

Does Communication Alone Fail in Crisis? The Relationship-Mediating Model in Securing Residents' Supportive Attitudes towards Hosting the Olympic Games

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Abstract

While research on event management often draws on social exchange and media theories in understanding residents' supportive attitudes, the role of government-public relationships (GPR) and strategic communication remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, this study examines how bridging communication strategies affect residents' supportive attitudes through GPR dimensions in the pandemic-postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics context. Using data from 500 Tokyo residents and PLS-SEM, two serial mediation models - affect-led (satisfaction → trust) and cognition-led (trust → satisfaction) - were tested. Findings reveal that bridging communication does not directly influence residents' supportive attitudes; rather, it operates entirely through sequential mediation of satisfaction and trust. Both affect-led and cognition-led pathways demonstrated similar effectiveness, suggesting that emotional and cognitive relationship components function as equally important mechanisms. These findings demonstrate that effective communication alone is insufficient; governments must foster genuine relationships grounded in both satisfaction and trust to secure support for mega sport events under challenging circumstances.

Keywords: government-public relationships, relationship management, communication strategies, the Olympic Games, event management

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Residents' supportive attitudes towards mega sport events are democratic tools to earn momentum of political legitimacy and a source of active participation in event management (Prayag et al., 2013). This support manifests through volunteering and cooperation, which are essential for successful event delivery (Pappas, 2014). Their support and enthusiasm are essential for a smooth policy agenda setting to policy implementation. Conversely, a deficiency of coordination and cohesion within the host community could “turn the planning process into a highly charged political and social exercise” (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006, p. 605). In fact, we have witnessed many cities withdrawing their bids from hosting mega sport events, particularly in nations with democratic leadership. This phenomenon has transformed event hosting into an increasingly charged political and social exercise (Evans, 2018).

These challenges become even more pronounced when unexpected crises disrupt event planning. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics exemplifies this situation, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced the first postponement in modern Olympic history. This crisis posed significant challenges for the Japanese government on multiple dimensions (e.g., financial uncertainty from extended preparation costs, public health concerns; Llevbare & McPherson, 2022). The situation demanded effective crisis communication to maintain residents' support while managing competing stakeholder interests under conditions of uncertainty.

Among the various reasons for these withdrawals, this research specifically focuses on government communication and relationship management approach. This gap is particularly significant because the decision to host mega sport events has traditionally represented a top down and unilateral decision-making process driven by governments (Gursoy, Yolal et al., 2017; Hiller & Wanner, 2018). The advent of information technology

has empowered the public to disseminate news and share their opinions in real time, significantly amplifying their influence in the decision-making process (Lock, 2019). Consequently, this change suggests a need for an enhanced public relations strategy (i.e., the management of government-public relationships [GPR]) that actively involves and considers the evolving role and power of the public (Wang et al., 2022). In this light, the present study aims to address two main research gaps: the practical gap and the theoretical gap.

Regarding theoretical gaps, the extant literature in sport and event management has actively utilised theories such as social exchange theory (e.g., Gursoy, Yolal et al., 2017; Gursoy, Milito et al., 2017; Kim & Manoli, 2022; Prayag et al., 2013; Pappas, 2014) and social representations theory (e.g., Zhou & Ap, 2009) to examine the formation of residents' attitudes and support towards events. However, the predictive power and theoretical development (i.e., their expandability) of these frameworks are still questioned by literature (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Woosnam & Norman, 2010).

Social exchange theory (SET) emphasises cost-benefit evaluations but does not adequately capture how trust and satisfaction develop through ongoing communication processes (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). Similarly, social representations theory focuses on collective meaning-making but overlooks the interactive relationship-building between government and public that shapes attitudinal outcomes (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). Moreover, the role of government communication strategies (i.e., bridging communication practice) in fostering residents' supportive attitudes toward a mega sport event during a crisis (i.e., pandemic-postponed Olympics) remains underexplored (Wang et al., 2022). This gap limits our understanding of how government messaging shapes residents' trust and support during mega-event crises, leaving practitioners without evidence-based guidance for effective crisis communication. Furthermore, while trust and satisfaction are recognised as key relational outcomes, existing research has not examined whether these dimensions operate

sequentially or which pathway more effectively translates communication efforts into supportive attitudes during crises (Ki & Hon, 2007; Kim & Krishna, 2017a).

Regarding practical gaps, both the "Future Host Questionnaire for the Olympic Games (IOC, 2021)" and the "Contractual Framework for Hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games (IOC, 2020)" highlight the critical role of government bodies and the strategic importance of public relations. These documents explicitly state the necessity of government involvement, public communication, and stakeholder collaboration throughout event phases. However, without understanding the specific mechanisms through which communication influences these relational outcomes, event organisers cannot strategically design strategies that effectively cultivate residents' support. Research exploring how government communication and relationship-building strategies affect residents' support during mega sport event crises remains limited.

To address these gaps, this research explores the sequential pathways through which GPR dimensions mediate communication perception by comparing two alternative models: the affect-led model (satisfaction → trust) and the cognition-led model (trust → satisfaction). Understanding which sequential pathway operates more effectively is particularly important in crisis contexts, where governments must decide whether to prioritise emotional reassurance to build satisfaction first, or factual information to establish trust first. Research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ1: To what extent do government-public relationships mediate the effect of bridging communication strategies on residents' supportive attitudes?

RQ2: Which sequential mediation pathway, affect-led or cognition-led model, more effectively explains the relationship between bridging communication and supportive attitudes?

By answering the questions, this study extends GPR concept to the context of mega sport events, examining how bridging communication strategies influence resident attitude through satisfaction and trust dimensions during crisis conditions. Empirical evidence comparing these sequential pathways is needed because theoretical arguments support both directions, yet no study has tested which pathway better explains attitude formation in mega sport event crises.

Literature Review

The current chapter builds the theoretical foundation. This chapter reviews the key concepts that underpin the research model drawing from existing literature and justify the context and significance of the study.

Government-Public Relationships: Conceptual Framework

The concept of GPR originates from organisation-public relationships (OPR) in public relations scholarship. Since the early 2000s, public relations research has shifted from information dissemination towards relationship management, emphasising the cultivation of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their strategic stakeholders (Ki & Hon, 2012; Shen, 2017). GPR applies these relational principles to the government context, recognising that governments must build and maintain quality relationships with citizens to achieve policy objectives and secure cooperation (Hong, 2013; Wang et al., 2022).

GPR offers distinct advantages over alternative theoretical frameworks commonly used in mega sport event research. SET conceptualises resident attitudes as outcomes of cost-benefit calculations, where support depends on perceived personal gains from event hosting (Gursoy, Yölal et al., 2017; Prayag et al., 2013). While useful for understanding transactional evaluations, SET does not explain how ongoing communication processes build the relational foundations of trust and satisfaction that sustain residents' support beyond immediate

exchange outcomes (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). Social representations theory (SRT) examines how communities collectively construct meanings about events (Zhou & Ap, 2009), but it focuses on shared cognitions rather than the interactive relationship-building between government and residents that shapes individual attitudinal responses (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). In contrast, GPR directly addresses how government communication strategies cultivate relational quality dimensions.

This framework is particularly applicable to crisis communication research because it identifies specific relational mechanisms (i.e., trust and satisfaction) that governments can strategically target through communication interventions. Unlike SET's passive exchange logic or SRT's collective meaning-making, GPR provides actionable insights into how governments can actively shape residents' support through deliberate communication strategies during mega sport event crises. Among the various dimensions of relationship quality, this study focuses on trust and satisfaction as key GPR components. Research on GPR in mega sport event contexts has consistently utilised these two dimensions as primary indicators of relationship quality (Kim & Manoli, 2022; Men et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022).

Trust in Government

Scholars have identified trust as a critical dimension of OPR and GPR from various literatures such as interpersonal relationship, relationship marketing, social psychology and management literature (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Moon & Rhee, 2013; Shen, 2017). Trust is considered critical because it serves as the foundation for cooperation and risk acceptance in relationships characterised by uncertainty and vulnerability (Kim et al., 2025; Nunkoo, 2018). In government contexts specifically, trust enables citizens to accept policy decisions even when they cannot fully verify outcomes, reducing the need for costly monitoring and enforcement mechanisms (Schmelz, 2021). The result is equally important in the public's policy compliance in a crisis (e.g., Bargain & Aminjonov, 2020). Additionally, trust

influences key outcomes such as conflict resolution (Huang, 2001b), reputation (Yang, 2007), and loyalty (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016).

From the perspective of public relations, trust is defined as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested that trust incorporates three dimensions: integrity (the belief that an organisation is fair and just), dependability (the belief that an organisation will do what it says it will do) and competence (the belief that an organisation can do what it says it will do). Yet, the ‘willingness’ in this definition was criticised by several researchers as a term that can be comprehended as implying behavioural intentions components (Shen, 2017). In this light, Shen (2017) eliminated the ‘willingness’ attribute and expounded trust as “one party’s or partner’s level of mutual confidence in the other relational parties or partners” (p. 997). This study adopts Shen’s (2017) refined definition in the context of mega sport events by conceptualising trust as residents’ level of confidence that the local government will do the right thing and recognise citizens as an important stakeholder group.

Residents’ trust in government in a host city of a mega sport event becomes even more important in the decision-making process. This importance stems from the fact that for the government, which is responsible for allocating and executing budgets, establishing trust is crucial because the residents, as taxpayers, often scrutinises the expenditure of public funds on mega sport events (Nunkoo et al., 2018; Ouyang et al., 2017). Moreover, trust is deeply associated with residents’ positive and negative perceptions toward hosting such events (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). If citizens trust their government, they expect it to minimise negative impacts while maximising positive outcomes. Furthermore, the level of residents’ governmental trust can play a significant role in legitimising policy-making decisions (Gursoy, Milito et al., 2017).

Relational Satisfaction

Relational satisfaction is defined as “the extent to which each party feels favourably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced [...] a satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20). Shen (2017) operationalised satisfaction as the subjective positive feelings when relational parties' expectations are met. It hinges upon whether mutual expectations are met and is regarded as a key indicator of an organisation's relational quality with its stakeholders (Ki & Hon, 2007).

Unlike any other dimensions in the quality of relationships, which might involve cognitive dimensions, satisfaction encompasses affection components (Huang, 2001a). In the context of GPR, satisfaction is operationally explained as the condition where the government meets or exceeds the public's expectations regarding communication and responsibilities (Men et al., 2018). Relational satisfaction is particularly important during crises in managing mega sport events, as these high-pressure situations can challenge a government's (including the organisational committees) ability to meet stakeholders' immediate needs and expectations through its communication and actions.

Bridging Communication Strategies

The concept of bridging communication originates from excellence theory in public relations, emphasising two-way symmetrical communication that fosters mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their key stakeholders (Kim & Krishna, 2018). Excellence theory has developed into a strategic management approach, stressing relationship building rather than simply influencing perceptions. Bridging communication strategies prioritise collaboration, interaction, and proactive relationship management, aiming to close gaps between organisational actions and stakeholder expectations (Kim & Krishna, 2017a).

Bridging strategies are particularly crucial for mega sport events because these events demand extensive residents' cooperation and generate significant scrutiny over extended

periods. Recent research demonstrates that ineffective government communication can substantially impact residents' perceptions, with communication errors and insufficient response mechanisms being significant sources of frustration (Mathews et al., 2025). The importance of bridging communication (e.g., relationship cultivation communications) becomes even more important in crisis contexts such as the pandemic, which forced the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics (Kim et al., 2025). Crisis situations intensify uncertainty while simultaneously challenging the government's capacity to maintain transparent communication under rapidly changing circumstances (Liu et al., 2022).

Hypotheses Development

By investigating the theoretical frameworks and results of previous studies, this chapter develops hypotheses examining the relationships among bridging communication, trust, satisfaction, and residents' attitudes towards hosting mega sport events.

Direct Effects of Bridging Communication

Previous studies suggest governments' communication strategies contribute significantly to both GPR and favourable attitudes towards policies and decisions. Bridging communication strategies involve two-way dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness to public concerns (Kim & Krishna, 2018). When governments employ these approaches, residents perceive that their input is valued, which in turn fosters positive attitudes towards government decisions. Evidence from crisis contexts further supports this direct relationship. Hirschfeld and Thielsch (2022) found that government crisis communication strategies directly shaped citizens' attitudes towards behavioural guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that how governments communicate during uncertain times significantly influences public responses. Similarly, Wang et al. (2022) showed that bridging communication positively influenced residents' attitudes towards a mega sport event by signalling government responsiveness and commitment to addressing public concerns. In

addition, research shows that bridging communication strategies positively influence satisfaction and trust. Regarding the relationship between bridging communication and relational satisfaction, Kim and Krishna (2018) demonstrated that citizens who perceived their government as employing bridging strategies reported higher satisfaction with government performance. This occurs because bridging communication signals that the government values citizen input and is willing to adapt its approach based on public feedback. The link between communication and trust follows a similar logic. Abdelzadeh and Sedelius (2024) conducted a panel study during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that satisfaction with government crisis communication significantly predicted increased trust in government over time. Research in mega sport event contexts further reinforces these relationships. Kim and Manoli (2022) examined how relationship quality shaped residents' attitudes towards the Olympic Games. Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1:** Residents' perception of bridging communication strategy is positively associated with residents' overall attitude towards a mega sport event
- H2:** Residents' perception of bridging communication strategy is positively associated with relational satisfaction
- H3:** Residents' perception of bridging communication strategy is positively associated with trust in government

GPR-mediating model: affect (relational satisfaction) and cognition (trust in government) lead models

Extensive empirical evidence establishes the foundational role of GPR in shaping resident attitudes towards policy initiatives and public relations. Trust represents the cognitive dimension involving rational assessments of government competence, reliability, and integrity, while satisfaction represents the affective dimension reflecting emotional

responses to relationship experiences (Kim & Manoli, 2022). In other words, these two dimensions operate through distinct psychological pathways: trust develops through information processing and judgement, while satisfaction emerges from emotional reactions to relationship quality. Trust, as a cognitive component, demonstrates consistent predictive power across diverse contexts (e.g., Kang & Ki, 2025; Ki & Hon, 2012; Ouyang et al., 2017). Men et al. (2018) confirmed that perceived leadership communication effectiveness directly contributed to public trust toward the government, demonstrating how effective communications enhance relationship quality. Wang et al. (2022) showed that relational trust mediated the relationship between perceived government responsiveness and positive word-of-mouth intention to vaccinate, indicating that the relationship dimension led to favourable outcomes. Additionally, Chon (2019) demonstrated that trust motivates citizens to actively advocate for governmental initiatives, indicating its capacity to generate favourable predispositions. In the mega sport events context, Kim et al. (2025) and Kim and Manoli (2022) found that residents' trust in the government's capabilities is a key driver of residents' support towards hosting mega sport events.

The affective dimension, represented by relational satisfaction, exhibits equally robust predictive validity. Ki and Hon (2012) established pathways from relationship quality perceptions to attitudes, with satisfaction serving as a primary determinant. Hong and Yang (2009) found satisfaction positively predicts word-of-mouth intentions and Liu and Huang (2023) confirmed that relationship quality including satisfaction predicts supportive attitudes on health policy (i.e., COVID-19 vaccination attitude), corroborated by Wang et al. (2022) in health policy contexts. Kang and Ki (2025) established that satisfaction was the only relationship quality factor influencing attitude formation, showing that students with satisfactory experiences developed more favourable attitudes and engaged in supportive behaviours. While existing research has examined the effects of trust and satisfaction on

attitudes in either mega sport event contexts or crisis contexts separately, no study has yet investigated these relationships in the combined context of a mega sport event affected by crisis. Based on the previous empirical results, the following hypotheses are established:

H4: Relational satisfaction is positively associated with residents' overall attitude towards a mega sport event

H5: Trust in government is positively associated with residents' overall attitude towards a mega sport event

The mediating role of GPR between perceptions of government communication strategies and attitude is well-established in existing research. Wang et al. (2022) demonstrated that relational satisfaction and trust mediate the effects of perceived responsiveness on positive word-of-mouth intentions for vaccinations. These GPR findings align with broader relationship management research, where trust and satisfaction mediate the link between communication and attitudinal outcomes (e.g., Kang & Yang, 2010; Kim & Krishna, 2017a). Since GPR extends OPR principles to governmental contexts (Hong, 2013), these collective findings justify investigating the mediating roles of satisfaction and trust in the relationship between perceived communication strategies and attitudes towards hosting mega sport events.

Existing research primarily examines these mediators in isolation or through simple mediation models. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how these two distinct, yet interconnected GPR dimensions work together sequentially to influence attitude formation. The current study addresses this limitation by examining the mediating role of both GPR dimensions through a serial mediation model. Testing serial mediation rather than examining each mediator separately is important because it captures the cumulative process through which communication shapes attitudes (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Rather than

assuming a single mediator or simple parallel pathways, the serial approach investigates whether a two-stage progression exists through either an affect-led or cognition-led sequence.

This approach is particularly crucial in government-public contexts because policy acceptance often depends on both emotional approval of government actions (i.e., satisfaction) and cognitive assessments of government competence (i.e., trust). Wang et al. (2022) found that satisfaction precedes trust in their emotion-dominant model, suggesting that affective responses occur before cognitive evaluations in GPR contexts. Moreover, Kim and Krishna (2017a) noted that both dimensions work together to create favourable relational environments. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6a: Trust in government is positively associated with relational satisfaction

H6b: Relational satisfaction is positively associated with trust in government

H7: Satisfaction and trust will mediate the path from bridging communication strategy to residents' attitude towards the mega sport event

There are two competing perspectives on the directionality between affect and cognition. Lu and Huang (2018) emphasised the need for research to explore how individuals process crisis information through affect-lead (i.e., satisfaction → trust) and cognition-lead (i.e., trust → satisfaction) approaches. Determining which sequence better explains attitude formation has practical implications for crisis communication strategy. If the affect-led pathway is stronger, governments should prioritise building emotional connections with residents before addressing cognitive concerns. Conversely, if the cognition-led pathway dominates, communication efforts should first establish competence and credibility to build trust.

The competing perspectives on directionality between affect-lead and cognition-lead approaches are grounded in distinct theoretical traditions. The path from trust to satisfaction can be understood through the framework of cognitive appraisal theory, which suggests that

emotions arise from an individual's cognitive evaluation of their environment (Lazarus, 2001). According to this theory, cognition precedes emotions because emotions develop through cognitive appraisal of situations (Lazarus, 2001). When applied to the current context, cognitive appraisal theory would suggest that residents first cognitively evaluate their local government based on prior experiences and performance assessments. This cognitive appraisal process would then lead to trust as a cognitive outcome, which subsequently influences emotional satisfaction when the government meets their expectations.

In contrast, there is a view that affective reactions can occur independently of and prior to cognitive evaluations. Applied to GPR, this theory suggests that residents first experience emotional satisfaction with government communication, which then informs their cognitive assessments of government trustworthiness. Existing empirical research within GPR contexts presents a different sequence. Specifically, satisfaction has been recognised as a foundational element that leads to other GPR dimensions such as trust in government (Lam & Wong, 2020). Furthermore, research exploring relationships within GPR dimensions found that satisfaction acts as a crucial predictor of trust and commitment, initiating the activation of other GPR dimensions (e.g., Bortree, 2010; Kim & Manoli, 2022). Consequently, this body of empirical evidence suggests an affect-dominant sequence where emotional satisfaction precedes cognitive trust, directly contradicting the predictions of cognitive appraisal theory. Given these competing theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, the following research question is proposed:

RQ 3: What is the directionality between satisfaction and trust in government-public relationships (affect-lead and cognition-lead models)?

###Insert Figure 1 here###

Methods

This section presents the research design, covering how the data were collected, what was measured, and the methods used for analysis.

Participants and Data Collection

This research focused on individuals residing in Tokyo Metropolis in Japan, the host location for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Specifically, participants were recruited from the 23 special wards of Tokyo, where the Olympic Park and main competition venues were located. The study employed online panel sampling through Rakuten Insight, an international research company that maintains a consumer panel for survey research. Data collection occurred from 23rd to 29th October 2020, following the Olympic postponement announcement, yielding 500 completed and usable questionnaires via the Qualtrics platform. The Games were held in July 2021 with the one year of postponement.

All survey items underwent back-translation procedures to guarantee accurate language translation (Brislin, 1970). The survey included screening items to verify participant eligibility (e.g., "I currently live in 23 special wards of Tokyo") and attention checks to identify inattentive respondents. For example, participants received instructions such as "Please click [7] in the multiple choice", and those who failed to comply were excluded from the study. The research received ethical approval from the researcher's university, and all procedures followed the University's ethics panel guidelines.

Measurement Items

The questionnaire comprised three sections: research objectives and completion guidelines; items measuring four latent variables and one control variable; and five demographic items. A 7-point Likert scale was utilised ("strongly disagree" [1] – "strongly agree" [7]). All scales were adapted from validated measures. To measure the bridging

communication strategies, this study adopted seven items from Kim and Krishna's (2018) study. The GPR scale comprised 11 items across two dimensions (satisfaction and trust; Hon & Grunig, 1999), examining residents' views of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. This focus on local government was appropriate because, although the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) address national concerns, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's operational decisions directly affect Tokyo residents' everyday experiences. Local authorities typically bear primary responsibility for organising and overseeing the mega event, making the local government-resident relationship central to this investigation. The dependent variable, supportive attitude towards the Games, was measured using two items adapted from Prayag et al. (2013).

This study included two demographic variables (e.g., gender, age) as control variables to account for potential confounding effects on the relationships being examined. Furthermore, interest in politics was also included as a control variable because political engagement may influence how residents perceive government communication strategies and their attitudes towards government initiatives.

Data Analysis

The current study used partial least squares equation modelling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. This approach was selected for several reasons. Firstly, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for testing complex models with multiple constructs and mediation relationships without requiring strict normality assumptions about data distribution (Hair et al., 2021). Secondly, PLS-SEM is appropriate for both theory testing and development (Hair et al., 2021). This capability was essential given our serial mediation models examining alternative pathways between communication strategies and public support. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.1 software with 5000 bootstrap resamples to assess the significance of path coefficients.

Results

This chapter presents the analysis in three main parts. The section begins with the preliminary data screening and the check for common method bias, followed by the assessment of the measurement and structural models.

Preliminary Analysis

Skewness and kurtosis values for univariate normality should fall within ± 1.00 (Hair et al., 2021). The univariate normality test revealed that skewness statistics ranged from -0.47 to 0.02, while kurtosis statistics ranged from -0.59 to 0.74. Therefore, all values met the criteria for univariate normality (see Table 1). Additionally, the Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated significant departures from normality for all variables ($p < .001$). For multivariate normality, Mahalanobis distance was calculated to identify potential outliers. This analysis revealed 28 cases with Mahalanobis distance values ranging from 21.45 to 36.43, which exceeded the critical value. Consequently, these cases were removed from subsequent analyses, resulting in a final sample of 472 participants.

The study collected data from 500 participants distributed across six age groups: 18 to 24 years ($n = 42$, 8.4%), 25 to 34 years ($n = 63$, 12.6%), 35 to 44 years ($n = 79$, 15.8%), 45 to 54 years ($n = 93$, 18.6%), 55 to 64 years ($n = 80$, 16%), and 65 years or above ($n = 143$, 28.6%). The gender distribution was relatively balanced with male participants ($n = 239$, 47.8%) and female participants ($n = 261$, 52.2%). Regarding educational background, the majority of participants held undergraduate degrees ($n = 270$, 54%), followed by high school qualifications ($n = 175$, 35%) and postgraduate degrees ($n = 55$, 11%).

###Insert Table 1 here###

Comment Method Bias

A potential concern for common method bias arose as data were collected from the same respondents in a single survey administration (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess this possibility, we employed the variance inflation factor (VIF) test following established procedures (Kock, 2017; Kock & Lynn, 2012). The analysis revealed that all VIF values ranged from 1.38 to 3.03; specifically, the highest VIF value was 3.03 for Trust2. These values fall well below the threshold of 3.3 recommended (Kock, 2017); therefore, common method bias was not a significant concern in this study.

Assessment of Measurement Model: Psychometric Properties

This assessment involves examining construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). For construct reliability, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceeded the 0.70 threshold (Gefen et al., 2000). Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.71 to 0.88; furthermore, composite reliability values ranged from 0.73 to 0.88 for rho_a and 0.83 to 0.91 for rho_c. Convergent validity was assessed through factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The recommended threshold for factor loadings is 0.707, while the AVE should exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). Four items with loadings below 0.707 were removed; these included Bridg3 (0.54), Bridg6 (0.52), Bridg7 (0.47), and Trust5 (0.64). Following removal, all remaining items exceeded the threshold; additionally, AVE values ranged from 0.55 to 0.77, surpassing the 0.50 requirement (Hair et al., 2021; see Table 2). Additionally, discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). The HTMT values should remain below 0.85 to establish discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The analysis revealed that all HTMT values ranged from 0.39 to 0.81; therefore, all values fell below the recommended threshold. This finding confirms that the constructs demonstrated adequate discriminant validity (see Table 3).

###Insert Table 2 here###

###Insert Table 3 here###

Hypotheses Testing of Structural Model

Through a two-tailed bootstrap procedure with 5000 resamples, the structural models were assessed by examining the path coefficients, t -values, coefficient of determination (R^2), cross-validated redundancy (Q^2), and effect sizes (f^2). Table 4 presents the quality indicators for both the affect-led and cognition-led models. For the affect-led model, the structural model explained 45% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.45$), 55% in trust ($R^2 = 0.55$), and 15% in positive attitude towards the Games ($R^2 = 0.15$). Furthermore, the Q^2 values confirm the model's predictive relevance for satisfaction ($Q^2 = 0.44$), trust ($Q^2 = 0.39$), and overall attitude ($Q^2 = 0.09$), as all values exceed zero (Hair et al., 2021). Regarding effect sizes, this study evaluated the effect sizes using the standard thresholds of 0.02 for small, 0.15 for medium, and 0.35 for large effects (Cohen, 1988). In the affect-led model, bridging strategy had a large effect on satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.82$) and a small effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.09$); additionally, satisfaction showed a medium to large effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.34$). Similarly, the cognition-led model accounted for 39% of the variance in trust ($R^2 = 0.39$), 55% in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.55$), and 16% in overall attitude ($R^2 = 0.16$). The Q^2 values indicated predictive relevance for all constructs, with satisfaction ($Q^2 = 0.40$), trust ($Q^2 = 0.38$), and overall attitude ($Q^2 = 0.09$) all exceeding the threshold value. In terms of effect sizes, bridging strategy had a large effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.65$) and a medium effect on satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.16$); moreover, trust exhibited a medium to large effect on satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.32$).

Table 5 displays the hypothesis testing results for both models. In the affect-led model, five out of seven hypotheses were supported. The paths from bridging strategy to satisfaction ($\beta = 0.67, p < 0.001$) and to trust ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$) were significant; likewise,

the path from satisfaction to trust ($\beta = 0.53, p < 0.001$) was significantly supported. However, the direct paths from bridging strategy to overall attitude ($\beta = 0.08, p = 0.28$) and from satisfaction to overall attitude ($\beta = 0.11, p = 0.26$) were not significant. The serial mediation analysis revealed that bridging strategy influenced overall attitude through the sequential mediation of satisfaction and trust ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.01$).

For the cognition-led model, all hypothesised relationships were supported except for the direct path from bridging strategy to overall attitude. Specifically, bridging strategy significantly influenced satisfaction ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$) and trust ($\beta = 0.63, p < 0.001$); furthermore, trust positively affected satisfaction ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.001$). Both satisfaction ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.05$) and trust ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$) demonstrated significant relationships with overall attitude. The serial mediation effect of bridging strategy on overall attitude through trust and then satisfaction was also significant ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05$).

####Insert Table 4 here####

####Insert Table 5 here####

Discussion

For the first research question, trust and satisfaction fully mediate the relationship between bridging communication and residents' attitudes. The insignificant direct path from bridging communication strategies to the supportive attitudes (H1) combined with significant indirect paths indicates full mediation. This finding extends previous research that documented partial mediation patterns. Kim and Krishna (2018) found both direct and indirect paths from bridging strategies to public engagement through intermediary sentiments. Wang et al. (2022) similarly reported both direct effects of responsiveness on behavioural intentions and indirect effects through satisfaction and trust during COVID-19.

However, the current study reveals a stronger pattern where bridging communication influences attitudes entirely through relationship quality, with no direct pathway. This complete relational dependency suggests that hosting mega sport events during crises requires deeper relationship cultivation than typical crisis contexts. The compound crisis context of simultaneous health emergency and controversial event hosting may have amplified residents' need for established relationship quality before forming supportive attitudes, explaining why communication signals alone proved insufficient.

For the second research question, the results suggest both models provide important and complementary insights. The cognition-led model supported more hypotheses (6 of 7), while the affect-led model demonstrated a marginally stronger serial mediation effect ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.01$) compared to the cognition-led model ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05$). Similarly, the path from satisfaction to trust ($\beta = 0.53, f^2 = 0.34$) only slightly exceeded the reverse direction ($\beta = 0.49, f^2 = 0.32$). These marginal differences, consistent with Wang et al.'s (2022) findings during COVID-19, indicate both pathways operate simultaneously during crises. Therefore, government communication during crises should cultivate both affective satisfaction and cognitive trust as these relational dimensions reinforce each other reciprocally rather than following a single dominant sequence. However, these findings emerged from the unique context of the pandemic-postponed Olympics, and generalisability to routine mega sport event hosting or different crisis contexts should be considered with appropriate caution.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes three critical theoretical contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, it integrates the communication strategy with the relationship management strategy with the public (i.e., GPR), creating a comprehensive framework that extends beyond traditional communication approaches. While previous studies have relied heavily on SET (e.g., Prayag et al., 2013) and social representations theory (e.g., Zhou & Ap, 2009), these

frameworks face limitations in predictive power and theoretical expandability in understanding host communities' attitude (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). This study partly addresses these limitations by combining strategic communication with relationship management with the public, particularly within a crisis context where government communication faces heightened scrutiny. This provides a more robust theoretical foundation for understanding government-resident dynamics during mega sport events.

Secondly, the pandemic-postponed Olympics context provides unique insights into how GPR operates under crisis conditions. The findings confirm the crucial mediating role of GPR dimensions in translating communication strategies into supportive attitudes. Unlike media-focused studies that often overlook residents as empowered decision-makers (e.g., Chien et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2019), this research demonstrates that satisfaction and trust (i.e., GPR) serve as essential mechanisms through which bridging communication influences overall positive attitude. The comparison between affect-lead and cognition-lead mediating models supports this, demonstrating similar effectiveness, which is a new finding from previous studies (e.g., Wang et al., 2022). This result suggests that both satisfaction and trust are important components of GPR, regardless of whether emotional or cognitive processes take precedence as their differences are marginal. Therefore, the serial mediation analysis reveals that communication alone cannot generate positive attitudes; instead, it must operate through relationship quality.

Thirdly, this research successfully extends the communication strategy and relationship management theories to the mega sport event context, an area that has received limited theoretical attention (Ma et al., 2023). By examining these relationships during the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis and Olympic postponement, this study provides a theoretical framework for understanding government-public interactions under challenging circumstances. This contribution is particularly significant given the digital communication

era; furthermore, it provides a theoretical framework for examining government-public interactions in other event contexts where traditional approaches have proven insufficient. By demonstrating the applicability of bridging communication and GPR in this unique context, the study opens a new area for theoretical development in sport event management literature.

Practical Implications

This study offers specific guidance for implementing Olympic Agenda 2020+ recommendations on stakeholder engagement and public communication. First, governments should operationalise bridging communication through concrete mechanisms such as public consultation forums, resident advisory committees, and responsive feedback channels. These build satisfaction by addressing community concerns while enhancing trust through transparent decision-making. Second, the serial mediation findings reveal that strategic communications' effectiveness depends on cultivating both satisfaction and trust sequentially with both pathways proving effective. Affect-led strategies prioritise building satisfaction first through responsive actions such as quickly addressing noise complaints from construction sites or providing compensation for traffic disruptions. These emotional responses then generate trust in governmental competence. Cognition-led strategies instead establish trust first by demonstrating technical expertise through publishing detailed environmental impact assessments or showcasing successful venue construction milestones. This cognitive confidence then cultivates satisfaction with overall event management. Third, the pandemic-postponed Olympics context demonstrates that maintaining consistent relationship quality becomes critical during crises when public scrutiny intensifies. For instance, Tokyo 2020 organisers provided daily pandemic updates and adjusted health protocols based on expert advice. Future hosts should establish resilient communication systems that can provide regular updates on changing circumstances through sustained two-way dialogue rather than one-way announcements.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides valuable insights; however, several limitations suggest opportunities for future research. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences. Although serial mediation analyses imply directionality, longitudinal research tracking satisfaction and trust throughout the event lifecycle (e.g., from bidding to legacy phases) could examine whether different planning stages alter residents' perceptions of bridging communication and relationship quality.

Secondly, while examining two serial orders provides important findings, other sequences among other GPR dimensions remain possible. Researchers could also investigate additional relational GPR dimensions such as control mutuality and commitment within the serial mediation framework (e.g., Tong, 2022).

Thirdly, cultural contexts shape communication perceptions. Our findings from a single mega event context may not generalise to regions with different political structures or engagement norms. For instance, collectivist cultures might form community trust readily; conversely, individualistic environments could present greater challenges. Comparative studies should test whether bridging communication produces similar results across different governance traditions.

Finally, while focusing on bridging communication, future research could compare it with buffering strategies (Kim & Krishna, 2017b). Although bridging offers stakeholder benefits, governments often combine strategies under various pressures. Understanding how these strategies interact during event planning phases would advance theory and guide practitioners in balancing transparency with strategic caution.

Conclusion

This study addressed critical theoretical and practical gaps by demonstrating how governments can foster public attitude for mega sport events using communication strategies and relationship management, particularly under crisis conditions. The findings reveal that bridging communication strategies alone are insufficient; rather, they must operate through quality government-public relationships to influence residents' attitudes. Specifically, the results demonstrate that satisfaction and trust serve as essential mediating mechanisms that reflect sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships in securing residents' positive attitudes towards hosting mega sport events. The comparison between affect-led and cognition-led models reveals that both dimensions function effectively, suggesting that emotional and cognitive relationship quality components work together to create the foundation for effective government-public engagement during challenging circumstances. By integrating strategic communication with relationship management theory within the pandemic-postponed Olympics context, this research provides a comprehensive framework for understanding government-resident dynamics under crisis conditions.

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Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis

Measurement items (label)	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk
(In hosting the Olympic Games) I feel our government's (Tokyo government) decision making process reflects the citizens' needs or interests (Bridg1)	3.66	1.21	-0.33	0.07	0.92*
I feel that our government believes that making and revising its decisions and behaviours is important to address the issues of its citizens (Bridg2)	3.98	1.21	-0.32	0.26	0.93*
Our government believes that it is important to conform to the expectations of its citizens (Bridg3)	4.37	1.37	-0.46	0.20	0.93*
When creating strategic messages in its public relations programs, our government reflects public's needs on them (Bridg4)	3.59	1.25	-0.23	0.04	0.92*
Building and nurturing relationships with its citizens is the key to our government's public relations program (Bridg5)	4.05	1.31	-0.45	0.17	0.92*
The purpose of our government's public relations program is to develop mutual understanding between the government and citizens (Bridg6)	3.96	1.32	-0.32	0.23	0.92*
The purpose of our government's public relations program is to adapt the attitudes and behaviour of government as much as it is to change the attitudes and behaviours of citizens (Bridg7)	3.93	1.23	-0.34	0.71	0.90*
The Tokyo government treats citizens fairly (Trust1)	3.55	1.40	0.02	-0.44	0.94*
The Tokyo government treats citizens justly (Trust2)	3.78	1.34	-0.11	-0.32	0.94*
Whenever the Tokyo government makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its citizens (Trust3)	3.80	1.34	-0.20	-0.09	0.94*
The Tokyo government can be relied on to keep its promises to citizens (Trust4)	3.63	1.32	-0.10	-0.11	0.93*
The Tokyo government has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do (Trust5)	4.01	1.38	-0.34	0.00	0.93*
I believe that the Tokyo government takes the opinions of citizens like me into account when making decisions (Trust6)	3.52	1.33	-0.05	-0.07	0.93*
I feel confident about the Tokyo government's skills such as ability for the government administration (Trust7)	3.85	1.32	-0.27	0.02	0.93*
Both the Tokyo government and citizens like me benefit from the relationship (Satis1)	4.02	1.19	-0.40	0.47	0.91*
Most citizens like me are happy in their interaction with the Tokyo government (Satis2)	3.99	1.19	-0.46	0.74	0.90*

Measurement items (label)	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk
I am pleased with the relationship the Tokyo government has established with citizen like me (Satis3)	3.67	1.19	-0.34	0.40	0.90*
Most citizens enjoy dealing with the Tokyo government (Satis4)	3.49	1.29	-0.13	-0.13	0.92*
Overall, I am excited about Tokyo hosting the Olympic Games (Attitude1)	4.29	1.81	-0.47	-0.59	0.91*
Overall, the Games positive impacts will outweigh its negative ones (Attitude2)	4.04	1.59	-0.35	-0.43	0.93*

Note. Bridg = bridging communication strategy; Satis = satisfaction; Attitude = overall attitude towards the Games; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; * $p < 0.001$

Table 2
Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Measurement items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
<i>Bridging strategy</i>		0.73	0.78	0.83	0.55
Bridg1	0.77				
Bridg2	0.72				
Bridg3	0.54				
Bridg4	0.75				
Bridg5	0.70				
Bridg6	0.52				
Bridg7	0.47				
<i>Overall attitude</i>		0.71	0.73	0.87	0.77
Attitude1	0.90				
Attitude2	0.85				
<i>Relational satisfaction</i>		0.75	0.76	0.84	0.57
Satis1	0.76				
Satis2	0.73				
Satis3	0.82				
Satis4	0.71				
<i>Trust in government</i>		0.88	0.88	0.91	0.63
Trust1	0.79				
Trust2	0.81				
Trust3	0.77				
Trust4	0.83				
Trust5	0.64				
Trust6	0.75				
Trust7	0.76				

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; rho_a = Dijkstra-Henseler's rho; rho_c = Jöreskog's rho; the values with bold were removed.

Table 3*Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) Results*

	Bridging strategy	Overall attitude	Satisfaction	Trust
Bridging strategy	1.00			
Overall attitude	0.39	1.00		
Satisfaction	0.79	0.44	1.00	
Trust	0.69	0.50	0.80	1.00

Table 4
The Quality of Structural Models

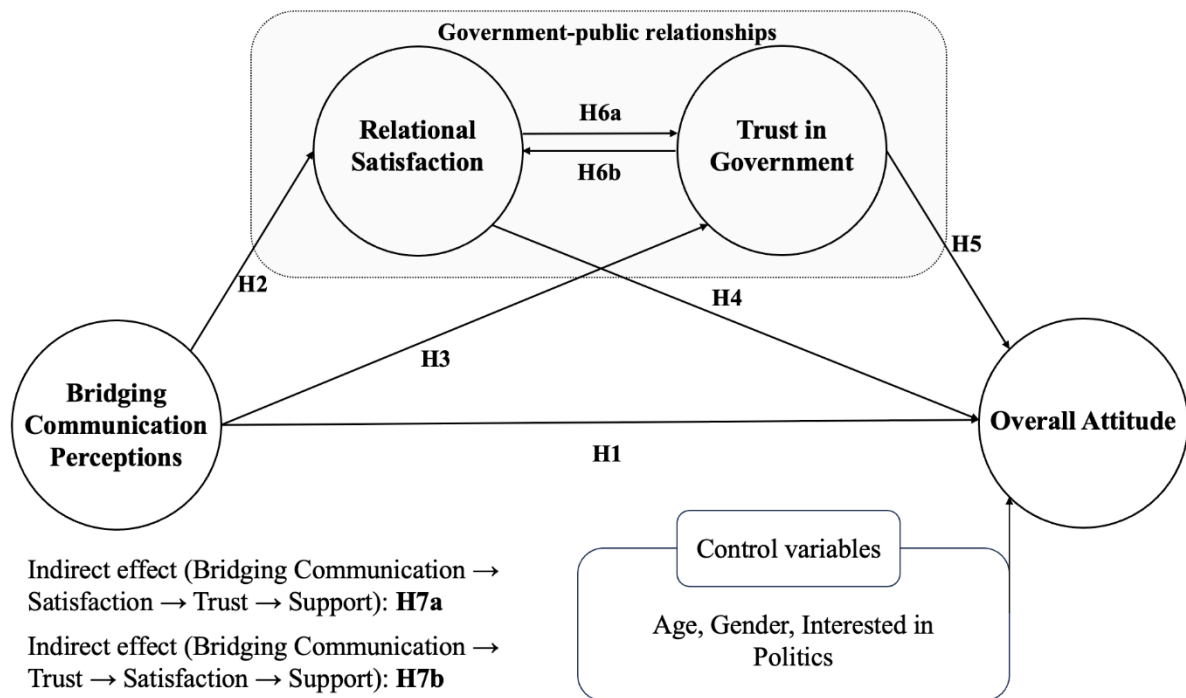
Endogenous constructs	Affect-led model		Cognition-led model		Exogenous constructs	Affect-led model	Cognition-led model
	R ²	Q ²	R ²	Q ²		f ²	f ²
Trust	0.55	0.39	0.39	0.38	Bridging strategy	0.09	0.65
Satisfaction	0.45	0.44	0.55	0.40	Bridging strategy	0.82	0.16
					Satisfaction	0.34	-
					Trust	-	0.32
Overall attitude	0.15	0.09	0.16	0.09	Bridging strategy	0.00	0.00
					Satisfaction	0.01	0.03
					Trust	0.03	0.02

Table 5
The Hypotheses Testing

	Path	Coefficient	SD	<i>t</i>	95% CI	Coefficient	SD	<i>t</i>	95% CI
Direct effects		Affect-led model				Cognition-led model			
H1	Bridging → Attitude	0.08	0.07	1.09	[-0.06, 0.22]	0.05	0.07	0.65	[-0.09, 0.19]
H2	Bridging → Satis	0.67***	0.03	22.02	[0.61, 0.73]	0.34***	0.05	6.24	[0.24, 0.44]
H3	Bridging → Trust	0.27***	0.05	5.01	[0.17, 0.37]	0.63***	0.04	16.22	[0.55, 0.71]
H4	Satis → Attitude	0.11	0.09	1.13	[-0.07, 0.29]	0.22*	0.09	2.54	[0.04, 0.40]
H5	Trust → Attitude	0.24**	0.09	2.61	[0.06, 0.42]	0.18*	0.09	1.95	[0.00, 0.36]
H6a	Satis → Trust	0.53***	0.05	11.79	[0.43, 0.63]	-	-	-	-
H6b	Trust → Satis	-	-	-	-	0.49***	0.05	9.89	[0.39, 0.59]
Serial mediation									
	Bridging → Satis → Trust	0.36***	0.03	10.31	[0.30, 0.42]	-	-	-	-
	Bridging → Trust → Satis	-	-	-	-	0.30***	0.04	8.05	[0.22, 0.38]
H7a	Bridging → Satis → Trust	0.09**	0.03	2.54	[0.03, 0.15]	-	-	-	-
H7b	Attitude Bridging → Trust → Satis	-	-	-	-	0.07*	0.03	2.22	[0.01, 0.13]

Note. SD = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; 95%; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1
Hypothetical Research Framework



Alt Text:

Hypothetical research framework illustrating how bridging communication perceptions influence overall attitude directly and indirectly through relational satisfaction and trust in government, with control variables age, gender, and political interest.