also increased by 22.6% [17].

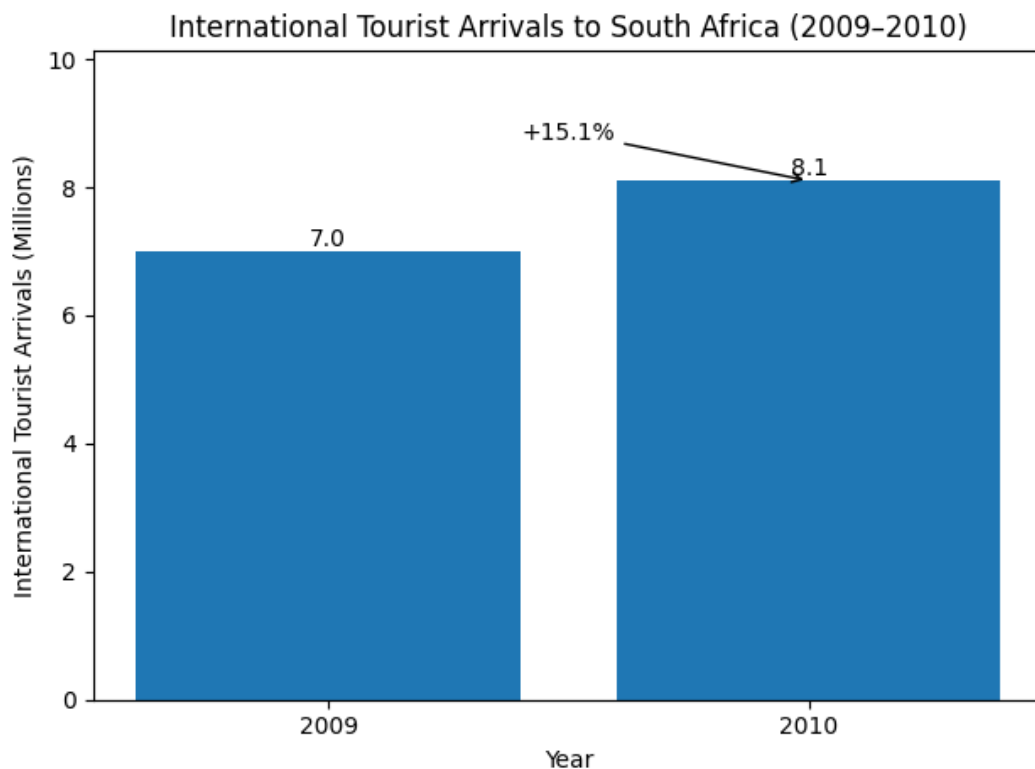


Figure 1. International Tourist Arrivals to South Africa Before and During the 2010 FIFA World Cup

Figure 1 shows that the FIFA World Cup attracted global media attention, which translated into real tourist visits and economic gains, thus increasing the attractiveness of South Africa to tourists.

3.2. Sports IP and Destination Attractiveness

The above studies suggest that SMI may contribute to a tourist destination's appeal in various related ways, one being its role as an important component of destination image. Major sporting events are widely covered by international media outlets and generate symbolic narrative content throughout their communication. SMIs enable host destinations to break down negative assumptions about them while constructing a new destination identity. For instance, South Africa by presenting their cultural diversity enabled many folks to get acquainted with the local customs and culture in Africa, which was not a backward image that is typical to people's stereotypical impression, altering the international community's view on the country. In this way it helped improve South Africa's international image as well as their national image.

Sports intellectual property enhances the attractiveness of a tourism destination by improving the tourist experience. The content provided by large-scale sports events is not limited to the games themselves but includes a comprehensive experience with emotional characteristics. Such experiences can enhance tourists' pleasure and deepen their emotional connection with the destination. Existing research has shown that tourist experience is an important determinant of a destination's competitiveness and tourist loyalty [18]. Being able to allow tourists to participate in an unforgettable sports feast, this feature centered on emotions and participation experiences distinguishes sports

tourism from traditional sightseeing tourism. Traditional tourist attractions may only attract tourists once, but sports tourism will have the idea of returning to watch the games.

Large-scale sports events often promote infrastructure construction, community environment improvement, and the creation of local jobs. They have an impact on the long-term development of the tourism industry. The government will invest a large amount of funds in public services, sports venues, etc., to achieve the effect of boosting the local GDP [19]. For example, during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, new venues and upgrades were constructed, enabling South Africa to have stronger capacity to receive tourists. In the long run, even after the event ends, these infrastructure improvements continue to enhance South Africa's attractiveness to tourists [13].

Finally, sports intellectual property promotes communication among fans. The spread of effective information between spectators and fans has significantly enhanced the local reputation, helping to attract more people to become true tourists. These processes indicate that sports intellectual property has value for short-term events and is an effective way to enhance the long-term attractiveness of a tourism destination.

4. Recommendations

The effectiveness of sports intellectual property in enhancing the attractiveness of a tourist destination largely depends on the degree of its integration with governance, event management and destination marketing. The government and sports event departments should not view sports events as isolated events. Instead, they should consider the situation over the next five to ten years and integrate the development of sports intellectual property with the overall tourism of a city.

4.1. Recommendations for Government and Policy Levels

For the government, establishing a long-lasting sports IP is a very time-consuming project. However, once it is completed, it will have an immeasurable potential for future tourism development. Incorporating the sports IP into the city's planning and establishing reasonable plans and policies through various departments such as tourism, transportation, and urban planning can effectively accelerate the construction of the sports IP. In today's society, sports should be combined with cultural education and current AI. For example, some sports museums, digital exhibition halls, or convenient sports facilities can be built near sports venues. This also enables tourists to experience the charm of sports, not only by watching sports but also by immersing themselves in the joy of sports. This also helps local residents build social activity facilities.

4.2. Recommendations for Sports Event Planners and Operators

For the organizers of sports events, the key issue they need to consider first is how to provide tourists with an unforgettable experience. They can offer additional experiences apart from the games, such as visits to the sports venues, behind-the-scenes interviews, and inviting some lucky audience members to interact with the players. These methods can stimulate the enthusiasm of fans and their interest in participating in the games. The management of local fans is also equally important. Organizing some events related to their own teams in the local community, offering discounts on tickets for local fans to watch the games, or some meal and ticket packages, can encourage local fans to come and participate in such events again. Finally, it is important to do a good job in social media promotion. Posting more photos of the players and the content that fans want to see can help enhance the local influence of the event.

4.3. Destination Marketing and Promotion Strategies

Marketing campaigns should not just be advertisements but rather more like figuring out what story people want to tell and convince customers. Destination brand research shows that storytelling can be a great way for tourists to develop an emotional connection with the destination [20]. Of course, collaborating with athletes as a tourism ambassador for a team can also enhance the destination's

visibility and attract more attention, especially from the fans of these stars. It is a great promotional method to have them create some vlogs about the city for city promotion and post them on their own social media platforms. Additionally, creating targeted sports-themed products with aviation groups or hotels, such as aircraft colour schemes or hotel sports-themed room designs, are also good approaches. Collaborating with the intellectual property of industries like movies, animations, or games can also help sports intellectual property reach younger and more diverse tourist groups.

5. Conclusion

This study combines theoretical analysis with practical case studies to analyse the role of sports intellectual property in enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa was used as a specific case for analysis. The results show that sports intellectual property has a significant impact on enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations, not only the short-term effects of the event, but also a more profound influence on a place in the long term. During this period, some stadiums built not only provided sports venues for local residents but also had a profound impact on the tourism development of the local area through some sports IPs.

Studies have demonstrated how sports IPs may contribute to enhance the appeal of a location through different mechanisms: firstly, by telling the story of their own city, it allows more people to know about the relationship between the city and sports and build an image. Second, sports IP can enhance people's traveling experience. Different from common tour of sightseeing, it provides a higher-order travel experience as well as making visitors want to come back again to the city. Third, big events could improve the city's infrastructure and the service level of its tourism industry. If everything mentioned above is done properly, then amongst fans, they would tell each other how attractive it is as a destination, and everyone would be rushing over there to travel. All of these together explain how sports IP contributes to growing tourism and making the destination attractive.

This study aims to explain how sports IP can enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination. The purpose is to enable those places without local sports IP to identify the advantages of cities with sports IP and to apply them reasonably in their own urban planning. This will provide an academic reference for local urban planning.

Although this study has provided some research results, there are still some limitations. This is because only one major event was used in this paper, and the South African World Cup was too far in the past. For the research, some recent events can be used, and the focus can be on some small city events to continue the study. To provide new solutions for better sports tourism.

References

- [1] Schwartz B. The paradox of choice. Harper Perennial, 2021.
- [2] Dashper K, Fletcher T, McCullough N. Sports events, society and culture. Routledge, 2014.
- [3] Gong W. Sports celebrity IP and fan circle culture integration: Sports tourism product strategy under fan economy. *Sport Business and Management: An International Journal*, 2025, 15(4): 427–442.
- [4] Parmett R. Sport events and place identity. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 2025.
- [5] Getz D. Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research. *Tourism Management*, 2009, 29(3): 403–428.
- [6] Zeng A. The development and utilization of sports IP and management strategies. *Advances in Physical Education*, 2024, 14(3): 60–71.
- [7] Weed M, Bull C. Sports tourism: Participants, policy and providers. Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003.
- [8] Ghani NIA, Nasir MNM., Nor ZM, Yahya R N S R, Ramli R, Muhammad N, Karim F. Identifying destination attractiveness of Kuala Terengganu perceived by domestic tourists. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2021, 11(9): 399–408.
- [9] Moradi E, Hossini R N S. Sport tourism and destination attractiveness: Bridging gaps in research for emerging economies. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 2025: 1–30.

- [10] Kaplanidou K, Gibson H J. Predicting behavioral intentions of active event sport tourists. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 2010, 15(2): 163–179.
- [11] Pekovic S, Perovic D, Stanovic T., Vukcevic J. Is Montenegro considered as a sports-recreational destination? *Sport Mont*, 2018, 16(2): 83–86.
- [12] Donaldson R, Ferreira S. (Re-)creating urban destination image: Opinions of foreign visitors to South Africa on safety and security. *Urban Forum*, 2009, 20(1): 1–18.
- [13] Sauter E. Branding a nation: A case study on South Africa, social media, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2023, 16(4): 502–511.
- [14] Allmers S, Maennig W. Economic impacts of the FIFA Soccer World Cups in France 1998, Germany 2006, and outlook for South Africa 2010. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 2009, 35(4): 500–519.
- [15] Heslop L A, Nadeau J, O'Reilly N, Armenakyan A. Mega-event and country co-branding: Image shifts, transfers and reputational impacts. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 2013, 16(1): 7–33.
- [16] FIFA. FIFA financial report 2010. FIFA, 2011.
- [17] South African Department of Tourism. 2010 state of tourism report. South African Government, 2011.
- [18] Moradi E, Hossini R N S. Sport destination competitiveness and attractiveness: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2025, 37: 101004.
- [19] Puspasari E Y. Existence Pilgrim Kawi's: Sustainable rural tourism approach for Sumbertempur. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 2022, 361: 03023.
- [20] Phung T, Nguyen D V P, Tran V P T. Storytelling on social media: Forging the path to tourism destination branding. *Cogent Business & Management*, 2025, 12(1).