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Does image fit matter to residents' attitudes and intentions toward sports events and host communities: the mediating role of quality of life

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how perceived image fit between a recurring community sports event and its host community influences residents' attitudes and behavioral intentions, with particular attention to the differentiated roles of attachment and quality of life. Grounded in schema theory, the study conceptualizes image fit as a cognitive mechanism shaping residents' evaluations of both the place and the event. Data were collected from 259 local residents of a long-running community marathon in rural Taiwan using a purposive sampling approach. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed relationships, alongside a theory-driven competing model analysis. The findings indicate that perceived image fit exerts significant positive effects on place attachment, event attachment, and behavioral intentions. Place attachment enhances residents' quality of life, which in turn mediates its effect on behavioral intentions. In contrast, event attachment directly predicts behavioral intentions, while its indirect pathway through quality of life is not supported. Model comparison results demonstrate that this refined structure provides superior explanatory and predictive power. By extending schema theory to a resident-based event context, the study elucidates distinct psychological pathways through which image fit fosters sustained community support for recurring sports events.

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Image fit; place attachment; event attachment; schema theory; recurring sports event; PLS-SEM

Introduction

Communities have increasingly hosted regional and annual sports events as a strategy to enhance local benefits and pursue sustainable development. Re-thinking and designing leveraging strategies to target a specific hosting community is the contemporary and critical issues (Kelly & Fairley, 2018). The residents' support toward sports event is crucial for hosting communities being benefited and development driving by sporting events (Kaplanidou, 2021).

The effect of sports events on the image of a host community has been widely examined in sport and event research. Prior empirical studies indicate that sports events can enhance the image of the host community, which in turn motivates sports tourists' intentions to revisit or recommend the event to others. Beyond these immediate image-related effects, increasing scholarly attention has focused on how sports events can foster long-term connections between events and local residents, which is critical for sustainable community development and event management (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010b).

So far, studies have indicated that when residents form a bond with their place, they are more willing to support the community's sports event (Ganji et al., 2021). As such, place attachment and event attachment could explain residents' behavioral intention toward sports events. There is still an unknown gap between the event images with place images contributing to the residents' attitude of bonding with the event and their community, and their supporting to the hosting sports event. The image fit provide a comprehensive variable to measure this gap (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010a; Oshimi & Harada, 2019).

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In sport tourism and event research, image fit refers to individuals' perceived congruence between the image of a sports event and the image of its host destination or community. Rather than representing an objective match, image fit reflects a subjective cognitive evaluation shaped by individuals' prior experiences, beliefs, and knowledge structures. Drawing on schema theory, individuals interpret new stimuli, such as recurring sports events, by comparing them with existing place-based schemas. When the perceived image of an event aligns with residents' established perceptions of their community, a higher level of image fit is formed, which can subsequently shape residents' attitudes, emotional attachments, and supportive behaviors. In resident-based event contexts, image fit is particularly salient because residents are long-term stakeholders whose evaluations influence both event sustainability and community development.

The application of image fit grounded in schema theory has been increasingly explored in sport event research as a means of assessing the congruence between sports events and host places (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010a, 2010b). Empirical studies have confirmed the effects of image fit on place image and participants' behavioral intentions (Oshimi & Harada, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). However, while event and place images capture relatively immediate outcomes, long-term community development requires a deeper understanding of residents' stable psychological traits, such as place attachment, event attachment, and perceived quality of life (QOL). Attachment represents a durable psychological bond through which residents connect with both their community and recurring sports events, thereby influencing sustained support.

In addition, the impact of sports events on residents' quality of life has been widely examined in sport event management research. QOL has been found to predict residents' behavioral intentions toward sports events (Custódio et al., 2018) and is considered a central objective of hosting sports events for community development (Theodorakis et al., 2019). Moreover, QOL serves as a key mechanism for gaining residents' long-term support for recurring sports events and fostering sustainable community development (Joaquim Araújo de Azevedo et al., 2013).

Accordingly, this study aims to achieve the following objectives. First, it examines how residents' perceived image fit between a recurring community sports event and its host community influences place attachment and event attachment. Second, it investigates the distinct roles of place attachment and event attachment in shaping residents' quality of life and behavioral intentions. Third, through a competing model approach, the study seeks to identify the structural configuration that best explains residents' support for recurring community sports events.

Literature review

Underpinning theory: schema theory

Schema theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for explaining how residents cognitively evaluate the relationship between a sports event and its host community. Schemas are organized knowledge structures stored in memory that guide individuals' interpretation of new information and experiences (Fiske, 1982). When individuals encounter stimuli related to familiar objects or environments, they rely on existing schemas to process information efficiently. Recent sport and communication research further demonstrates that schema congruity enhances cognitive fluency and emotional priming, thereby strengthening evaluative responses and behavioral outcomes (Lee & Read, 2024).

In the context of sports events, residents typically hold well-established schemas regarding their community's identity, values, and image, as well as prior experiences with recurring events. Image fit reflects the perceived congruence between these schemas – that is, the extent to which the symbolic, cultural, and functional attributes of a sports event align with residents' mental representations of their community. Empirical studies indicate that image congruence between sports events and host places positively influences attitudes, affective responses, and behavioral intentions (Wang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Higher perceived congruence facilitates more fluent information processing and favorable evaluations (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010a).

Schema theory thus explains why image fit serves as a critical antecedent of residents' psychological responses. Schema-consistent perceptions reinforce residents' identification with both the place and the event, strengthening place attachment and event attachment, whereas incongruent associations may weaken attachment and supportive intentions. Prior sport marketing and sponsorship research suggests

that schema-consistent stimuli are more likely to generate positive and durable attitudinal effects, while incongruent associations may undermine perceived authenticity (Bredikhina & Kunkel, 2022; Jensen & Vlacanich, 2023).

Moreover, repeated exposure to a recurring sports event that aligns with residents' place-based schemas allows positive evaluations to accumulate over time, contributing to perceptions of improved quality of life and sustained support for the event (Jensen & Vlacanich, 2023). Accordingly, schema theory provides a coherent rationale for the proposed relationships among image fit, attachment constructs, quality of life, and behavioral intentions examined in this study.

Schema theory and image fit

The concept of image fit between sports events and host locations has its theoretical roots in sport marketing and event studies. Building on this foundation, Hallmann and Breuer (2010a, 2010b) formally introduced image fit in the sport event–destination context, demonstrating its influence on attitudes and behavioral intentions. Subsequent resident-based studies further confirmed the relevance of image fit in shaping place attachment and event-related support (Oshimi & Harada, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021).

This body of evidence highlights the relevance of schema theory (Fiske, 1982), which has been widely recognized as a robust theoretical framework for explaining the cognitive linkage between sports events and their host locations (Koo & Lee, 2019). Schema theory posits that individuals rely on pre-existing cognitive structures to interpret new information under familiar conditions. In the context of sports events, residents draw upon established schemas related to their community and prior event experiences to evaluate the perceived congruence between an event and its host location. Through this process, image fit is cognitively constructed as residents assess how well the event aligns with their mental representations of the community, leading to favorable or unfavorable evaluations.

Prior research has consistently shown that congruence between event image and place image plays a critical role in shaping residents' attitudes toward and support for sports events (Chang et al., 2020; Schnitzer et al., 2021). Recent studies further suggest that sport event image is a multidimensional construct influenced by both event-related and destination-related attributes (Xia & Xu, 2024).

Accordingly, this study applies Fiske's schema theory to explain how residents cognitively evaluate the linkage between a recurring sports event and its host community. When residents perceive a strong image fit, positive evaluations are more likely to emerge, fostering attachment and supportive behavioral intentions toward both the event and the host community. Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Image fit has a positive effect on place attachment.

Hypothesis 2: Image fit has a positive effect on attachment to a recurring sports event.

Hypothesis 3: Image fit has a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

Place attachment

Place attachment is commonly defined as a psychological characteristic reflecting an individual's emotional bond to a place (Stylidis et al., 2014). While attachment is steady and less prone to change, image fit is a dynamic variable, evolving as a place changes. Therefore, the utilization of place attachment is appropriate when seeking to understand the changing attitude of residents towards a host location as a result of a recurring sports event.

We consider place attachment to be an attitudinal variable that captures residents' sentiment toward their own community. Hence, it is rational to propose that place attachment elicits a positive psychological effect that can be used to assess residents' attitude, since attitude represents individuals' psychological tendencies based on their perception of engaging in a behavior; therefore, we postulate a relationship between place attachment and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we seek to use a stable trait to examine residents' attitudes toward a sports event hosted annually in their respective community (Ramkissoon et al., 2012),

attachment could be verified as an antecedent attitudinal construct on the behavior intentional construct of support toward sports events. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

Hypothesis 4: Place attachment has a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

Place attachment is often claimed as an antecedent to QOL. When residents are attached to their community with a strong degree of commitment and positive feelings, they may engage in active citizenship behaviors, thereby contributing to a better overall QOL (Joaquim Araújo de Azevedo et al., 2013). Moreover, cultural and environmental attributes in a community may not only benefit health and well-being, but also promote social ties, civility, and belongingness. Marketing of a location must therefore aim to fulfill the expectations of different market segments by promoting QOL, especially for inner market segments like residents. Prior research suggests that place attachment represents a relatively stable psychological bond that can shape residents' evaluations of community-based initiatives, including recurring sports events (Ramkissoon et al., 2012).

Assuming a positive relationship exists in tourism and recreational contexts (Joaquim Araújo de Azevedo et al., 2013) and drawing from the literature, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: Place attachment has a positive effect on QOL.

Event attachment

The event attachment can be defined as residents' attachment to the sporting event. Event attachment is crucial for developing and maintaining the relationship between a person and a recurring sports event hosted in a community. As with place attachment, the concept of event attachment has been incorporated in previous studies seeking to investigate the interactions among affect, cognition, and behaviors toward a given object by focusing on the affective bond between an individual and an event (Brown et al., 2016).

Past research has clearly shown that event attachment influences residents' level of support for re-hosting a sports event in the future. The effect of event attachment on residents' consumption intentions (Filo et al., 2010), as well as on event sustainability (Halpenny et al., 2016) have all been established. Event attachment has been shown to influence positive resident outcomes toward sports events, including psychosocial benefits and supportive behavioral intentions. Previous studies have also suggested that perceived benefits derived from event attachment may contribute to residents' quality of life; however, empirical verification of this direct relationship remains limited. Nevertheless, these studies disregarded the direct effect of event attachment on residents' behavioral intentions and QOL. Based on these studies, we propose that:

Hypothesis 6: Attachment towards a recurring sports event has a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 7: Attachment towards a recurring sports event has a positive effect on QOL.

Quality of life (QOL) perceptions in sports event

Quality of life (QOL) is a multidimensional construct reflecting residents' overall evaluation of their well-being within a community. In the context of sport events, QOL has been widely adopted as a key indicator linking event-related perceptions to residents' support and long-term community development (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Ouyang et al., 2019).

QOL perceived by residents has been proposed as a reasonable concept to predict their intention to support further event development (Kaplanidou et al., 2013). If residents perceive the increase in QOL by evaluating the impact of sports events, then they will support hosting the events in their community. Thus, QOL would mediate the relationship between residents' psychological attitude towards an event and their intentions. Based on the insights from these studies, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 8: QOL has a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 9: QOL has a mediating effect between place attachment and behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 10: QOL has a mediating effect between event attachment and behavioral intentions.

The research framework is shown in [Figure 1](#).

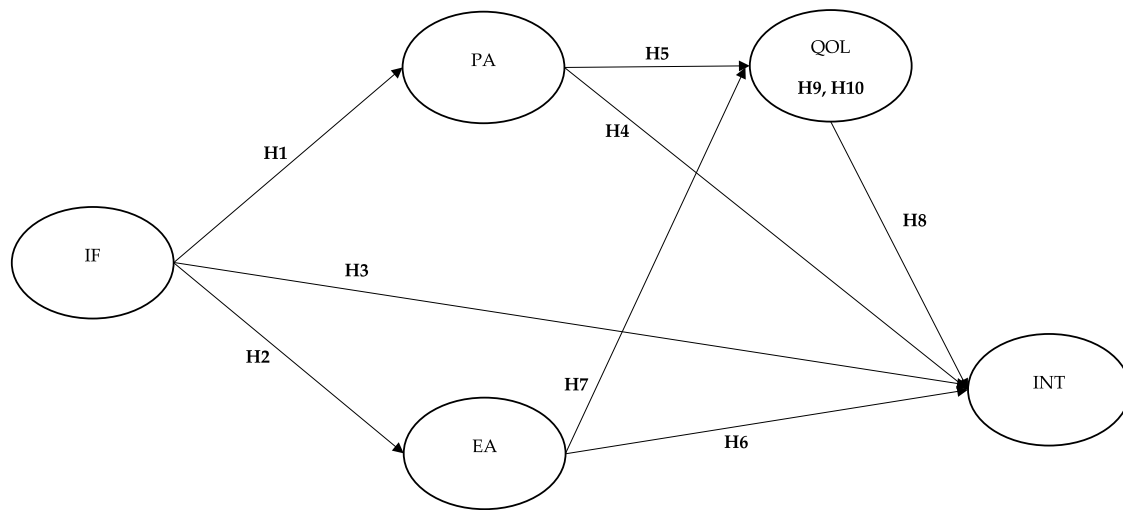


Figure 1. Proposed research framework.

Note: (i) IF: Image Fit, PA: Place Attachment, EA: Event Attachment, QOL: Quality of Life, INT = Behavioural intentions; (ii) H9, H10 mediation effects.

Method

Research procedure and sample

This study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine residents' perceptions of image fit, attachment, quality of life, and behavioral intentions toward a recurring community sports event. Data were collected in the context of the Tianzhong Marathon, an annual marathon held in Tianzhong Township, Changhua County, Taiwan. The event has been organized for more than a decade and plays an important role in local community development (Chen et al., 2020).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient contextual knowledge and experiential exposure to the event, which is essential for providing meaningful evaluations of the study constructs (Memon et al., 2017). Three explicit selection criteria were applied. First, respondents were required to be residents of Tianzhong Township, as the study focused on host community perceptions. Second, respondents had to be aware of the Tianzhong Marathon to enable assessment of perceived image fit between the event and the host community. Third, respondents were required to have direct or indirect involvement in the event, such as participation as spectators, volunteers, staff members, or organizers, ensuring adequate experiential exposure to evaluate attachment, quality of life, and behavioral intentions.

These criteria were theoretically justified by the research objectives, as residents lacking awareness or exposure to the event would be unable to provide informed assessments of the focal constructs. The application of purposive sampling therefore enhanced the internal validity of the study by focusing on information-rich respondents relevant to the research context.

Data were collected during the event period using a self-administered questionnaire. Trained research assistants approached potential respondents in public areas surrounding the event venue and nearby community spaces, explained the purpose of the study, and invited eligible residents to participate voluntarily. Eligibility was confirmed through brief screening questions regarding residency, event awareness, and involvement prior to questionnaire administration. Respondents who met the criteria completed the questionnaire on-site, and all completed surveys were collected immediately. Participants were informed that their responses were anonymous and confidential.

Sample adequacy was assessed using power analysis. Following Cohen (2013), the minimum required sample size was calculated based on a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a statistical power of 0.95, and the maximum number of predictors in the structural model. A total of 259 valid questionnaires were collected, exceeding the minimum requirement and providing sufficient statistical power for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (Memone et al., 2020). Respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' demographics.

Demographics	Frequency (n = 259)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	66	25.5
Female	193	74.5
Age		
18–29	85	15.8
30–39	74	32.8
40–49	40	28.6
50–59	19	15.5
≥60	41	7.3
Marriage		
Married	73	28.2
Not married	186	71.8
Education		
Sixth grade or below	10	3.9
Junior high school graduate	9	3.5
High school graduate	90	34.7
College or University Graduate	134	51.7
Graduate degree or higher	16	6.2
Employment		
Non business	124	47.9
Business related	104	40.2
Currently unemployed	31	11.9
Personal Monthly Income (NTD)		
Under \$20000	61	23.6
\$20001–40000	140	54.1
\$40001–60000	47	18.1
\$60001–80000	9	3.5
More than \$80001	2	0.8

PLS-SEM was employed for data analysis due to its suitability for complex models, including those involving mediation and model comparison (Chin et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2020; Nitzl et al., 2016; Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

Research instruments

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data and consisted of two parts. The first part captured respondents' demographic characteristics, while the second included five scales measuring image fit and place attachment (Oshimi & Harada, 2019), event attachment and quality of life (Ouyang et al., 2019), and behavioral intentions (Oshimi & Harada, 2019). All measurement items were adapted from established instruments widely applied in sport event and resident-based research. Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

As the original instruments were developed in English, a back-translation procedure was conducted to ensure linguistic equivalence and content validity (Brislin, 1970). The questionnaire was first translated into Chinese and independently translated back into English by bilingual experts. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus. Face validity was further assessed by experts in sports management and tourism studies, and a pilot test with local residents was conducted to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness of the items (Memon et al., 2017).

In addition, age was initially included as a control variable to account for potential confounding effects. The results indicated that age did not significantly influence the endogenous variables nor alter the hypothesized relationships. Consistent with recommendations emphasizing model parsimony and interpretability, age was therefore excluded from the final structural model.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Common method bias test

To assess potential common method bias, a full collinearity assessment was conducted following Kock and Lynn (2012). This approach was adopted because it simultaneously examines both vertical (predictor–predictor) and lateral (predictor–criterion) collinearity within a PLS-SEM framework, providing a more

comprehensive test than the marker-variable technique. The results showed that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 0.016 to 2.705, well below the recommended threshold of 3.3. According to Kock and Lynn (2012), these values indicate that common method bias is unlikely to pose a serious concern, supporting the validity of the subsequent analyses.

Descriptive analysis results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all measurement items. Mean values ranged from 5.20 to 6.25 on a seven-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive perceptions. Image fit ($M = 5.60$ – 5.96), place attachment ($M = 5.30$ – 5.98), and event attachment ($M = 5.20$ – 5.63) all exhibited moderately to high mean values, reflecting residents' emotional bonds with the event and community. Quality of life showed consistently high means ($M = 5.54$ – 5.75), while behavioral intentions recorded the highest scores, particularly intention to recommend the event ($M = 6.25$). Standard deviations ranged from 1.11 to 1.57, and skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges, indicating no serious deviations from normality.

Respondents' profile characteristics

A total of 259 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis (Table 1). The sample was predominantly female (74.5%), with respondents mainly aged between 30 and 49 years. Most participants were not married, had completed at least a high school education, and were employed across diverse occupational sectors. More than half of the respondents reported a monthly income between NTD 20,001 and 40,000, indicating a range of socioeconomic backgrounds among local residents.

Measurement model

Reliability

The reflective measurement model was evaluated following the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2023). As shown in Table 2, all measurement items exhibited mean values above five, with standard deviations ranging from 1.227 to 1.573, indicating generally positive evaluations and acceptable response variability. Although some indicators (e.g. IF4 and INT1) showed skewness and/or kurtosis values slightly exceeding the recommended ± 2 threshold, this does not pose a concern for partial least squares structural equation modeling, as PLS-SEM is robust to non-normal data distributions when bootstrapping procedures are applied (Hair et

Table 2. Assessment of reliability and convergent validity.

Construct	Item	Description	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	Loading	CR	AVE
Image Fit (IF)	IF1	The place and the event stand for similar things	5.602	1.406	1.158	−1.087	0.929	0.971	0.893
	IF2	There is a logical connection between the event and the place	5.900	1.358	2.340	−1.484	0.953		
	IF3	The image of the event and the image of the place are similar	5.857	1.315	1.737	−1.303	0.957		
Place Attachment (PA)	IF4	The place and the event fit together well	5.958	1.362	2.357	−1.601	0.941	0.969	0.817
	PA1	I feel attached to this neighborhood	5.977	1.227	1.749	−1.344	0.853		
	PA2	I would regret having to move to another neighborhood	5.297	1.562	0.064	−0.784	0.870		
	PA3	When I've been away for a while, I really want to come back	5.564	1.400	0.150	−0.819	0.925		
	PA4	I feel at home in this neighborhood	5.903	1.313	1.192	−1.241	0.920		
	PA5	When I'm away, I miss this neighborhood	5.873	1.337	0.728	−1.141	0.927		
	PA6	This is my favorite neighborhood to live in	5.622	1.402	−0.148	−0.801	0.918		
Event Attachment (EA)	PA7	When I'm away, I'm happy to come back	5.784	1.264	0.136	−0.890	0.913	0.940	0.840
	EA1	I know much about the marathon event	5.633	1.283	0.077	−0.768	0.922		
	EA2	I have a special connection to the marathon and the people who attend to this event	5.270	1.573	−0.356	−0.675	0.893		
	EA3	I consider myself an educated resident regarding the marathon	5.201	1.532	−0.283	−0.620	0.935		
Quality Of Life (QOL)	QOL1	How satisfied are you with your own happiness?	5.741	1.294	1.488	−1.154	0.959	0.972	0.921
	QOL2	How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?	5.749	1.241	0.936	−1.014	0.968		
	QOL3	How satisfied are you with the quality of your life?	5.544	1.350	0.436	−0.899	0.952		
Intention (INT)	INT1	Would you recommend the event to others?	6.251	1.109	3.374	−1.790	0.921	0.924	0.860
	INT2	Would you want to revisit this event next year?	5.710	1.513	1.410	−1.328	0.933		

Note: **SD**: Standard Deviation, **CR**: Composite Reliability, **AVE**: Average Variance Extracted.

al., 2019, 2023). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using composite reliability (CR). As presented in Table 3, all CR values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency across all constructs.

Convergent validity

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining indicator loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The results show that all outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, supporting the reliability of individual indicators. Furthermore, all AVE values were above the minimum criterion of 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Together, these results provide strong support for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2023).

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which has been recommended as a robust criterion for evaluating discriminant validity in PLS-SEM (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). As reported in Table 4, all HTMT values ranged from 0.520 to 0.787, which are well below the conservative threshold of 0.90. These results indicate that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another, thereby confirming discriminant validity.

Structural model assessment

Upon assessing collinearity among the predictors within the structural model, all VIF scores were confirmed to be below the threshold value of 3.3 (Kock & Lynn, 2012). Next, bootstrapping using 5000 subsamples was employed to examine all the path relationships in the model (Hair et al., 2023). Table 5 illustrates the results of the hypothesis testing. Notably, H4 (PA→INT), H8 (QOL→INT), H9 (PA→QOL→INT), and H10 (EA→QOL→INT) were not supported.

Since the objectives of this study were threefold, to examine how residents' perceived image fit influences place attachment and event attachment, to investigate the differentiated roles of these attachments in shaping quality of life and behavioral intentions, and to identify the structural configuration that best explains residents' support for recurring community sports events, the proposed model was first evaluated as a theoretically grounded structure. However, residents' psychological responses to recurring sports events are inherently complex and may involve multiple, asymmetric mechanisms. Relying on a single structural specification may therefore obscure alternative yet theoretically plausible pathways linking image fit, attachment, and quality of life.

Accordingly, following the methodological recommendations of Shmueli et al. (2019) and Chin et al. (2020), a theory-driven competing model approach was adopted to systematically assess alternative mediation structures. This approach enables the comparison of multiple theoretically defensible models and facilitates theory refinement by identifying a parsimonious model with stronger explanatory and predictive power.

As Figure 2 shows, Model 1 analyzed the partial mediation of QOL on the effects of place attachment and event attachment on behavioral intentions, Model 2 analyzed the partial mediation of QOL for event attachment and the full mediation of QOL for place attachment, Model 3 analyzed the partial mediation of QOL for place attachment and the full mediation of QOL for event attachment, and Model 4 analyzed the full mediation of QOL for the effects of place attachment and event attachment on behavioral intentions. To compare the four models, we used traditional PLS-based criteria (R^2 , Adjusted R^2 , Blindfolding Q^2),

Table 3. Correlations of each constructs.

	IF	PA	EA	QOL	INT
Image Fit (IF)					
Place Attachment (PA)	.567**				
Event Attachment (EA)	.506**	.569**			
Quality Of Life (QOL)	.497**	.744**	.574**		
Behavioral Intentions (INT)	.606**	.546**	.662**	.553**	

** $p < .01$.

Table 4. Assessment of discriminant validity using HTMT.

Construct	IF	PA	EA	QOL	INT
Image Fit (IF)					
Place Attachment (PA)	0.595 (LB: 0.476; UB: 0.672)				
Event Attachment (EA)	0.545 (LB: 0.110; UB: 0.441)	0.608 (LB: 0.569; UB: 0.663)			
Quality Of Life (QOL)	0.520 (LB: 0.497; UB: 0.596)	0.787 (LB: 0.767; UB: 0.819)	0.618 (LB: 0.580; UB: 0.645)		
Behavioral Intentions (INT)	0.685 (LB: 0.615; UB: 0.726)	0.607 (LB: 0.576; UB: 0.613)	0.749 (LB: 0.704; UB: 0.792)	0.621 (LB: 0.605; UB: 0.656)	

Note: The values in the brackets represent the lower bound (LB) and the upper bounds (UB) of the 95% confidence interval

PLSpredict, asymptotically efficient criteria (i.e. Akaike Information Criteria – AIC), and asymptotically consistent criteria (i.e. Bayesian Information Criteria – BIC), as suggested by Chin et al. (2020) (see Table 6). The results showed that Model 2 was optimum in terms of prediction, producing the highest values for traditional PLS-based criteria among the four models. Additionally, Model 2 reported the highest Q^2 value with the lowest predicted root mean square error (RMSE) and mean absolute error (MAE) values. Finally, Model 2 had the lowest AIC and BIC values among the competing models. Taken together, the results unequivocally supported that Model 2 held the highest predictive power and was the most parsimonious. Considering alternative models can facilitate the development of stronger theory by extending or challenging the assumptions of existing theory in any field of study. When we used the model selection criteria assessment, it allows us to compare alternative models and select a best explained model that is parsimonious yet well-fitting model (Chin et al., 2020; Shmueli et al., 2019). To conclude, this is an exploration technique to search for best model explanation in quantitative research design.

After the modified model (Model 2) was confirmed, we then assessed its structural model, as detailed in Table 7. Nine path relationships were assessed, of which eight were supported and one was not. Image fit was found to be positively related to place attachment (H1: $\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$), event attachment (H2: $\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$), and behavioral intentions (H3: $\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$). As such, H1, H2, and H3 were supported. Place attachment was found to be positively related to QOL (H5: $\beta = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$), while event attachment was found to be positively related to both behavioral intentions (H6: $\beta = 0.393$, $p < 0.001$) and QOL (H7: $\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$). QOL was found to have a positive impact on behavioral intentions (H8: $\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.05$). The results thus provided support for H5, H6, H7, and H8. Next, the indirect effect results indicated that the relationship between place attachment and behavioral intentions was significant and fully mediated by QOL (H9: effect = 0.104, $p < 0.05$); hence, H9 was supported. Conversely, QOL did not mediate the relationship between event attachment and behavioral intentions, so H10 was not supported, as shown in Figure 3.

The R^2 values of residents' place attachment, event attachment, QOL, and behavioral intentions during the period in which the event was hosted were all found to exceed the 0.26 threshold suggested by (Cohen, 2013), indicating that the model was substantial. Next, the effect sizes (f^2) of the paths from image fit to place attachment, event attachment, and behavioral intentions were significant. Both the paths of place attachment to QOL and event attachment to behavioral intentions also showed significant effect sizes, indicating the relevance of these predictor variables to their respective endogenous variables.

Table 5. Assessment of the proposal model.

Direct Path	Hypothesis	β	t-value	R^2	Q^2	f^2	VIF	Decision
IF → PA	H1	0.573 ***	11.222	0.328	0.266	0.489	1.000	supported
IF → EA	H2	0.513 ***	8.178	0.264	0.213	0.358	1.000	supported
PA → QOL	H5	0.633 ***	9.974	0.604	0.552	0.683	1.481	supported
EA → QOL	H7	0.216 ***	3.427			0.079	1.481	supported
IF → INT	H3	0.326 ***	3.001	0.552	0.453	0.147	1.618	supported
PA → INT	H4	0.019	0.199			0.000	2.715	not supported
EA → INT	H6	0.019 ***	4.108			0.199	1.709	supported
QOL → INT	H8	0.153	1.545			0.021	2.530	not supported
Indirect Path		Effect						
PA → QOL → INT	H9	0.097	1.505					not supported
EA → QOL → INT	H10	0.003	1.262					not supported

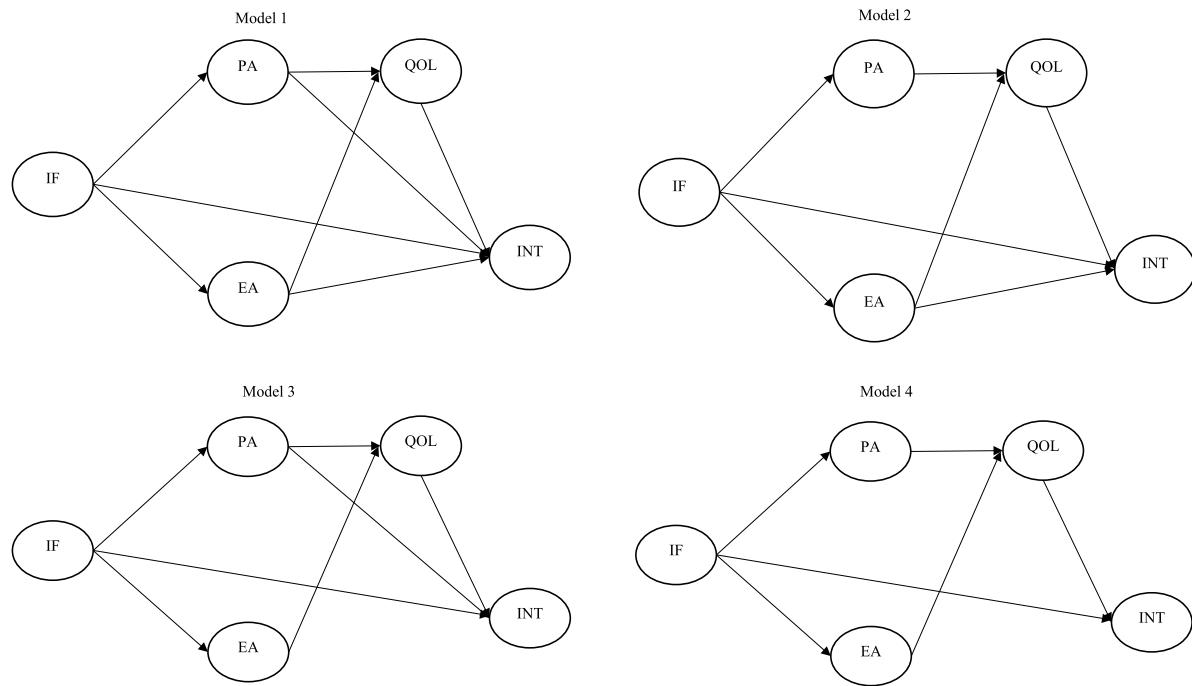


Figure 2. Competing model.

Note: (i) IF: Image Fit, PA: Place Attachment, EA: Event Attachment, QOL: Quality of Life, INT = Behavioral intentions.

The cross-validated redundancy measure Q^2 , which captures the inner model's predictive relevance, was derived from the blindfolding procedure with an omission distance of 12. Q^2 values were found to be 0.266 (place attachment), 0.213 (event attachment), 0.552 (QOL), and 0.458 (behavioral intentions). All values were above the necessary threshold of zero, meaning the model could be considered as satisfactorily predictive (Chin et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2023).

Therefore, the initially proposed model was first evaluated as the primary theoretical framework. Because the hypothesized mediation effects were not supported, a competing model approach was employed to explore alternative structures with greater explanatory power. Based on this comparison, Model 2 was selected, and the final structural relationships discussed in this study are reported in Table 7 and Figure 3.

Conclusion

Discussion

Building on the competing model analysis reported in the Results section, this discussion focuses on the refined structural relationships identified in the selected model (Model 2), which offers a more theoretically coherent explanation of residents' behavioral intentions toward recurring community sports events. The findings highlight perceived image fit as a foundational cognitive mechanism shaping residents' place

Table 6. Assessment of competing model.

No	Technique	Criteria	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
1	Traditional PLS Based	R^2	0.552	0.552	0.466	0.462
		Adjusted R^2	0.545	0.547	0.46	0.458
		Blindfolding Q^2	0.453	0.458	0.379	0.383
2	PLSpredict	RMSE	0.808	0.807	0.808	0.810
		MAE	0.568	0.566	0.570	0.569
		Q^2_{predict}	0.365	0.368	0.366	0.367
3	Asymptotically Efficient	AIC	−199.056	−200.985	−155.483	−155.776
4	Asymptotically Consistent	BIC	−181.272	−186.757	−141.255	−145.106

Note: Grey shading represents best values.

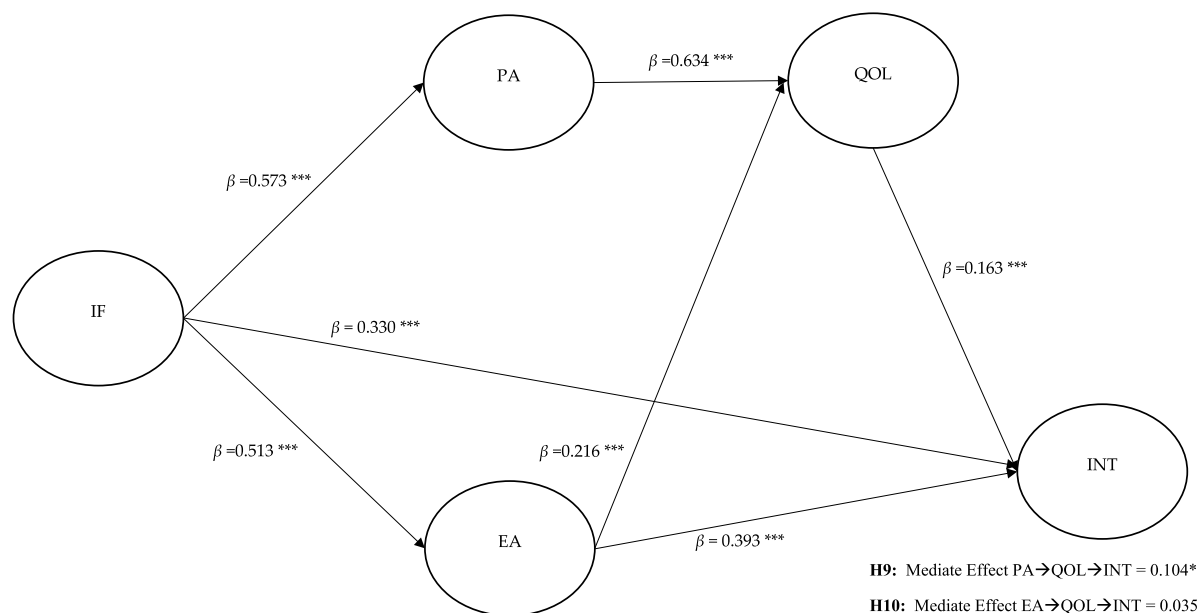
Table 7. Assessment structural model of the modified model.

Direct path	Hypothesis	β	t-value	R ²	f ²	Q ²	Path relationship
IF → PA	H1	0.573***	11.44	0.328	0.490	0.266	supported
IF → EA	H2	0.513***	8.385	0.264	0.358	0.213	supported
PA → QOL	H5	0.634***	10.432	0.604	0.685	0.552	supported
EA → QOL	H7	0.216***	3.565	0.393	0.079		supported
IF → INT	H3	0.330***	3.378	0.552	0.164	0.458	supported
EA → INT	H6	0.393***	3.565		0.207		supported
QOL → INT	H8	0.163***	2.069		0.037		supported
Indirect Path	Effect						
PA→QOL→INT	H9	0.104*	2.049				supported
EA→QOL→INT	H10	0.035	1.568				not supported

attachment and event attachment. Consistent with prior studies in sport and event contexts (Oshimi & Harada, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), and extending them to a rural community setting, the results support schema theory (Fiske, 1982) by demonstrating that residents rely on existing cognitive frameworks to evaluate recurring events. When event and place images are perceived as congruent, favorable schemas are activated, fostering emotional bonds with both the host community and the event.

The findings further suggest that image fit and event attachment play central roles in shaping residents' behavioral intentions. This aligns with previous research indicating that perceived congruence contributes to positive attitudes and supportive behaviors (Oshimi & Harada, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Recent studies similarly show that alignment between event and place images enhances residents' intentions across diverse contexts (Ait Challal et al., 2024; Lobo et al., 2023). From a psychological perspective, perceived congruence facilitates the internalization of the event as part of residents' social environment, strengthening long-term support.

In contrast, the absence of a direct effect of place attachment on behavioral intentions diverges from some earlier findings (Oshimi & Harada, 2019). This discrepancy may reflect the nature of small-scale recurring events, where residents' support is shaped less by symbolic place bonds and more by perceived everyday relevance and impacts. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the role of perceived social and community impacts in resident support (Gursoy et al., 2017; Ouyang et al., 2019), particularly in non-mega and small-town event contexts (Johnston et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

**Figure 3.** Structural modified model results.

Note: (i) * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$; (ii) IF: Image Fit, PA: Place Attachment, EA: Event Attachment, QOL: Quality of Life, INT = Behavioral intentions
 Note: (i) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; (ii) IF: Image Fit, EA: Event Attachment: PA: Place Attachment, QOL: Quality of Life, INT: Behavioural Intentions
 Note: (i) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; (ii) IF: Image Fit, EA: Event Attachment: PA: Place Attachment, QOL: Quality of Life, INT: Behavioral Intentions.

Supporting this view, place attachment was found to influence behavioral intentions indirectly through quality of life (QOL). This finding echoes Yuksel et al. (2010), who noted that the relationship between place attachment and intention is often mediated by other psychological mechanisms. Given that place attachment comprises multiple dimensions, such as place identity and place dependence (Yuksel et al., 2010), the results underscore the importance of examining these dimensions separately in future community-based event research.

The study also provides robust support for the role of event attachment in driving residents' behavioral intentions, consistent with prior sport and tourism research (Filo et al., 2010; Halpenny et al., 2016). Even for small-scale recurring events with limited external sponsorship, residents' emotional bonds with the event emerge as critical for sustainability, echoing findings from larger event contexts (Chi et al., 2018; Mohamad et al., 2024; Ouyang et al., 2017).

Finally, QOL positively influences behavioral intentions and mediates the relationship between place attachment and intention. This is consistent with earlier studies highlighting QOL as a key mechanism linking community perceptions to event support (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Ma & Kaplanidou, 2017; Ouyang et al., 2019). As a comprehensive indicator of community well-being (Joaquim Araújo de Azevedo et al., 2013), QOL provides a critical lens for understanding how recurring sports events contribute to both individual well-being and sustained community support (Hsu et al., 2020; Park et al., 2022).

Theoretical implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to destination and sports event research by clarifying the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying residents' support for recurring community-based sports events. First, the findings extend schema theory (Fiske, 1982) by demonstrating that perceived image fit functions as a central cognitive mechanism through which residents interpret and evaluate recurring sports events within their community. While schema theory has been widely applied in consumer behavior research, this study advances the framework by positioning image fit as an antecedent that activates residents' emotional attachment to both the event and the host place in a rural, resident-focused context.

Second, the study refines attachment-based perspectives by differentiating the roles of place attachment and event attachment in shaping residents' behavioral intentions. Contrary to prior assumptions that place attachment directly leads to event support (e.g. Oshimi & Harada, 2019), the findings reveal a more nuanced mechanism in small-scale recurring event settings. Place attachment does not directly translate into behavioral intentions but operates indirectly through quality of life. This challenges simplified attachment–intention models and highlights the importance of contextual scale and mediating processes in attachment research.

Third, by incorporating quality of life as a mediating construct, the study integrates well-being perspectives into resident-based sport event models. The findings indicate that residents' support is not driven solely by emotional bonds or cognitive congruence, but also by perceived improvements in everyday life and community well-being. This theoretical integration advances understanding by positioning quality of life as a key mechanism linking attachment-related constructs to behavioral outcomes, consistent with recent review evidence emphasizing its role in long-term sport event impacts (Xu & Sato, 2025).

Finally, the adoption of a competing model approach offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating that mediated and indirect relationships can reflect theoretically meaningful processes rather than statistical artifacts. By systematically comparing alternative structural configurations, the study provides a more comprehensive representation of residents' attitudinal formation and encourages future research to move beyond linear modeling assumptions. Collectively, these contributions refine theories of image fit, attachment, and resident support, advancing a more nuanced understanding of sustained engagement in community-based sports events.

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide several actionable implications for event organizers, destination managers, and local policymakers involved in the planning and management of recurring community sports events,

particularly in rural contexts. First, the central role of perceived image fit highlights the importance of aligning event image with local community identity. Event organizers should actively assess residents' perceptions of place image through community consultations or surveys during the planning process. The results indicate that when residents perceive strong congruence between event and place images, they are more likely to develop attachment and supportive intentions. Accordingly, event themes, branding, and communication strategies should reflect local culture, values, and narratives rather than relying on standardized or externally imposed images.

Second, the strong influence of event attachment on behavioral intentions suggests that fostering residents' emotional bonds with the event is critical. Organizers should implement strategies that encourage repeated and meaningful resident involvement, such as volunteering programs, co-creation activities, and opportunities for ongoing engagement across event cycles. This is particularly important for small-scale recurring events that depend heavily on local support due to limited access to external sponsorship or funding.

Third, the mediating role of quality of life underscores the need to position community sports events as mechanisms for enhancing everyday well-being, not merely as tourism or economic initiatives. Policymakers should integrate event planning with broader community development efforts, such as improving public spaces, accessibility, and recreational infrastructure linked to the event. Demonstrating tangible and intangible contributions to residents' quality of life, such as social interaction, community pride, and improved living environments, can strengthen long-term resident support.

Finally, the findings suggest that resident support emerges from interconnected cognitive, emotional, and well-being processes. Practitioners are therefore encouraged to adopt a holistic management approach that simultaneously addresses image alignment, emotional engagement, and community benefits. Beyond attendance or economic indicators, incorporating resident-centered metrics, such as perceived image fit, attachment, and quality of life, can provide more meaningful guidance for sustainable event management and policy decision-making (Higham, 2021).

Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged, which also suggest directions for future research. First, the model focused on key attitudinal and well-being variables. Future studies may extend this framework by incorporating additional factors such as perceived event impacts, levels of resident involvement, or governance-related variables, which could provide deeper insight into how residents evaluate and support recurring community sports events. Second, the use of purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, particularly to residents with limited awareness of the event. Probability-based sampling techniques should be employed when comprehensive sampling frames are available. Third, place attachment was examined as a single dimension; future research should explore its multidimensional structure, including place identity and place dependence. Fourth, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and longitudinal studies are recommended to clarify the temporal relationships among image fit, attachment, quality of life, and behavioral intentions. Finally, the higher proportion of female respondents and varying levels of event involvement may have influenced the findings. Future research could collaborate with event organizers to obtain more balanced sampling frames and further examine how different resident roles shape perceptions and support (Chen et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This study examined how perceived image fit influences residents' attachment, quality of life, and behavioral intentions toward a recurring community sports event in a rural context. The findings highlight image fit as a key cognitive mechanism that activates residents' emotional attachment to both the event and the host community, thereby shaping supportive behavioral intentions. The results further demonstrate that event attachment plays a direct role in fostering resident support, while the influence of place attachment operates indirectly through quality of life. By integrating schema theory with attachment and well-being perspectives, this study advances understanding of resident-based support mechanisms for recurring sports events. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of aligning event image with community identity and

enhancing residents' quality of life to promote sustainable event development and long-term community engagement.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical approval

Based on the Human Subjects Research Act of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan, ethics approval was not required for this study. However, we also made sure that all the participants' rights were taken care of under the principles of research ethics with human participants.

Data availability statement

Data are available upon request from the first author.

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