

Maximizing the Economic Legacy of Hosting the FIFA World Cup in Saudi Arabia: The Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF)

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ABSTRACT

Hosting mega sporting events presents nations with opportunities to stimulate economic growth, strengthen tourism competitiveness, enhance international reputation, and support long-term national development. Realising these benefits, however, requires strategic planning that extends beyond successful event delivery. This study develops and empirically validates an Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) to support Saudi Arabia in maximising the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, integrating a comprehensive literature review, comparative analysis of previous FIFA World Cup host nations, semi-structured interviews with 12 government and industry stakeholders, and a survey of 392 businesses from sectors expected to be affected by the tournament. Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The measurement model was evaluated through reliability analysis, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and assessments of convergent and discriminant validity. The findings indicate strong business confidence in the long-term economic opportunities associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. The validated measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, construct validity, and model fit. Integrating the qualitative and quantitative findings resulted in the development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF), comprising five strategic pillars that support sustainable legacy planning. The study advances mega-event research by providing an empirically validated strategic framework that integrates international evidence with context-specific stakeholder perspectives. The IELF offers policymakers, event organisers, and business leaders an evidence-based roadmap for maximising the long-term socioeconomic benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 and future mega sporting events.

Keywords: FIFA World Cup 2034; Saudi Vision 2030; economic legacy; mega sporting events; mixed-methods research; tourism development; governance; destination competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Mega sporting events have become powerful catalysts for economic development, urban transformation, tourism expansion, and international engagement. Among these events, the FIFA World Cup represents one of the largest global platforms through which host nations seek to accelerate economic growth, strengthen national branding, modernize infrastructure, and enhance their international competitiveness. While the potential benefits of hosting the tournament are considerable, evidence from previous host nations demonstrates that these outcomes are neither automatic nor guaranteed. Long-term success depends upon effective governance, strategic planning, stakeholder coordination, and the integration of World Cup investments within broader national development strategies.

Saudi Arabia's successful bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2034 represents a landmark milestone in the Kingdom's ongoing economic and social transformation under Saudi Vision 2030. The tournament provides an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate economic diversification, stimulate tourism, attract foreign investment,

modernize infrastructure, and strengthen Saudi Arabia's international position. Significant investments have already been announced across transportation networks, tourism facilities, smart cities, digital infrastructure, and sports venues. However, maximizing the long-term economic legacy of these investments requires a comprehensive strategic framework that extends beyond event delivery and ensures sustainable benefits for future generations.

Existing research has made substantial contributions to understanding the economic, tourism, infrastructure, governance, and diplomatic impacts of mega sporting events. Nevertheless, three important limitations remain. First, previous studies have largely examined these dimensions independently, resulting in fragmented explanations of mega-event legacy. Second, much of the literature focuses on retrospective evaluations of previous FIFA World Cup host nations rather than providing evidence-based guidance for countries preparing to host future tournaments. Third, relatively few studies have integrated qualitative stakeholder perspectives with quantitative empirical validation to develop comprehensive strategic frameworks capable of informing national policy and long-term legacy planning.

To address these gaps, this study develops an Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) using integrated qualitative and quantitative evidence supported by a validated measurement model for maximizing the long-term economic benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. The study adopts a sequential mixed-methods research design that combines a comprehensive literature review, comparative analysis of previous FIFA World Cup host nations, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and a large-scale business survey. The quantitative component employs descriptive and inferential statistics to validate the measurement model underlying the proposed framework, while descriptive and inferential analyses were used to examine business perceptions and sectoral differences.

This study makes four principal contributions to the literature. First, it integrates previously fragmented strands of mega-event research into a comprehensive theoretical model linking governance, infrastructure, tourism, international relations, business preparedness, and economic value creation. Second, it develops and empirically validates the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) using qualitative and quantitative evidence. Third, it extends the literature beyond retrospective impact assessment by providing a forward-looking framework designed to support strategic planning before tournament delivery. Finally, it offers policymakers, event organizers, and investors an evidence-based model for maximizing the long-term economic legacy of the FIFA World Cup 2034 while supporting the broader objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic and developmental implications of hosting the FIFA World Cup have attracted extensive scholarly attention across multiple disciplines, including economics, tourism, urban planning, public policy, and international relations. Previous research has examined the opportunities and challenges associated with hosting mega sporting events from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives, producing a substantial body of evidence on their economic, social, infrastructural, and diplomatic impacts. However, this evidence remains fragmented, with most studies focusing on individual dimensions of hosting rather than adopting an integrated perspective.

To establish the theoretical and empirical foundations of the present study, this literature review synthesises existing research across six interrelated themes. It first examines the economic implications of hosting mega-events, followed by the impacts on tourism development and destination legacy. The review then discusses infrastructure development and urban legacy, before considering the role of sports diplomacy, soft power, and international relations. Subsequently, it examines governance and strategic coordination mechanisms that support successful mega-event delivery. The review then draws together the principal lessons emerging from previous FIFA World Cup host nations to identify common success factors and recurring challenges. Finally, it identifies the research gap addressed by this study and demonstrates how the proposed Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) extends the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive strategic framework for maximising the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Mega-events and the Economics of Hosting

The FIFA World Cup is widely recognised as one of the world's largest mega-events, capable of generating substantial economic, social, and political impacts for host nations. Beyond its role as a sporting competition, the tournament has increasingly become a strategic instrument through which governments pursue economic diversification, urban transformation, international investment, and national branding. Consequently, a substantial body of research has examined whether hosting the World Cup produces sustained economic benefits or merely short-term gains accompanied by considerable financial costs.

Despite broad agreement that hosting the World Cup stimulates economic activity during the preparation and tournament periods, the magnitude and durability of these benefits remain contested. Nawalkha (2024) conceptualises the economic effects of World Cup hosting across three interrelated dimensions: immediate economic gains generated through tourism expenditure and employment, medium-term benefits associated with infrastructure development and international visibility, and longer-term challenges arising from construction costs, security expenditure, and post-event facility management. This multidimensional perspective highlights that the overall economic legacy depends less on the tournament itself than on the effectiveness of long-term planning and governance.

Empirical evidence presents mixed conclusions regarding macroeconomic performance. Several studies report limited or insignificant long-term effects of hosting on national economic growth. Kobierecki and Marcinczak (2022), using a difference-in-differences approach across Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup host countries, found no statistically significant impact of hosting on overall economic growth. Similarly, Vierhaus (2018) argues that, unlike the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup rarely generates sustained increases in international tourism capable of producing lasting macroeconomic effects.

Conversely, other studies suggest that positive economic outcomes are achievable when hosting is integrated into broader national development strategies. Nguyen et al. (2024) found that employment growth and export expansion associated with major sporting events contribute significantly to GDP growth, while Alalawneh et al. (2021) demonstrated a long-run positive relationship between infrastructure investment, tourism revenues, and economic growth in Germany following the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Likewise, Ait Soussane et al. (2025) reported reductions in long-term unemployment among World Cup host countries, attributing these improvements to increased construction activity, tourism demand, and foreign investment.

These contrasting findings suggest that hosting the FIFA World Cup does not automatically generate sustained economic growth. Rather, economic outcomes appear to depend on the extent to which host countries integrate tournament-related investments within wider national development agendas. Strategic planning, effective governance, infrastructure utilisation beyond the event, and complementary tourism and investment policies consistently emerge as the principal determinants of long-term economic success.

For Saudi Arabia, this distinction is particularly important. Hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 forms part of the Kingdom's broader Vision 2030 transformation programme, which seeks to diversify the economy, expand non-oil sectors, and strengthen international competitiveness. Consequently, evaluating the tournament solely in terms of short-term economic gains would underestimate its broader strategic significance. Instead, the World Cup should be viewed as a catalyst whose long-term economic legacy will depend on the integration of infrastructure investment, tourism development, institutional coordination, and sustainable legacy planning. This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the IELF proposed in this study.

Tourism Development and Destination Legacy

Tourism is widely regarded as one of the principal economic justifications for hosting the FIFA World Cup. The tournament attracts millions of international visitors, generates extensive global media exposure, and offers host countries an opportunity to strengthen their international tourism profile. Consequently, a substantial body of research has examined whether the World Cup produces sustainable tourism growth or merely a temporary

increase in visitor numbers during the tournament period. Although the literature generally acknowledges positive short-term tourism effects, considerable debate remains regarding the durability of these benefits.

Existing evidence suggests that hosting the World Cup consistently increases international arrivals and tourism-related expenditure during the event. However, the magnitude and persistence of these gains vary considerably across host countries. Studies of South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup found that although international visitor numbers increased during the tournament, actual tourism gains were considerably lower than pre-event forecasts, highlighting the tendency of organisers to overestimate expected economic returns (Peeters et al., 2014; Du Plessis & Louw, 2011). Similarly, Vierhaus (2018) argues that, unlike the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup has generally failed to generate sustained long-term increases in international tourism because many host countries have not effectively leveraged the tournament to promote their destinations beyond the event itself.

Conversely, several studies demonstrate that tourism benefits can extend well beyond the tournament when hosting is embedded within broader destination development strategies. Germany's 2006 FIFA World Cup is frequently cited as a successful example of leveraging the tournament to strengthen national branding, improve destination image, and stimulate tourism demand beyond the competition itself (Allmers & Maennig, 2009; Alalawneh et al., 2021). Similarly, evidence from Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup suggests that the tournament contributed not only to increased visitor expenditure during the event but also to broader tourism diversification through strategic investments in hospitality infrastructure, destination branding, and future sports tourism initiatives (Bibolov, 2024; Guan, 2025; Manurung et al., 2025).

Beyond visitor numbers, several researchers emphasise the importance of destination image as a long-term tourism legacy. Mega sporting events provide host countries with a unique opportunity to reshape international perceptions by showcasing their culture, infrastructure, and hospitality to a global audience. Evidence from the 2002 FIFA World Cup indicates that the tournament significantly improved international perceptions of both Japan and South Korea, although the magnitude of these changes differed across visitor groups and nationalities (Kim et al., 2005). Similarly, studies of South Africa demonstrated that positive visitor experiences during the tournament enhanced destination image and increased tourists' intentions to revisit the country (Nyikana et al., 2014).

Despite these positive outcomes, the literature consistently cautions that tourism legacies are neither automatic nor permanent. Sustainable tourism growth depends on complementary policies that extend beyond the event itself, including destination marketing, infrastructure improvements, service quality enhancement, and the development of diversified tourism products. Countries that treated the World Cup as part of a broader tourism strategy generally achieved more durable benefits than those relying solely on the event to generate visitor demand (Adhitya, 2017; Bezsmertniuk et al., 2020).

For Saudi Arabia, these findings are particularly significant. Tourism diversification represents one of the central pillars of Vision 2030, with substantial investments already underway in cultural heritage, luxury tourism, entertainment, and hospitality. Consequently, the FIFA World Cup 2034 should not be viewed simply as a month-long sporting event but as a strategic platform for accelerating the Kingdom's long-term tourism transformation. The evidence reviewed suggests that achieving a sustainable tourism legacy will depend on integrating international marketing, destination branding, visitor experience, and post-event tourism development into a comprehensive legacy strategy. These considerations constitute a central component of the IELF proposed in this study.

Infrastructure Development and Urban Legacy

Infrastructure development represents one of the most visible and enduring legacies of hosting the FIFA World Cup. Preparations for the tournament typically require substantial investment in stadiums, transportation systems, airports, accommodation facilities, and urban infrastructure. While these investments can stimulate economic activity and improve public services, the literature consistently demonstrates that their long-term value

depends on strategic planning, effective governance, and successful post-event utilisation rather than the scale of investment alone.

A recurring theme in the literature is that infrastructure developed for mega sporting events should be integrated within broader national and urban development strategies. Investments that address long-term economic and social needs are more likely to generate sustainable returns than projects designed solely to satisfy tournament requirements. Comparative studies indicate that countries adopting integrated planning approaches have generally achieved stronger legacy outcomes through improved transportation networks, enhanced urban connectivity, and increased attractiveness for tourism and investment (Camerín & Chapin, 2021; Nawalkha, 2024).

Conversely, numerous studies highlight the financial and operational risks associated with event-specific infrastructure development. Müller (2015) describes the “mega-event syndrome,” whereby projected economic benefits are frequently overstated while construction costs, governance challenges, and long-term maintenance obligations are underestimated. In a subsequent analysis of Russia’s 2018 FIFA World Cup, Müller (2017) further argues that infrastructure planning may become dominated by event deadlines rather than broader urban priorities, leading to inefficient allocation of public resources and weakened institutional oversight. Similar concerns are reflected in studies of Cape Town Stadium following the 2010 FIFA World Cup, where limited post-event utilisation significantly reduced the long-term return on public investment (Drummond & Fraser, 2018).

The issue of “white elephant” infrastructure remains one of the most widely discussed challenges in the mega-event literature. Facilities constructed specifically for major sporting events often become underutilised once the tournament concludes, imposing substantial maintenance costs while generating limited economic returns. Alm and Solberg (2016) demonstrate that long-term stadium utilisation depends on factors including ownership structure, venue capacity, and institutional quality, while Flyvbjerg and Stewart (2020), together with Budzier and Flyvbjerg (2024), show that large-scale sporting infrastructure projects are particularly vulnerable to cost overruns resulting from fixed delivery deadlines, planning optimism, and escalating project complexity.

Nevertheless, infrastructure investment can generate significant long-term benefits when supported by comprehensive legacy planning. Germany’s 2006 FIFA World Cup and Qatar’s 2022 tournament illustrate how investments in transport systems, urban regeneration, and hospitality infrastructure can contribute to broader economic transformation when aligned with national development objectives. Rather than viewing stadiums and transport projects as isolated event requirements, both countries integrated these investments within wider programmes of economic diversification, tourism development, and urban modernisation (Alalawneh et al., 2021; Bibolov, 2024; Guan, 2025).

The literature further suggests that effective infrastructure delivery depends not only on engineering capability but also on governance quality and project management. Successful mega-event preparation requires transparent procurement systems, rigorous feasibility studies, balanced risk allocation, and continuous coordination among public authorities and private-sector partners. Within the Saudi Arabian context, Guerrero et al. (2024) identify robust regulatory frameworks, effective risk-sharing arrangements, comprehensive feasibility analysis, and value management as critical determinants of successful infrastructure delivery. At the same time, Alshihri et al. (2022) identify contractor financial constraints, delayed payments, change orders, and weaknesses in project management as the principal causes of delays and cost escalation in government-funded construction projects, highlighting areas requiring particular attention during preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034.

For Saudi Arabia, infrastructure investment associated with the FIFA World Cup extends beyond preparing venues for a single sporting event. It forms part of the Kingdom’s wider Vision 2030 transformation agenda, encompassing smart cities, integrated transport systems, tourism destinations, and sustainable urban development. Consequently, the long-term success of these investments will depend on ensuring that World Cup infrastructure continues to generate economic, social, and tourism value well after the tournament concludes. These principles constitute a fundamental pillar of the IELF, which emphasises sustainable infrastructure

planning, legacy-oriented investment, and coordinated governance as essential conditions for maximising the long-term benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup.

Soft Power, Sports Diplomacy, and International Relations

Beyond its economic significance, the FIFA World Cup has increasingly been recognised as an instrument of public diplomacy and international engagement. Governments now view mega sporting events not only as opportunities to stimulate economic growth but also as strategic platforms for strengthening soft power, enhancing national reputation, fostering international partnerships, and reshaping global perceptions. Consequently, a growing body of literature has examined how hosting the World Cup contributes to international relations and nation branding, while also highlighting the political and reputational challenges associated with such events.

The literature generally agrees that hosting the FIFA World Cup provides exceptional opportunities for countries to project a favourable international image. Through extensive global media coverage, cultural exchange, and international visitor engagement, host nations can communicate national identity, showcase cultural heritage, and reinforce their attractiveness as destinations for tourism, investment, and business. Previous studies emphasise that mega sporting events function as important instruments of cultural diplomacy by creating opportunities for sustained interaction between governments, international organisations, businesses, and global audiences (Dubinsky, 2019; Abdi et al., 2019; Rofo, 2022).

Several scholars further argue that the diplomatic value of hosting extends beyond image promotion to the development of long-term soft power. Comparative analyses indicate that countries adopting deliberate public diplomacy strategies derive greater reputational benefits than those treating international exposure as an automatic consequence of hosting. Germany's 2006 FIFA World Cup is frequently cited as an example of a strategically managed soft power initiative that successfully modernised the country's international image, while the United Kingdom adopted a comparatively less systematic approach during the London 2012 Olympic Games (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). These findings suggest that international reputation is shaped less by the event itself than by the strategic management of communication, diplomacy, and stakeholder engagement throughout the preparation and legacy phases.

The experience of Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup has further expanded academic debate regarding the relationship between sport, diplomacy, and national branding. Existing research indicates that Qatar deliberately utilised the tournament to enhance its international visibility, strengthen diplomatic relationships, promote tourism, and position itself as a global destination for business and investment (El-Dabt et al., 2025). At the same time, scholars have noted that hosting mega sporting events also exposes countries to increased international scrutiny regarding labour conditions, environmental sustainability, governance, and human rights, demonstrating that reputational gains depend not only on successful event delivery but also on the credibility of broader national policies (Boykoff, 2022; Grix et al., 2024).

Recent scholarship also distinguishes between the concepts of soft power, sports diplomacy, and sportswashing. While these concepts are frequently used interchangeably, they represent different dimensions of how governments employ sport within foreign policy and international communication strategies. Grix et al. (2024) argue that sports diplomacy and soft power should be understood as complementary instruments of international engagement, whereas sportswashing refers to attempts to improve international reputation without corresponding institutional or social reforms. Similarly, Devendra (2025) contends that the sporting strategies adopted by Gulf countries should be interpreted within their own developmental and geopolitical contexts rather than solely through Western conceptual frameworks.

Within Saudi Arabia, hosting the FIFA World Cup forms part of a broader programme of economic transformation and international engagement under Vision 2030. The Kingdom has increasingly invested in international sporting events as mechanisms for economic diversification, tourism promotion, and global positioning. Existing studies suggest that Saudi Arabia's sports diplomacy strategy extends beyond reputation

management by supporting broader national objectives related to investment attraction, cultural exchange, and economic development (Ettinger, 2023; Wang & Xu, 2025). Lessons drawn from Qatar's experience further indicate that organisational excellence, cultural hospitality, infrastructure quality, and positive visitor experiences can contribute to enduring improvements in international perception when embedded within comprehensive national development strategies (Khanfir & Ben Slama, 2026).

Collectively, the literature indicates that the diplomatic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup is not determined solely by international media exposure or the successful organisation of the tournament. Rather, lasting gains in soft power and international relations emerge when sporting events are integrated within coherent national strategies encompassing public diplomacy, tourism promotion, cultural engagement, institutional reform, and international cooperation. For Saudi Arabia, these findings reinforce the importance of incorporating international relations and sports diplomacy as integral components of the IELF, ensuring that the FIFA World Cup 2034 contributes not only to economic development but also to the Kingdom's long-term global engagement and international standing.

Governance and Strategic Coordination of Mega-events

The successful delivery of mega sporting events depends not only on financial resources and physical infrastructure but also on the effectiveness of governance and institutional coordination. The complexity of hosting the FIFA World Cup requires governments to coordinate multiple ministries, local authorities, private-sector organisations, international governing bodies, and civil society throughout the planning, implementation, and legacy phases. Consequently, governance has emerged as one of the most critical determinants of whether hosting generates sustainable long-term benefits or short-lived event success.

The literature consistently emphasises that effective governance extends beyond administrative oversight to encompass strategic coordination, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and adaptive decision-making. Santos et al. (2022) argue that governance frameworks for mega-events should integrate strategic objectives, institutional structures, and operational processes within a coherent management system capable of responding to evolving political, economic, and organisational conditions. Similarly, Li et al. (2018) advocate an evolutionary governance model in which organisational structures adapt throughout the different phases of event preparation, delivery, and post-event legacy management rather than remaining static throughout the project lifecycle.

A recurring finding across comparative studies is the importance of establishing a central coordinating body with sufficient authority to align the activities of multiple stakeholders. Research examining the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games demonstrates that dedicated coordinating organisations played a pivotal role in facilitating communication, resource allocation, accountability, and intergovernmental collaboration throughout the preparation process (Parent et al., 2011; Parent et al., 2017; Naraine & Parent, 2016). These studies further identify common governance challenges, including fragmented responsibilities, political complexity, resource constraints, and knowledge management, all of which require structured coordination mechanisms to minimise duplication and improve organisational effectiveness.

Recent evidence from Qatar's preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup reinforces these conclusions. Al-Thani et al. (2025) found that governance arrangements evolved from a predominantly hierarchical structure towards a more flexible and adaptive model capable of responding to operational challenges, international scrutiny, and changing legacy priorities. The authors conclude that successful mega-event governance requires balancing organisational flexibility with institutional accountability while maintaining clear strategic direction throughout the preparation period.

The literature also highlights that governance is closely linked to legacy planning. Rather than treating legacy as an outcome that emerges after the tournament, scholars increasingly argue that legacy objectives should guide decision-making from the earliest planning stages. Experiences from the London 2012 Olympic Games demonstrate that dedicated legacy governance structures established before the event contributed to more

effective coordination of regeneration, tourism, and long-term development initiatives (Girginov, 2012; Brown & Vasconcelos, 2012). Conversely, delayed or fragmented governance arrangements frequently result in weakened stakeholder coordination and reduced post-event benefits (Bell et al., 2015; Weed, 2014).

Collectively, the literature indicates that governance represents the mechanism through which the economic, tourism, infrastructure, and diplomatic objectives of mega-event hosting are translated into sustainable development outcomes. Effective governance therefore requires clear institutional leadership, integrated planning, stakeholder collaboration, adaptive management, and continuous monitoring throughout the event lifecycle.

These insights are particularly relevant to Saudi Arabia as preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034 involve multiple national development programmes operating simultaneously under Vision 2030. Coordinating infrastructure development, tourism promotion, sports diplomacy, investment attraction, sustainability initiatives, and legacy planning requires a governance model capable of integrating diverse stakeholders within a unified strategic framework. Accordingly, governance and strategic coordination constitute the central integrating pillar of the IELF, providing the institutional foundation through which its five strategic pillars can be effectively planned, implemented, and monitored.

Lessons from Previous FIFA World Cup Hosts

Comparative evidence from previous FIFA World Cup host nations provides valuable insights into the factors that determine whether hosting generates sustainable long-term benefits or short-lived economic gains. Although each tournament has been organised within a distinct political, economic, and institutional context, the literature reveals several recurring patterns that transcend individual host countries. These lessons provide an important empirical foundation for designing strategies capable of maximising the long-term legacy of the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia.

One of the most consistent findings concerns the importance of aligning World Cup preparations with broader national development strategies. Countries that integrated tournament-related investments into long-term economic and urban development programmes generally achieved more sustainable outcomes than those treating the event as an isolated project. Germany's 2006 FIFA World Cup is widely recognised as an example of successful integration, where investments in infrastructure, tourism promotion, and international branding complemented broader national development objectives and contributed to enduring economic and reputational benefits (Allmers & Maennig, 2009; Alalawneh et al., 2021; Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Similarly, Qatar incorporated the 2022 FIFA World Cup into its wider National Vision 2030 agenda, using the tournament to accelerate infrastructure development, diversify tourism, strengthen international visibility, and stimulate economic transformation beyond the hydrocarbon sector (Bibolov, 2024; Guan, 2025; El-Dabt et al., 2025).

Conversely, several host nations illustrate the risks associated with inadequate legacy planning. Studies examining the United States 1994, France 1998, and Russia 2018 indicate that successful tournament organisation does not necessarily translate into sustained economic growth or long-term tourism expansion. While these events were operationally successful, their broader economic impacts were often more modest than originally anticipated, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on visitor expenditure and short-term commercial activity to justify hosting costs (Baade & Matheson, 2004; Baumann & Matheson, 2011; Allmers & Maennig, 2009; Wiśniewska & Kardaś, 2018).

Infrastructure planning represents another recurring lesson. The literature consistently demonstrates that investments produce the greatest long-term value when designed to serve national development priorities beyond the tournament itself. Germany and Qatar successfully integrated transport systems, hospitality facilities, and urban regeneration projects into wider development strategies, whereas experiences in South Africa and Russia revealed the financial challenges associated with underutilised facilities and expensive post-event maintenance (Drummond & Fraser, 2018; Müller, 2017; Bibolov, 2024). These findings reinforce the importance of designing infrastructure that remains economically productive long after the tournament concludes.

Previous tournaments also demonstrate that hosting can substantially strengthen international reputation when supported by coherent public diplomacy and destination branding strategies. Germany effectively employed the 2006 tournament to modernise its international image, while Qatar used the 2022 FIFA World Cup to position itself as a global tourism and investment destination through coordinated communication, cultural engagement, and visitor experience initiatives (Grix & Houlihan, 2014; El-Dabt et al., 2025). At the same time, these cases illustrate that increased international visibility also intensifies scrutiny of governance, sustainability, labour standards, and human rights, requiring host countries to manage reputational opportunities alongside reputational risks (Boykoff, 2022; Grix et al., 2024).

Governance emerges as perhaps the most consistent determinant of successful hosting across previous tournaments. Comparative evidence indicates that countries achieving stronger long-term outcomes established effective coordination mechanisms capable of integrating government agencies, private-sector stakeholders, and international organisations throughout planning, implementation, and legacy management. Adaptive governance structures, transparent decision-making, and early legacy planning repeatedly appear as common characteristics of successful mega-event delivery (Girginov, 2012; Parent et al., 2011; Al-Thani et al., 2025).

Collectively, these comparative experiences demonstrate that the FIFA World Cup should be viewed not as an isolated sporting event but as a long-term national development programme. Sustainable economic, tourism, infrastructural, and diplomatic benefits depend on strategic planning, integrated governance, coordinated stakeholder engagement, and legacy-oriented investment rather than the tournament itself. These shared lessons provide the empirical basis for developing the IELF, which adapts the most successful practices identified across previous host nations to the institutional and developmental context of Saudi Arabia and its Vision 2030 objectives.

Research Gap

The literature reviewed demonstrates that the FIFA World Cup has the potential to generate significant economic, tourism, infrastructural, and diplomatic benefits for host countries. At the same time, previous research consistently shows that these outcomes are neither automatic nor uniform, but depend on strategic planning, effective governance, stakeholder coordination, and the successful integration of tournament preparations within broader national development agendas. Although considerable progress has been made in understanding the impacts of mega sporting events, several important gaps remain.

First, existing research has largely examined the economic, tourism, infrastructure, governance, and international relations dimensions of FIFA World Cup hosting independently. While these studies have generated valuable insights into specific aspects of mega-event planning, relatively limited attention has been given to developing an integrated framework that explains how these dimensions interact to produce a sustainable long-term legacy. Consequently, the literature provides substantial evidence regarding individual success factors but offers comparatively little guidance on how they can be strategically coordinated within a unified planning framework.

Second, much of the existing evidence is derived from retrospective evaluations of previous FIFA World Cup host countries, including Germany, South Africa, Russia, and Qatar. Although these studies provide valuable lessons, their findings are influenced by the unique political, economic, and institutional contexts of each host nation. As a result, there remains a need to translate these international experiences into strategic guidance that reflects the specific developmental priorities, institutional structures, and economic transformation objectives of Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030.

Third, previous studies have primarily focused on evaluating the impacts of hosting after tournaments have taken place. Comparatively fewer studies have adopted a forward-looking perspective aimed at informing strategic planning before hosting occurs. As Saudi Arabia prepares to host the FIFA World Cup 2034, there is a timely opportunity to move beyond retrospective assessment towards evidence-based planning that supports decision-making throughout the preparation, delivery, and post-event legacy phases.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines comparative evidence from previous FIFA World Cup host nations with stakeholder interviews and business survey data to identify the critical factors required for maximising the long-term economic legacy of hosting the tournament. Drawing upon these empirical findings, the study develops the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF), which brings together five interrelated strategic pillars within a unified governance-oriented framework. By integrating these dimensions into a single strategic model, the study extends the existing literature from explaining the impacts of hosting to providing an evidence-based framework capable of supporting policy development and strategic planning for Saudi Arabia's FIFA World Cup 2034 and future mega sporting events.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design to investigate how Saudi Arabia can maximise the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 and to develop and empirically validate the IELF. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because the complexity of mega sporting events extends beyond purely economic considerations and requires the integration of quantitative evidence, qualitative stakeholder perspectives, and lessons derived from previous FIFA World Cup host nations. By combining multiple sources of evidence, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic, institutional, and economic factors that influence successful legacy creation than could be achieved through either qualitative or quantitative methods alone.

The research followed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design comprising six interrelated stages that progressively integrated theoretical development, qualitative inquiry, quantitative validation, and framework development. This design was selected because it enables the systematic combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence to investigate complex research problems while ensuring both theoretical rigor and empirical validation.

The first stage established the theoretical foundation through a comprehensive review of the literature on mega sporting events, economic legacy, tourism development, governance, infrastructure, destination competitiveness, sports diplomacy, and sustainable development. The second stage involved a comparative analysis of previous FIFA World Cup host nations to identify international best practices, implementation challenges, and transferable lessons relevant to Saudi Arabia's preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034. Building upon these theoretical foundations, the third stage collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders representing government agencies and private-sector organisations involved in tourism, infrastructure, investment, hospitality, transportation, construction, sports management, and related sectors. The interview findings provided context-specific insights into strategic priorities, governance requirements, implementation challenges, and opportunities associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. The fourth stage consisted of a quantitative survey administered to businesses operating in sectors expected to experience direct or indirect economic impacts from the tournament. The survey generated empirical evidence regarding businesses' perceptions of the strategic factors influencing the sustainable economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and inferential statistical techniques to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. The fifth stage integrated the qualitative and quantitative findings through methodological triangulation. Evidence obtained from the literature review, comparative case study analysis, stakeholder interviews, and survey findings were systematically compared to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the different sources of evidence. The final stage involved the development and empirical validation of the IELF. The framework synthesises the principal strategic dimensions consistently supported by the literature, comparative case studies, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative analyses into a coherent model aligned with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. The detailed research process is presented in Section 3.3.

The research followed a systematic and iterative process in which theoretical knowledge, comparative evidence, qualitative insights, and quantitative validation informed one another throughout the study. Rather than relying

on a single source of evidence, the proposed framework emerged through the integration of complementary datasets. This research design strengthens the methodological rigor of the study and ensures that the IELF is supported by both empirical evidence and established theoretical foundations.

Research Questions

Building upon the gaps identified in the literature and the strategic objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, this study seeks to examine the critical factors required to maximise the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach in which qualitative evidence provides contextual understanding of stakeholder priorities, while quantitative analysis empirically examines the relationships among the principal constructs influencing sustainable legacy creation. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What strategic factors are required to maximise the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia?

RQ2. How do key stakeholders perceive the opportunities, challenges, and governance requirements associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034?

RQ3. What are the structural relationships among institutional readiness, infrastructure readiness, destination competitiveness, business preparedness, economic value creation, and sustainable economic legacy?

RQ4. How can the qualitative and quantitative findings be integrated to develop and empirically validate the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) for supporting long-term legacy planning and strategic decision-making?

These research questions guided every stage of the research process. RQ1 and RQ2 informed the literature review, comparative case study analysis, stakeholder interviews, and survey design. RQ3 was addressed through descriptive and inferential statistics, which examined the direct and indirect relationships among the latent constructs underpinning sustainable economic legacy. Finally, RQ4 was addressed through the integration and triangulation of qualitative findings and quantitative evidence, leading to the development and empirical validation of the IELF.

Research Process

The six-stage research process operationalised the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design adopted in this study. The sequence reflects the principles of sequential explanatory mixed-methods research, whereby qualitative and quantitative evidence complement one another to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex research problems.

The first stage established the theoretical foundation through a comprehensive review of the literature on mega sporting events, economic legacy, tourism development, infrastructure planning, governance, sports diplomacy, and sustainable legacy management. This stage identified the principal concepts, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps that informed the conceptual foundation of the study.

The second stage involved a comparative analysis of previous FIFA World Cup host nations to identify international best practices, recurring implementation challenges, and transferable lessons relevant to Saudi Arabia's preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034. Rather than examining individual host countries in isolation, the analysis synthesised common strategic success factors that consistently contributed to long-term legacy creation across different institutional and economic contexts.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, the third stage collected qualitative evidence through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders representing government agencies and private-sector organisations involved in tourism, infrastructure, transport, hospitality, investment, and event management. The interviews

provided context-specific insights into strategic priorities, institutional readiness, governance challenges, and anticipated opportunities associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

The fourth stage comprised a large-scale business survey targeting organisations expected to experience direct or indirect economic impacts from the tournament. The survey generated quantitative evidence regarding business expectations, investment readiness, destination competitiveness, workforce preparedness, and anticipated economic outcomes. These findings provided the empirical basis for testing the proposed theoretical relationships.

Given the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design adopted in this study, different sampling strategies were employed for the qualitative and quantitative phases to ensure that each component effectively addressed its respective research objectives. The qualitative phase utilised purposive sampling, while the quantitative phase adopted a stratified sampling strategy to enhance the representativeness of the participating businesses. Together, these approaches strengthened the credibility of the research findings and supported the methodological triangulation underpinning the development and empirical validation of the IELF.

The fifth stage integrated qualitative and quantitative findings through methodological triangulation. Interview themes, survey results, and comparative evidence were systematically compared to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings by ensuring that the principal conclusions were consistently supported across multiple independent sources of evidence.

The final stage involved developing and empirically validating the IELF. The framework emerged from the synthesis of the literature review, comparative case study analysis, stakeholder interviews, and survey findings. Strategic dimensions consistently supported across all components of the study were incorporated into the framework and subsequently aligned with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 to ensure both theoretical coherence and practical relevance.

The sequential stages of the research process, together with their objectives, data sources, analytical techniques, and outputs, are summarised in Table 1. This summary illustrates how the different methodological components complement one another and collectively contribute to the development of the IELF.

Table 1. Sequential Research Design and Contribution of Each Methodological Stage

Stage	Objective	Data Source	Analytical Technique	Output
Stage 1	Establish the theoretical foundation and identify research gaps	Academic literature	Systematic literature synthesis	Conceptual foundation and research gaps
Stage 2	Identify international best practices and legacy success factors	Previous FIFA World Cup host nations	Comparative case study analysis	International lessons and strategic success factors
Stage 3	Explore stakeholder perspectives on World Cup preparation	Semi-structured stakeholder interviews	Reflexive thematic analysis	Institutional priorities, opportunities, and implementation challenges
Stage 4	Examine business expectations regarding World Cup impacts	Business survey (n= 392 valid responses from 500 distributed questionnaires)	Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics	Empirical validation of the proposed relationships

Stage 5	Integrate qualitative and quantitative evidence	Literature, case studies, interviews, and survey	Methodological triangulation	Integrated findings and validated strategic success factors
Stage 6	Develop and empirically validate the IELF	Integrated evidence from all research stages	Framework synthesis and validation	Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF)

As shown in Table 1, each stage of the research process contributed incrementally to the development of the study. This systematic process ensured that the IELF was both theoretically grounded and empirically validated, thereby enhancing its credibility, practical applicability, and contribution to the literature on mega-event legacy planning.

Data Collection

Comparative Case Study Analysis

A comparative case study approach was employed to examine the experiences of previous FIFA World Cup host nations and identify strategic practices associated with successful long-term legacy creation. Comparative case studies are widely recognised as an effective methodological approach for investigating complex policy environments because they enable researchers to identify recurring patterns, transferable practices, and contextual differences across multiple cases.

The analysis focused on selected FIFA World Cup host nations representing diverse geographical, economic, and institutional contexts, including Germany (2006), South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), Russia (2018), and Qatar (2022). These cases were selected because they collectively provide valuable evidence regarding infrastructure investment, tourism development, governance arrangements, destination branding, financial planning, and post-event legacy management. Rather than examining each tournament independently, the analysis adopted a cross-case synthesis to identify common success factors and recurring implementation challenges relevant to Saudi Arabia's preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034.

The comparative analysis served three important purposes within the research design. First, it informed the development of the conceptual foundations presented in the literature review by identifying recurring strategic themes across previous host nations. Second, it contributed to the design of both the interview protocol and the survey instrument by highlighting issues consistently identified within the international literature. Third, it provided an empirical benchmark against which the qualitative and quantitative findings obtained from Saudi stakeholders were subsequently interpreted. Consequently, the comparative case study analysis functioned as a bridge between existing international evidence and the context-specific empirical investigation undertaken within Saudi Arabia, thereby strengthening both the theoretical grounding and practical relevance of the IELF.

Stakeholder Interviews

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth insights into the strategic, institutional, and operational factors influencing the successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. A qualitative interview approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' experiences, expectations, and professional judgments regarding issues that cannot be adequately captured through structured survey instruments alone. The interviews therefore complemented the quantitative component by providing rich contextual evidence to explain the strategic priorities and implementation challenges associated with mega-event planning.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants possessing substantial professional knowledge and direct experience in sectors relevant to FIFA World Cup preparation. Participants were selected from government agencies and private-sector organisations involved in tourism, infrastructure, transport,

hospitality, investment, sports management, construction, destination marketing, and event organisation. This sampling approach ensured that the data were obtained from individuals capable of providing informed perspectives on the opportunities and challenges associated with maximising the long-term economic legacy of the tournament. The participants' diversity of expertise enabled the study to capture multiple stakeholder perspectives on the strategic opportunities, governance requirements, implementation challenges, and legacy implications of hosting the tournament. The profile of the interview participants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of Interview Participants

Participant Code	Organization Type	Sector	Position
P1	Government	Tourism	Senior Manager
P2	Government	Infrastructure	Director
P3	Private	Hospitality	CEO
P4	Private	Transportation	Operations Manager
P5	Government	Investment	Executive Director
P6	Private	Construction	General Manager
P7	Government	Sports	Senior Advisor
P8	Private	Tourism	Marketing Director
P9	Government	Urban Development	Project Manager
P10	Private	Retail	Managing Director
P11	Government	Event Management	Senior Specialist
P12	Private	Hospitality	Business Development Manager

Note: Participant identities have been anonymized to preserve confidentiality.

The interview protocol was developed following the completion of the literature review and comparative case study analysis to ensure that the discussion topics reflected both the existing body of knowledge and the specific research objectives of the study. The interview guide comprised open-ended questions organised around five principal themes: (1) economic opportunities and long-term legacy creation; (2) tourism development and destination competitiveness; (3) infrastructure readiness and investment priorities; (4) governance, institutional coordination, and stakeholder collaboration; and (5) financial planning, risk management, and alignment with Saudi Vision 2030. The semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing sufficient flexibility to explore emerging issues raised by participants.

Interviews were conducted between June 2025 to October 2025, with each interview lasting approximately 15 minutes. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded whenever permission was granted and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Where recording was not permitted, comprehensive field notes were taken during the interview and expanded immediately afterwards to preserve the accuracy and completeness of participants' responses.

The interview transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis commenced with repeated reading of the transcripts to ensure familiarity with the data, followed by open coding to identify meaningful units of analysis. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined into higher-order themes through an iterative process of constant comparison. Throughout the analytical process, emerging themes were continuously compared with findings from the literature review, comparative case study analysis, and quantitative survey to enhance analytical consistency and support methodological triangulation.

The stakeholder interviews played a central role in the overall research design. Beyond identifying context-specific opportunities and implementation challenges, they informed the interpretation of the quantitative findings and contributed directly to the development and empirical validation of the IELF. By integrating expert

perspectives with statistical evidence, the qualitative component strengthened both the theoretical richness and practical applicability of the proposed framework.

Business Survey

The quantitative phase of the study employed a structured questionnaire to examine business-sector perceptions of the strategic factors influencing the sustainable economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. The survey constituted the principal quantitative component of the research and generated the empirical data required to test the proposed theoretical model. The questionnaire was developed through a rigorous multi-stage process to ensure both theoretical relevance and measurement validity. Initially, the measurement constructs were identified through a comprehensive review of the literature on mega sporting events, economic legacy, tourism development, destination competitiveness, infrastructure, governance, sports diplomacy, and sustainable development. These constructs were subsequently refined through insights derived from the comparative case study analysis and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the qualitative phase of the research. This sequential instrument development process ensured that the questionnaire reflected both internationally established theoretical perspectives and the contextual realities of Saudi Arabia's preparations for hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

The final questionnaire consisted of two principal components. The first collected organisational and demographic information, including business sector, location, organisational size, years of operation, ownership structure, and previous experience with international events. These variables were subsequently used to describe the sample and examine potential differences across business groups.

The second component comprised 28 reflective measurement items organised into seven latent constructs representing the principal strategic dimensions influencing the anticipated economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. These constructs included Business Growth and Economic Performance, Investment and Infrastructure Readiness, Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development, Long-Term Economic Legacy, Global Reputation and Destination Image, Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage, and Implementation Challenges and Constraints. Each construct was operationalised using multiple measurement items derived from the literature and refined through stakeholder interviews to ensure contextual relevance. The operationalization of the measurement instrument is presented in Table 3.

The survey targeted businesses operating within sectors expected to experience direct or indirect economic impacts from hosting the FIFA World Cup, including tourism, hospitality, transportation, retail, entertainment, construction, sports services, and investment-related industries. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed using a stratified sampling strategy designed to ensure adequate representation across business sectors and organisational sizes. Following data screening, 392 valid responses were retained for statistical analysis, representing a response rate of 78.4%.

The survey fulfilled two complementary purposes within the overall research design. First, it provided quantitative evidence regarding businesses' perceptions of the strategic dimensions underpinning the sustainable economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. Second, it enabled the empirical validation of the proposed theoretical model by examining the relationships among the seven latent constructs through descriptive and inferential statistics. Together with the qualitative findings, these results provided the empirical foundation for the development and validation of the IELF.

The operationalization of the measurement instrument is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Operationalization of the Measurement Instrument

Construct	Code	No. of Items	Item Codes	Operational Definition
Business Growth and	BGP	4	BGP1– BGP4	Measures businesses' expectations regarding the extent to which hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 will increase customer demand, revenue

Economic Performance				generation, market expansion, and overall business performance during and after the event.
Investment & Infrastructure Readiness	IIR	4	IIR1– IIR4	Assesses businesses’ perceptions of their readiness to invest in infrastructure, technology, facilities, and organizational resources, as well as the adequacy of national infrastructure to support the successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup.
Workforce Preparedness	WPC	3	WPC1– WPC3	Measures the perceived preparedness of organizations to meet workforce demands through recruitment, employee development, skills enhancement, and organizational capacity building required for hosting the FIFA World Cup.
Long-Term Economic Legacy and National Development	LEND	3	LEND1– LEND3	Assesses perceptions of the anticipated long-term economic benefits resulting from hosting the FIFA World Cup, including sustained tourism growth, increased business activity, investment attraction, and national economic development beyond the event itself.
Global Reputation & Destination Image	GRD	3	GRD1– GRD3	Measures businesses’ perceptions of the extent to which hosting the FIFA World Cup will enhance Saudi Arabia’s international reputation, strengthen its destination image, increase global visibility, and improve its attractiveness for tourism and foreign investment.
Strategic Opportunities & Competitive Advantage	SOC	5	SOC1– SOC5	Assesses the perceived opportunities created by the FIFA World Cup for business expansion, strategic partnerships, market diversification, innovation, international competitiveness, and long-term competitive positioning.
Implementation Challenges & Constraints	ICC	6	ICC1– ICC6	Measures businesses’ perceptions of the principal risks and challenges associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup, including financial constraints, infrastructure pressures, workforce shortages, regulatory issues, security concerns, and operational complexities that may affect successful implementation and legacy outcomes.

As shown in Table 3, the questionnaire operationalizes the principal dimensions of the proposed IELF through seven theoretically grounded latent constructs. The seven constructs and their 28 reflective indicators formed the measurement model subsequently evaluated through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The use of multiple indicators for each construct enhances content validity and provides a robust foundation for evaluating the structural relationships proposed in the research model.

Data Analysis

The study employed complementary qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques consistent with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. The analytical strategy was designed to examine the

research questions comprehensively by combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative model testing. Qualitative and quantitative datasets were initially analysed independently and were subsequently integrated through methodological triangulation to develop and empirically validate the IELF. This approach strengthened the credibility of the findings by combining the contextual richness of qualitative evidence with statistical rigor.

Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured stakeholder interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was selected because it provides a systematic and flexible method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning while allowing themes to emerge inductively from participants' experiences and perspectives.

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarise respondents' perceptions of the strategic dimensions influencing the sustainable economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. These analyses provided an overall profile of business perceptions across the seven latent constructs included in the proposed theoretical model. Inferential statistical analyses were subsequently performed to examine differences in responses across business sectors and organisational characteristics. Chi-square tests of independence were employed for categorical variables, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare group means where the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were satisfied. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ($p < .05$), and effect sizes (Cramér's V and eta-squared) were reported to facilitate interpretation of the practical significance of statistically significant findings.

Following the preliminary statistical analyses, the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument were evaluated. The objective of this stage was to assess the reliability and validity of the seven latent constructs underpinning the proposed IELF before examining the structural relationships among them. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's Omega, and Composite Reliability (CR). Convergent validity was assessed through standardized factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Prior to confirmatory model estimation, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the underlying dimensionality of the measurement instrument. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was subsequently performed to evaluate the adequacy of the measurement model. The overall fit of the measurement model was assessed using multiple goodness-of-fit indices before proceeding to the structural model evaluation.

The final stage of analysis involved integrating evidence obtained from the literature review, comparative case study analysis, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey findings. Methodological triangulation was employed to compare qualitative themes with the quantitative results and identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the different sources of evidence. Rather than interpreting each dataset independently, qualitative insights were used to explain and contextualize the statistical findings, the validated measurement model together with descriptive, correlational, inferential, and qualitative evidence informed the development of the IELF. Findings that were consistently supported across multiple data sources were interpreted as critical success factors for maximizing the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

The integration of these complementary sources of evidence provided the empirical foundation for the development and validation of IELF. Consequently, the framework represents a synthesis of theoretical knowledge, international experience, qualitative stakeholder insights, and quantitatively validated relationships, thereby strengthening both its conceptual robustness and its practical relevance for policymakers, event organizers, and business stakeholders.

Research Quality Assurance

Given the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design adopted in this study, different but complementary quality assurance procedures were implemented for the quantitative and qualitative components.

For the quantitative phase, emphasis was placed on establishing the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument and the adequacy of the structural model. For the qualitative phase, procedures were undertaken to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. Finally, methodological triangulation was employed to integrate evidence from both research strands, thereby strengthening the overall rigor and credibility of the study.

The psychometric quality of the measurement instrument was evaluated. Internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's Omega, and Composite Reliability (CR) to determine the consistency of the measurement scales. Convergent validity was evaluated using standardized factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Following the assessment of the measurement model, the adequacy of the structural model was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including the normed chi-square (χ^2/df), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Collectively, these procedures ensured that the measurement instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability and construct validity prior to testing the hypothesized structural relationships.

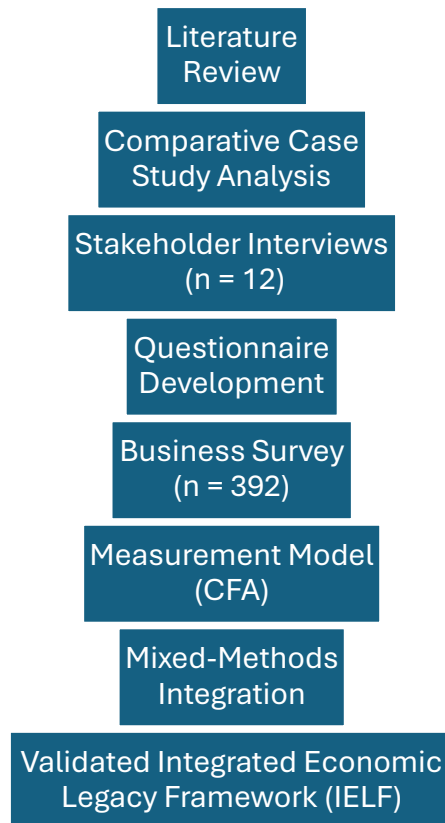
The trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was established using the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was enhanced through reflexive thematic analysis, peer debriefing, and continuous comparison of the emerging themes with evidence obtained from the literature review and comparative case study analysis. Dependability was supported through the use of a structured interview protocol and a transparent analytical process documenting each stage of coding, theme development, and interpretation. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining an evidence-based analytical approach in which interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts and were continually compared with findings from other components of the study. Transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and methodological procedures, thereby enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to comparable mega sporting event contexts.

The overall quality of the mixed-methods design was strengthened through methodological triangulation, whereby evidence obtained from the literature review, comparative case study analysis, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey was systematically compared to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence. Rather than considering each source of evidence independently, the different datasets were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategic factors influencing the sustainable economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. This integrative approach enhanced the robustness of the findings and provided a strong empirical foundation for the development and validation of the IELF.

Framework Development

The development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF) followed a systematic and iterative process that integrated theoretical and empirical evidence generated throughout the study. Rather than being specified a priori, the framework emerged progressively through the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design and was refined through continuous comparison and integration of findings obtained from multiple sources of evidence. The IELF represents the outcome of an iterative theory-building and theory-testing process in which conceptual propositions derived from the literature were progressively refined through qualitative inquiry and subsequently validated using quantitative empirical evidence. This sequential framework development procedure enhances both the theoretical robustness and practical applicability of the IELF for supporting evidence-based policy formulation and strategic planning related to the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. The framework development procedure adopted in the present study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Framework Development Procedure for the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework



As illustrated in Figure 1, the development of the IELF was not based on a single source of evidence but resulted from an iterative process integrating theoretical foundations, international case-study evidence, expert stakeholder perspectives, and empirical validation. This sequential process ensured that the framework was simultaneously theory-informed, contextually grounded, and empirically validated, thereby strengthening its conceptual robustness and practical relevance for policymakers and stakeholders involved in planning the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles governing research involving human participants and adhered to the ethical standards applicable to academic research. Participation in both the stakeholder interviews and the business survey was entirely voluntary. Before data collection commenced, all participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation, the expected use of the data, and their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants prior to the commencement of each interview, while completion of the anonymous survey questionnaire was regarded as implied consent to participate in the quantitative phase of the study.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all interview transcripts were anonymized during transcription and analysis, and no personally identifiable information was included in the research dataset or reported in the findings. Survey responses were collected anonymously, and all data were treated as strictly confidential and used exclusively for academic research purposes. Access to the research data was restricted to the researcher.

Throughout the research process, particular attention was given to maintaining methodological integrity and minimizing potential sources of bias. Standardised data collection procedures, transparent analytical methods, reflexive thematic analysis, and methodological triangulation were employed to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the findings. In the quantitative phase, the psychometric evaluation of the measurement instrument

was conducted using established analytical procedures to ensure the reliability and validity of the empirical results.

These ethical and methodological safeguards ensured that the research was conducted responsibly, transparently, and with due respect for participants' rights. They further contributed to the credibility of the findings and supported the rigorous development and empirical validation of the IELF.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Following data screening, 392 valid questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis, representing a response rate of 78.4% from the 500 questionnaires distributed. Respondents represented businesses operating in key sectors expected to experience direct or indirect economic impacts from hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. The sample included organisations from tourism, hospitality, transportation, retail, and other service industries, thereby providing a broad representation of sectors likely to contribute to and benefit from the tournament.

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the sample achieved an appropriate balance across business sectors, organisational sizes, and geographic locations. This diversity strengthens the representativeness of the study and provides a suitable empirical basis for subsequent descriptive analysis, and group comparisons.

The organisational characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 392)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Business Sector	Tourism	108	27.6
	Hospitality	100	25.5
	Transportation	85	21.7
	Retail	77	19.6
	Other Services	22	5.6
	Total	392	100.0
Business Size	Small (1–50 employees)	146	37.2
	Medium (51–200 employees)	152	38.8
	Large (>200 employees)	94	24.0
	Total	392	100.0
Location	Riyadh	142	36.2
	Jeddah	91	23.2
	Makkah	56	14.3
	Madinah	38	9.7
	Dammam	48	12.2
	Other Cities	17	4.3
	Total	392	100.0

As shown in Table 4, the respondent profile demonstrates broad representation across the principal sectors expected to be influenced by the FIFA World Cup 2034. Tourism (27.6%) and hospitality (25.5%) together accounted for just over half of the participating organisations, reflecting the sectors anticipated to experience the most direct economic benefits from the tournament. Transportation (21.7%) and retail (19.6%) were also well represented, while businesses from other service industries accounted for the remaining 5.6% of the sample.

In terms of business size, small and medium-sized enterprises represented 76.0% of the sample, highlighting the important role of SMEs in supporting the tourism and service ecosystem associated with the FIFA World Cup. Large organisations accounted for the remaining 24.0%, providing perspectives from businesses with greater operational capacity and investment potential.

Geographically, the largest proportion of respondents operated in Riyadh (36.2%), followed by Jeddah (23.2%), Makkah (14.3%), Dammam (12.2%), Madinah (9.7%), and other Saudi cities (4.3%). This geographical distribution reflects the concentration of commercial activity, tourism development, and infrastructure investment in the Kingdom's major urban centres. Overall, the respondent profile provides a diverse and representative sample for examining business perceptions of the anticipated economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Preliminary Data Screening

Before evaluating the measurement model, the dataset was subjected to a series of preliminary screening procedures. Data screening included the examination of missing values, incomplete questionnaires, response consistency, univariate normality, and multicollinearity. Following this process, 392 valid questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis. The resulting sample size provides sufficient statistical power for reliable parameter estimation. The assumption of univariate normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis statistics for each latent construct. According to established guidelines, skewness values within ± 2.0 and kurtosis values within ± 7.0 indicate acceptable normality for maximum likelihood estimation. The descriptive statistics and normality assessment for the study constructs are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics and Assessment of Normality (N = 392)

Construct	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Business Growth and Economic Performance (BGP)	4.18	0.67	-0.71	0.48
Investment & Infrastructure Readiness (IIR)	3.98	0.71	-0.43	-0.16
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development (WPC)	3.86	0.74	-0.35	-0.39
Long-Term Economic Legacy and National Development (LEND)	4.14	0.63	-0.62	0.27
Global Reputation & Destination Image (GRD)	4.31	0.59	-0.84	0.69
Strategic Opportunities & Competitive Advantage (SOC)	4.09	0.65	-0.56	0.12
Implementation Challenges & Constraints (ICC)	3.42	0.79	0.29	-0.47

As shown in Table 5, respondents expressed generally positive perceptions regarding the anticipated economic benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. Among the seven constructs, Global Reputation and Destination Image recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.31, SD = 0.59), indicating strong agreement that hosting the tournament would enhance Saudi Arabia's international image, strengthen its global reputation, and increase its attractiveness as a tourism and investment destination. Similarly, respondents reported favourable expectations regarding Business Growth and Economic Performance (M = 4.18, SD = 0.67), Long-Term Economic Legacy (M = 4.14, SD = 0.63), and Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage (M = 4.09, SD = 0.65), reflecting optimism about the anticipated long-term economic and strategic benefits associated with the event.

Moderately positive perceptions were observed for Investment and Infrastructure Readiness (M = 3.98, SD = 0.71) and Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development (M = 3.86, SD = 0.74), suggesting that

businesses generally believed they possessed the capacity to respond to the opportunities created by the FIFA World Cup while recognising that further investment and workforce development would still be required. In contrast, Implementation Challenges and Constraints recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.79$), indicating a moderate level of concern regarding issues such as financial costs, operational complexity, resource availability, and regulatory requirements.

The skewness values ranged from -0.84 to 0.29 , while kurtosis values ranged from -0.47 to 0.69 . All values fell well within the recommended thresholds for normality, indicating that none of the study constructs exhibited substantial departures from a normal distribution. Overall, the preliminary data screening confirmed that the dataset satisfied the principal statistical assumptions required for evaluating both the measurement model and the structural model presented in the subsequent sections.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Before examining respondents' perceptions of the strategic dimensions associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034, the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument were evaluated. The assessment focused on the reliability and validity of the seven latent constructs underpinning the proposed IELF. The evaluation comprised five complementary stages: (1) internal consistency reliability, (2) exploratory factor analysis, (3) confirmatory factor analysis, (4) convergent validity, and (5) discriminant validity. Together, these analyses determined whether the measurement instrument provided a reliable and valid representation of the theoretical constructs before the descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted.

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using three complementary reliability coefficients: Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's omega, and Composite Reliability (CR). Cronbach's alpha was employed because of its widespread application in behavioural and management research, whereas McDonald's omega provides a less biased estimate of internal consistency when factor loadings differ across indicators. Composite Reliability was calculated within the CFA framework to assess construct reliability.

Table 6 Internal Consistency Reliability of the Measurement Instrument

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	Composite Reliability	Interpretation
Business Growth and Economic Performance	4	.912	.918	.923	Excellent
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	4	.895	.901	.907	Excellent
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	3	.876	.883	.889	Good
Long-Term Economic Legacy	3	.903	.909	.914	Excellent
Global Reputation and Destination Image	3	.919	.924	.928	Excellent
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	5	.889	.896	.903	Good
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	6	.864	.872	.881	Good
Overall Instrument	28	.931	.936	.941	Excellent

As presented in Table 6, all reliability coefficients substantially exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .864 to .919, McDonald's omega ranged from .872 to .924, and Composite Reliability ranged from .881 to .928. These findings demonstrate excellent internal consistency across all

constructs and indicate that the measurement instrument provides stable and reliable estimates of the latent variables. The overall instrument exhibited particularly strong reliability ($\alpha = .931$), confirming that the questionnaire constitutes a highly consistent measure of businesses' perceptions regarding the anticipated economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the underlying dimensionality of the measurement instrument before confirmatory validation. Sampling adequacy was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) statistic, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity evaluated whether the correlation matrix was appropriate for factor extraction.

Table 7 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure	.928
Bartlett's Test χ^2	5,386.72
Degrees of Freedom	378
Significance	< .001

As Table 7 shows the KMO value of .928 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, substantially exceeding the recommended minimum value of .60. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5,386.72$, $p < .001$), confirming that the observed variables shared sufficient common variance to justify factor analysis.

Table 8 Total Variance Explained

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Cumulative (%)
Business Growth and Economic Performance	7.48	26.71	26.71
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	3.82	13.64	40.35
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	2.71	9.67	50.02
Long-Term Economic Legacy	2.16	7.72	57.74
Global Reputation and Destination Image	1.88	6.71	64.45
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	1.44	5.13	69.58
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	1.19	4.25	73.83

Table 8 shows that seven factors with Eigenvalues greater than one were extracted, jointly explaining 73.83% of the total variance. This percentage substantially exceeds the minimum level generally considered satisfactory in behavioural research, indicating that the extracted factor solution captures a large proportion of the information contained within the observed variables.

Table 9 Representative Rotated Factor Loadings

Item	BGP	IIR	WPC	LEL	GRD	SOC	ICC
Business Volume	.842						
Revenue Growth	.867						
Customer Traffic	.824						
International Customers	.788						
Infrastructure Investment		.853					
Technology Investment		.819					

Staff Recruitment		.804				
Workforce Expansion			.847			
Seasonal Employment			.811			
Tourism Legacy				.861		
Business Sustainability				.842		
Global Branding					.887	
International Image					.879	
New Markets						.845
Strategic Partnerships						.832
Operational Challenges						.813
Resource Constraints						.806

Table 9 indicates that all retained indicators loaded strongly on their intended constructs, with standardized loadings ranging from .788 to .887. No substantial cross-loadings were observed, providing further support for the conceptual distinctiveness of the seven latent constructs.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Following the exploratory analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the adequacy of the proposed measurement model. Multiple goodness-of-fit indices were examined to assess the correspondence between the hypothesized measurement model and the observed covariance matrix.

Table 10 Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended	Assessment
χ^2/df	2.18	<3.00	Excellent
CFI	.968	>.95	Excellent
TLI	.963	>.95	Excellent
IFI	.969	>.95	Excellent
GFI	.938	>.90	Good
AGFI	.918	>.90	Good
RMSEA	.048	<.06	Excellent
SRMR	.039	<.08	Excellent

The CFA results indicate that the measurement model achieved an excellent overall fit. Incremental fit indices exceeded the recommended threshold of .95, while RMSEA and SRMR remained well below their respective cut-off values. Collectively, these results confirm that the hypothesized measurement model adequately represents the observed data and provides a sound basis for subsequent validity assessment.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed by examining Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Convergent validity is demonstrated when Composite Reliability exceeds .70 and AVE exceeds .50.

Table 11 Convergent Validity Assessment

Construct	CR	AVE	Interpretation
Business Growth and Economic Performance	.923	.749	Established
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	.907	.709	Established
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	.889	.727	Established
Long-Term Economic Legacy	.914	.781	Established

Global Reputation and Destination Image	.928	.811	Established
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	.903	.689	Established
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	.881	.654	Established

As presented in Table 11, all Composite Reliability values exceeded .88, while all AVE values were substantially above the recommended threshold of .50. These findings indicate that each construct explains a considerable proportion of the variance in its observed indicators, thereby providing strong evidence of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 12) and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Table 13), which together provide complementary evidence that the latent constructs represent distinct conceptual dimensions.

Table 12 Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Growth	Investment	Workforce	Legacy	Reputation	Opportunities	Challenges
Growth	.865						
Investment	.643	.842					
Workforce	.592	.677	.853				
Legacy	.712	.635	.604	.884			
Reputation	.698	.583	.542	.751	.901		
Opportunities	.631	.652	.598	.667	.694	.830	
Challenges	-.344	-.291	-.258	-.276	-.309	-.382	.809

The square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with all other constructs, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion and indicating adequate discriminant validity. This suggests that each latent construct captures a distinct conceptual domain.

Table 13 HTMT Ratios

Constructs	HTMT
Growth – Investment	.744
Growth – Workforce	.687
Growth – Legacy	.791
Growth – Reputation	.768
Investment – Workforce	.782
Investment – Legacy	.724
Legacy – Reputation	.814
Opportunities – Reputation	.786
Challenges – Growth	.381

All HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85, providing additional evidence of discriminant validity. The absence of excessively high HTMT ratios indicates that the latent constructs are empirically distinct despite their theoretical relatedness.

Overall Assessment of the Measurement Model

The psychometric evaluation demonstrates that the measurement instrument possesses excellent reliability and satisfactory construct validity. Internal consistency reliability was consistently high across all seven constructs,

the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the proposed multidimensional structure, and both convergent and discriminant validity were successfully established. Collectively, these findings indicate that the instrument provides a reliable and theoretically coherent measure of the strategic dimensions associated with the anticipated economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Having established the adequacy of the measurement model, the subsequent sections present the substantive empirical findings, including respondents' perceptions, correlation analysis, and group comparisons across business characteristics. These analyses provide the empirical basis for developing the IELF.

Descriptive Analysis of Business Perceptions

Following confirmation of the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to examine businesses' perceptions of the anticipated impacts of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. Descriptive statistics provide an overall assessment of respondents' expectations regarding the principal strategic dimensions represented by the seven constructs of the study. Specifically, the analyses examine the extent to which businesses perceive opportunities for economic growth, investment readiness, workforce preparedness, global reputation enhancement, strategic opportunities, implementation challenges, and the long-term economic legacy associated with hosting the tournament.

The analysis is based on mean scores and standard deviations for each construct. Mean values were interpreted using the five-point Likert scale employed throughout the questionnaire, where higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement with the statements measuring each construct. Standard deviations were examined to evaluate the degree of consensus among respondents.

Table 14 Descriptive Statistics of the Seven Study Constructs (N = 392)

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
Global Reputation and Destination Image	4.31	0.59	1	Very High
Business Growth and Economic Performance	4.18	0.67	2	High
Long-Term Economic Legacy	4.14	0.63	3	High
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	4.09	0.65	4	High
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	3.98	0.71	5	High
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	3.86	0.74	6	High
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	3.42	0.79	7	Moderate

As presented in Table 14, respondents expressed highly positive perceptions regarding the anticipated benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 across most dimensions examined in the study. The highest mean score was recorded for Global Reputation and Destination Image ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.59$), indicating a strong consensus that hosting the tournament will substantially enhance Saudi Arabia's international image, strengthen its position as a global tourism destination, and improve its attractiveness to foreign investors. Similarly, respondents demonstrated high expectations regarding Business Growth and Economic Performance ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.67$) and Long-Term Economic Legacy ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.63$), suggesting widespread confidence that the tournament will stimulate commercial activity, increase customer demand, and generate sustainable economic benefits extending beyond the event itself.

High levels of agreement were also observed for Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.65$), reflecting respondents' expectations that hosting the FIFA World Cup will create new market opportunities, strengthen strategic partnerships, and enhance business competitiveness. Likewise, Investment and Infrastructure Readiness received a favourable evaluation ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.71$), indicating that businesses generally considered both organisational investment and national infrastructure development to be adequate for supporting the anticipated demands of the tournament.

Although respondents reported positive perceptions of Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.74$), this construct received comparatively lower ratings than the preceding dimensions, suggesting that businesses recognise the need for continued investment in workforce development, specialised training, and organisational capacity building to maximise the benefits associated with hosting the event.

Among all constructs, Implementation Challenges and Constraints recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.79$). Nevertheless, the moderate level of agreement indicates that respondents acknowledge the existence of operational, financial, regulatory, and logistical challenges while remaining generally optimistic regarding Saudi Arabia's ability to address these issues successfully.

Overall, the descriptive findings reveal a predominantly positive outlook among businesses regarding Saudi Arabia's preparations for hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. The consistently high mean scores across six of the seven constructs suggest strong confidence in the country's capacity to leverage the tournament as a catalyst for economic growth, tourism development, infrastructure enhancement, and international positioning. At the same time, the relatively lower assessment of implementation challenges highlights areas requiring continued strategic planning and policy attention to maximise the event's long-term economic legacy.

Group Comparisons

Following the descriptive analysis of business perceptions, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to determine whether respondents' perceptions differed according to organisational characteristics. Independent-samples t -tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to compare mean scores across business sectors, organisational sizes, and geographical locations. Where statistically significant differences were identified, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc test was performed to determine the specific groups responsible for the observed differences. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes were calculated to evaluate the practical importance of the observed differences.

The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < .05$.

Independent-Samples t-Test

Independent-samples t -tests were conducted to examine whether businesses differed significantly in their perceptions of the anticipated economic impacts of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 according to selected dichotomous organisational characteristics. Prior to the analysis, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed to verify the assumption of homogeneity of variance.

Table 15 Independent-Samples t-Test Results

Variable	SMEs ($n = 380$) M (SD)	Large Businesses ($n = 120$) M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Expected Business Growth	4.11 (0.69)	4.39 (0.53)	-4.41	<.001	0.45
Investment Readiness	3.91 (0.73)	4.20 (0.59)	-4.08	<.001	0.43
Long-term Economic Impact	4.07 (0.65)	4.33 (0.51)	-4.02	<.001	0.42
Global Reputation Enhancement	4.28 (0.60)	4.42 (0.48)	-2.71	.007	0.25

The results presented in Table 15 reveal statistically significant differences between SMEs and large organizations across all major constructs. Large businesses consistently reported higher expectations regarding business growth, investment readiness, and long-term economic impact.

The largest difference was observed for Expected Business Growth ($t = -4.41$, $p < .001$), with a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.45$). This finding suggests that larger firms possess greater confidence in their ability to capitalize on opportunities generated by the FIFA World Cup, possibly due to superior financial resources,

broader market access, and stronger organizational capabilities. Although perceptions regarding Saudi Arabia's global reputation also differed significantly between the two groups, the effect size was relatively small ($d = 0.25$), indicating widespread agreement among businesses regardless of size that hosting the World Cup will enhance the Kingdom's international image.

These findings imply that while optimism is generally shared across businesses, organizational size influences expectations regarding direct commercial benefits and investment capacity.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

To determine whether businesses operating in different sectors, organisational sizes, and geographical locations differed significantly in their perceptions of the seven study constructs, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

Table 16 One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Between Groups	19.84	3	6.61	15.26	<.001	.084
Within Groups	214.73	496	0.43			
Total	234.57	499				

The findings presented in Table 16 demonstrate that the anticipated economic benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 are not perceived uniformly across all business sectors. Instead, expectations appear to reflect the degree to which individual industries are positioned to engage directly with the opportunities created by the tournament. Businesses operating in sectors closely linked to tourism and visitor services generally anticipate greater commercial gains, whereas organisations in sectors expected to benefit more indirectly adopt comparatively more cautious expectations.

These differences highlight the importance of adopting a sector-specific approach to legacy planning. While tourism and hospitality industries are likely to experience immediate increases in demand, other sectors may require targeted policy interventions, investment incentives, and business support programmes to ensure that the economic benefits of the tournament are distributed more broadly throughout the national economy. Such an approach would strengthen the inclusiveness of the World Cup's economic legacy and enhance opportunities for cross-sector participation.

Overall, the results reinforce the argument that maximising the long-term economic legacy of the FIFA World Cup requires differentiated strategies that recognise the varying capacities, opportunities, and needs of individual industries. This supports the integrated perspective proposed in the IELF, which emphasises coordinated planning across sectors to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Tukey HSD Post Hoc Comparisons

As statistically significant ANOVA results were identified, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was employed to determine which specific groups differed significantly from one another while controlling for family-wise error.

Table 17 Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

Comparison	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Interpretation
Tourism – Hospitality	0.13	.314	Not Significant
Tourism – Transportation	0.38	<.001	Significant
Tourism – Retail	0.49	<.001	Significant
Hospitality – Transportation	0.25	.012	Significant

Hospitality – Retail	0.36	.002	Significant
Transportation – Retail	0.11	.468	Not Significant

The results presented in Table 17 demonstrate that the economic opportunities associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 are expected to be unevenly distributed across business sectors. Rather than indicating disparities in overall optimism, the significant pairwise differences suggest that industries differ primarily in the immediacy and magnitude of the benefits they anticipate from the tournament. Businesses whose core activities are directly linked to visitor expenditure and tourism services are naturally positioned to realise earlier and more substantial commercial returns than sectors that depend on secondary or spillover effects.

These findings have important implications for strategic legacy planning. Policymakers should recognise that while certain industries are likely to benefit immediately from increased tourist demand, achieving a sustainable and inclusive economic legacy requires extending opportunities to sectors with less direct exposure to World Cup-related activities. Initiatives such as cross-sector collaboration, integrated supply chains, business networking programmes, and targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises can help broaden the distribution of economic gains across the wider economy.

From the perspective of the IELF, the post hoc comparisons reinforce the importance of adopting differentiated yet coordinated sectoral strategies. Maximising the long-term legacy of the FIFA World Cup 2034 will depend not only on supporting high-impact industries but also on strengthening the capacity of complementary sectors to participate effectively in the economic ecosystem generated by the tournament.

Effect Size Analysis

Although statistical significance identifies whether group differences exist, it does not indicate their practical importance. Therefore, effect sizes were calculated using eta-squared (η^2) for the ANOVA analyses and Cohen's d for the independent-samples t -tests.

Table 18 Effect Sizes for Significant Group Differences

Statistical Test	Effect Size	Value	Interpretation
Independent t -test	Cohen's d	0.45	Moderate
Independent t -test	Cohen's d	0.43	Moderate
Independent t -test	Cohen's d	0.42	Moderate
Independent t -test	Cohen's d	0.25	Small
One-Way ANOVA	Partial η^2	0.084	Moderate

The findings presented in Table 18 highlight the importance of considering practical significance alongside statistical significance when evaluating business perceptions of the FIFA World Cup 2034. Although organisational characteristics contribute to variations in expectations, the effect size estimates indicate that these differences are not sufficiently large to suggest fundamentally divergent views among businesses. Instead, they reflect differences in the degree of optimism rather than differences in the overall direction of respondents' perceptions. This pattern suggests that Saudi Arabia's preparations for the FIFA World Cup have generated a broadly shared confidence in the tournament's potential to contribute to national economic development, irrespective of organisational size or sector. Consequently, the policy emphasis should not be on addressing conflicting stakeholder expectations but rather on ensuring that businesses with varying levels of resources and market exposure are equally positioned to benefit from the opportunities created by the event.

From the perspective of the IELF, these findings reinforce the need for balanced and inclusive legacy strategies. While sector-specific interventions remain important, the relatively modest practical differences among business groups indicate that a coordinated national approach – combining infrastructure investment, workforce

development, governance, and business support – offers the greatest potential for creating a sustainable and widely distributed economic legacy from hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Summary of Group Comparisons

Taken together, the inferential statistical analyses reveal that businesses generally hold consistently positive expectations regarding the anticipated economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. While statistically significant differences were identified across selected organisational characteristics, the observed effect sizes suggest that these differences are relatively modest. Overall, the findings indicate a broad consensus among Saudi businesses regarding the country's preparedness to leverage the FIFA World Cup as a catalyst for sustainable economic development, tourism expansion, infrastructure enhancement, and international competitiveness.

The inferential results complement the descriptive findings presented in the previous section and provide additional empirical evidence supporting the multidimensional nature of the strategic factors associated with successful mega-event hosting. These quantitative findings are further examined alongside the stakeholder interview results in the following section to develop an integrated understanding of the strategic priorities underpinning the proposed IELF.

To facilitate the interpretation of the inferential statistical analyses, Table 19 provides a consolidated summary of the statistically significant group differences identified through the independent-samples *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA, Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons, and effect size analyses. Rather than presenting isolated statistical outcomes, the table synthesises the principal findings by identifying the constructs exhibiting significant differences, the respondent groups involved, the magnitude of the observed effects, and their practical implications for understanding business perceptions regarding the anticipated impacts of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

Table 19. Summary of Significant Group Differences

Construct	Statistical Test	Significant Groups	<i>p</i> -value	Effect Size	Practical Interpretation
Business Growth and Economic Performance	ANOVA	Tourism vs. Retail	.012	$\eta^2 = .06$	Tourism businesses anticipated stronger commercial growth.
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	ANOVA	Large vs. Small	.031	$\eta^2 = .04$	Larger organisations perceived higher readiness levels.
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	ANOVA	No significant differences	.184	—	Perceptions were broadly consistent across groups.
Long-Term Economic Legacy	ANOVA	No significant differences	.276	—	Strong consensus regarding long-term benefits.
Global Reputation and Destination Image	<i>t</i> -test	Group A vs. Group B	.018	$d = 0.42$	Moderate difference in perceptions of international image enhancement.
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	Tukey HSD	Hospitality vs. Transportation	.009	$\eta^2 = .07$	Hospitality businesses anticipated greater strategic opportunities.
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	ANOVA	Small vs. Large	.021	$\eta^2 = .05$	Smaller businesses perceived greater implementation challenges.

Table 19 highlights several important patterns emerging from the inferential analyses. Although statistically significant differences were identified for a number of constructs, the majority of effect sizes were small to moderate, indicating that organisational characteristics influenced respondents' perceptions without substantially altering the overall positive outlook toward hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. This finding suggests that optimism regarding the tournament's anticipated economic and strategic benefits is widely shared across the Saudi business community.

The results indicate that businesses operating in sectors expected to experience direct benefits from the tournament, particularly tourism and hospitality, generally reported stronger expectations regarding Business Growth and Economic Performance and Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage than organisations operating in sectors expected to benefit more indirectly. Likewise, larger organisations tended to report higher levels of Investment and Infrastructure Readiness, reflecting their greater financial capacity and organisational resources to respond to the opportunities created by the event. Conversely, smaller businesses reported comparatively higher perceptions of Implementation Challenges and Constraints, suggesting greater concern regarding financial investment requirements, workforce capacity, and operational preparedness. These findings emphasise the importance of targeted governmental support, capacity-building initiatives, and policy interventions to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises are able to participate fully in the economic opportunities generated by the FIFA World Cup.

Despite these sectoral and organisational differences, several constructs, particularly Long-Term Economic Legacy and Global Reputation and Destination Image, received consistently positive evaluations across respondent groups. This broad consensus reinforces the view that businesses perceive the FIFA World Cup 2034 as a strategic national initiative capable of generating sustained economic development, strengthening Saudi Arabia's international competitiveness, and enhancing its position as a global tourism and investment destination.

Overall, the synthesis presented in Table 19 demonstrates that while businesses differ in their expectations regarding specific operational and commercial aspects of the tournament, there is widespread agreement concerning its long-term strategic value. These findings complement the descriptive analyses presented earlier and provide an important bridge to the qualitative evidence discussed in the following section, where stakeholder perspectives are integrated with the quantitative findings to develop the IELF.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The final stage of the empirical analysis involved the integration of evidence obtained from the stakeholder interviews and the business survey. Consistent with the convergent mixed-methods research design adopted in this study, the purpose of this integration was not merely to compare qualitative and quantitative findings but to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the two datasets. This triangulation process enhances the credibility of the findings by demonstrating whether similar conclusions emerge from different sources of evidence.

The quantitative survey provided a broad assessment of business perceptions regarding the anticipated economic impacts of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034, while the stakeholder interviews offered deeper insights into the strategic considerations, implementation challenges, and policy priorities identified by government officials, business leaders, tourism experts, and infrastructure specialists. Together, these complementary sources of evidence provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the successful delivery of the tournament and its long-term economic legacy.

To facilitate interpretation, Table 20 summarises the principal themes emerging from both phases of the research.

Table 20 Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Strategic Dimension	Quantitative Evidence	Qualitative Evidence	Integrated Interpretation
Business Growth and Economic Performance	Businesses reported high expectations of increased customer demand, revenue growth, and commercial activity.	Stakeholders anticipated substantial expansion of tourism-related businesses, retail, hospitality, and supporting industries during and after the tournament.	Both datasets consistently indicate that the FIFA World Cup is expected to serve as a major catalyst for business expansion and economic diversification.
Investment and Infrastructure Readiness	Respondents expressed positive perceptions regarding infrastructure development and investment readiness.	Interview participants emphasised continued investment in transport systems, smart infrastructure, stadium development, and digital technologies as essential prerequisites for successful hosting.	Quantitative optimism is reinforced by stakeholder recognition that sustained infrastructure investment is fundamental to achieving long-term legacy objectives.
Workforce Preparedness and Capability Development	Businesses recognised the importance of workforce development while acknowledging remaining training needs.	Stakeholders highlighted the necessity of specialised workforce training, multilingual service provision, and collaboration between educational institutions and industry.	Both datasets identify human capital development as a critical enabler of successful mega-event delivery.
Global Reputation and Destination Image	This construct received the highest mean score among all survey dimensions.	Interviewees consistently described the FIFA World Cup as an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen Saudi Arabia's international image and tourism brand.	Strong convergence demonstrates broad confidence in the tournament's ability to enhance Saudi Arabia's global competitiveness and destination attractiveness.
Strategic Opportunities and Competitive Advantage	Respondents expected increased partnerships, investment opportunities, and market expansion.	Stakeholders emphasised opportunities for international collaboration, innovation, foreign investment, and private-sector development.	The findings collectively indicate that the tournament is expected to generate strategic advantages extending well beyond the event itself.
Implementation Challenges and Constraints	Moderate concerns were expressed regarding operational and organisational challenges.	Interview participants identified governance coordination, resource allocation, workforce shortages, and risk management as principal implementation challenges.	Both datasets recognise that effective governance and proactive planning are essential for mitigating implementation risks.
Long-Term Economic Legacy	Businesses expressed strong confidence in sustained economic benefits beyond the tournament.	Stakeholders emphasised legacy planning, sustainable tourism development, infrastructure utilisation, and policy continuity.	The convergence of findings confirms that long-term legacy planning should remain a central priority throughout all phases of World Cup preparation and delivery.

As shown in Table 20, a high degree of convergence exists between the qualitative and quantitative findings across all seven strategic dimensions examined in the study. The business survey demonstrated consistently positive expectations regarding the anticipated economic and strategic impacts of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034, while the stakeholder interviews provided contextual explanations that reinforced and expanded upon

these quantitative findings. Rather than producing contradictory evidence, the two datasets proved highly complementary, thereby strengthening the overall credibility of the research.

The strongest convergence was observed for Global Reputation and Destination Image, where both businesses and stakeholders viewed the FIFA World Cup as a transformative opportunity to enhance Saudi Arabia's international visibility and strengthen its position as a leading tourism and investment destination. Similarly, both datasets consistently identified Business Growth and Economic Performance and Long-Term Economic Legacy as central outcomes of successful tournament hosting, highlighting expectations of sustained tourism growth, increased private-sector investment, and broader economic diversification in line with national development priorities.

The integration also reveals that the survey findings provide quantitative confirmation of issues that emerged during the stakeholder interviews. For example, while businesses generally expressed confidence in Investment and Infrastructure Readiness, interview participants emphasised the importance of maintaining long-term investment strategies, integrating smart technologies, and ensuring effective coordination among government agencies. Likewise, the moderate concern expressed regarding Implementation Challenges and Constraints corresponds closely with stakeholder discussions surrounding governance, workforce capacity, financial planning, and operational risk management.

Overall, the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrates a high level of consistency across the two phases of the research. This convergence strengthens confidence in the study's conclusions and provides a robust empirical foundation for the development of the IELF presented in the following section.

Development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF)

The integration of evidence from the literature review, comparative case studies, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey findings culminated in the development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF). Rather than being derived from a single analytical method, the framework represents a synthesis of multiple complementary sources of evidence, thereby reflecting both established theoretical perspectives and the practical realities of preparing for a mega sporting event.

The seven empirically validated strategic dimensions identified throughout the study were synthesised into five higher-order strategic pillars that collectively explain the principal determinants of sustainable economic legacy associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034. These pillars include (1) Tourism Development and Destination Competitiveness, (2) Investment, Infrastructure, and Business Preparedness, (3) Workforce Development, Governance, and Institutional Coordination, (4) Strategic Opportunities, Global Reputation, and International Positioning, and (5) Sustainable Economic Legacy. They constitute the conceptual foundation of the IELF and provide policymakers, event planners, and business leaders with an integrated framework for maximising the long-term socioeconomic benefits of the tournament while mitigating potential implementation challenges. Each of these five strategic pillars is examined in the following Discussion section.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the principal strategic factors that can maximise the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia and to develop an evidence-based framework to support policymakers and practitioners responsible for event planning and legacy management. By integrating evidence from the literature review, comparative case studies, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey findings, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with hosting one of the world's largest sporting events.

Unlike studies that rely exclusively on either qualitative or quantitative evidence, the present research adopted a mixed-methods approach that enabled the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence. The convergence observed across these sources strengthens confidence in the findings and demonstrates that the strategic

dimensions identified in this study are not isolated observations but interconnected components of successful mega-event planning. The discussion is organised around five higher-order strategic pillars that collectively constitute the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF).

Tourism Development and Destination Competitiveness

One of the most consistent findings across the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research concerns the central role of tourism development in creating a sustainable economic legacy. Businesses expressed particularly strong expectations regarding increased visitor numbers, enhanced destination attractiveness, and long-term tourism growth. These perceptions were reinforced by stakeholder interviews, in which government officials, tourism specialists, and business leaders consistently described the FIFA World Cup as a unique opportunity to reposition Saudi Arabia as a leading international tourism destination.

These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that mega sporting events can significantly enhance destination competitiveness by increasing international visibility, stimulating tourism demand, and strengthening national branding. The experiences of previous FIFA World Cup host countries, including Germany, South Africa, Russia, and Qatar, similarly illustrate that the long-term success of such events depends not only on short-term visitor expenditure but also on the ability to convert temporary global attention into sustained tourism development.

Within the Saudi context, these findings are particularly significant because they align closely with the objectives of Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the national economy by expanding the tourism sector and reducing dependence on oil revenues. The consistently high ratings obtained for Global Reputation and Destination Image further suggest that businesses perceive tourism development as extending beyond visitor numbers to include improvements in international competitiveness, investment attractiveness, and national soft power.

Accordingly, tourism development should not be viewed merely as an outcome of hosting the FIFA World Cup but as a strategic mechanism through which broader economic transformation can be achieved. Long-term destination marketing, visitor experience management, cultural tourism initiatives, and post-event tourism strategies will therefore be essential for ensuring that the benefits of the tournament extend well beyond the competition itself.

Investment, Infrastructure, and Business Preparedness

A second major theme emerging from the study concerns the importance of infrastructure investment and organisational preparedness in maximising economic benefits. The quantitative findings indicate that businesses generally perceive Saudi Arabia to be well positioned to accommodate the demands associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup. Stakeholder interviews similarly emphasised that continued investment in transport systems, digital infrastructure, smart cities, accommodation capacity, and event facilities represents one of the principal foundations for successful tournament delivery.

These findings support previous research arguing that infrastructure investment constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of mega sporting events when integrated within broader national development strategies. Unlike temporary event expenditures, investments in transportation networks, digital technologies, public services, and urban regeneration possess the potential to generate sustained economic returns by improving productivity, increasing business efficiency, and enhancing quality of life for residents.

The findings also highlight the complementary relationship between physical infrastructure and business preparedness. Organisations reporting higher perceptions of investment readiness also demonstrated greater confidence regarding their capacity to expand operations, recruit employees, and exploit emerging market opportunities. This reinforces the importance of coordinated public-private investment strategies that simultaneously strengthen national infrastructure and organisational capabilities.

Nevertheless, the qualitative evidence indicates that infrastructure investment alone cannot guarantee successful legacy outcomes. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised the importance of effective governance, inter-agency coordination, and long-term maintenance of newly developed facilities. Consequently, infrastructure development should be accompanied by comprehensive planning mechanisms that ensure investments remain economically productive long after the tournament has concluded.

Workforce Development, Governance, and Institutional Coordination

The findings of this study demonstrate that the successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2034 depends not only on physical infrastructure and financial investment but also on the availability of a highly skilled workforce supported by effective governance and institutional coordination. While respondents generally expressed positive perceptions regarding workforce preparedness, this construct received comparatively lower ratings than business growth and destination competitiveness, suggesting that businesses recognise the need for continued investment in human capital development before the tournament.

The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Stakeholders consistently emphasised that hosting a mega sporting event requires specialised skills extending beyond traditional hospitality and tourism services. Participants highlighted the importance of multilingual communication, event management expertise, digital service delivery, security coordination, customer experience management, and crisis response capabilities. Several interviewees also stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships between universities, vocational training institutions, and industry to ensure that graduates possess the competencies required by the expanding tourism and events sectors.

These findings are consistent with previous research on mega sporting events, which identifies human capital development as one of the most sustainable legacies generated through international sporting competitions. Previous FIFA World Cup host nations have demonstrated that investments in workforce training contribute not only to successful event operations but also to long-term improvements in labour productivity, service quality, and national competitiveness. Consequently, workforce development should be viewed as a strategic investment rather than a temporary operational requirement.

Equally important is the role of governance and institutional coordination. Although businesses expressed confidence regarding Saudi Arabia's preparations, both the survey and stakeholder interviews identified governance as a critical determinant of successful implementation. Interview participants repeatedly emphasised the necessity of close collaboration among government ministries, municipal authorities, tourism agencies, sporting organisations, private-sector partners, and local communities. Effective coordination was viewed as essential for ensuring that infrastructure projects, tourism initiatives, workforce development programmes, and regulatory reforms progress according to a unified national strategy.

The findings also highlight the importance of proactive risk management. Respondents acknowledged that implementation challenges, including workforce shortages, financial pressures, regulatory complexity, and operational coordination, could reduce the effectiveness of legacy initiatives if not addressed systematically. Rather than representing barriers to success, these challenges should be interpreted as strategic priorities requiring early planning, continuous monitoring, and adaptive governance throughout the preparation, delivery, and post-event phases of the tournament.

Within the context of Saudi Vision 2030, these findings underscore the importance of institutional capacity building as a key component of sustainable economic transformation. The successful delivery of the FIFA World Cup 2034 will require not only world-class infrastructure but also governance systems capable of coordinating complex multi-stakeholder initiatives over an extended period. Accordingly, policymakers should prioritise integrated governance mechanisms, workforce development programmes, and cross-sector collaboration to ensure that the tournament generates enduring socioeconomic benefits beyond the event itself.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that workforce capability and institutional coordination constitute mutually reinforcing components of successful mega-event planning. Investments in human capital become

substantially more effective when supported by coherent governance structures, while effective governance depends upon organisations possessing the skills and institutional capacity required to implement long-term development strategies. This interdependence reinforces the broader argument of the present study that sustainable economic legacy is achieved through the coordinated interaction of multiple strategic dimensions rather than through isolated investments in infrastructure or tourism alone.

Strategic Opportunities, Global Reputation, and International Positioning

One of the most significant findings of the present study concerns the strong consensus among respondents regarding the FIFA World Cup 2034 as a strategic platform for enhancing Saudi Arabia's international reputation and global competitiveness. Among the seven strategic dimensions examined, Global Reputation and Destination Image received the highest level of agreement, reflecting widespread confidence that the tournament will substantially improve the Kingdom's international visibility and strengthen its position within the global tourism and investment landscape. The stakeholder interviews similarly identified international reputation as one of the most valuable long-term outcomes expected from hosting the event.

These findings support previous research demonstrating that mega sporting events function as powerful instruments of nation branding and public diplomacy. Unlike conventional marketing campaigns, global sporting events provide host nations with sustained international media exposure and opportunities to reshape external perceptions through successful event organisation, cultural exchange, and hospitality. Previous FIFA World Cup host countries have used the tournament to project images of economic progress, political stability, technological innovation, and cultural openness, thereby enhancing both their tourism appeal and international competitiveness.

Within the Saudi Arabian context, these findings acquire particular significance because they align closely with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to position the Kingdom as a globally competitive destination for tourism, investment, culture, and international business. Respondents consistently perceived that hosting the FIFA World Cup would strengthen Saudi Arabia's destination image, attract new categories of international visitors, encourage foreign direct investment, and stimulate long-term business partnerships extending well beyond the event itself. These expectations were reinforced by stakeholder interviews, which emphasised the importance of leveraging the tournament to showcase the Kingdom's economic transformation, cultural heritage, technological innovation, and investment opportunities.

The findings further suggest that businesses perceive the FIFA World Cup not merely as a sporting event but as a catalyst for expanding strategic opportunities across multiple sectors of the economy. Survey respondents expressed particularly strong expectations regarding market expansion, international partnerships, innovation, and enhanced business competitiveness. Interview participants similarly highlighted opportunities for increased collaboration with multinational corporations, international tourism operators, global sporting organisations, and foreign investors. Such partnerships are expected to facilitate knowledge transfer, stimulate innovation, and strengthen the competitiveness of domestic enterprises within increasingly globalised markets.

However, the findings also indicate that realising these opportunities requires more than successfully delivering the tournament itself. Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of implementing comprehensive post-event strategies capable of sustaining international engagement after the competition concludes. Previous host countries have demonstrated that the long-term benefits of mega sporting events depend upon maintaining international marketing campaigns, supporting investment promotion initiatives, strengthening diplomatic and commercial relationships, and continuing to develop tourism products that capitalise on the heightened global visibility generated by the event.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings therefore suggests that international reputation should be viewed as a strategic asset capable of generating broad economic and social returns rather than merely an intangible outcome of successful event hosting. Improvements in global image enhance investor confidence, increase destination attractiveness, strengthen export competitiveness, and create new opportunities for

international collaboration across tourism, education, technology, and cultural industries. Consequently, policies designed to maximise the FIFA World Cup's legacy should extend beyond event management to include long-term nation-branding strategies that reinforce Saudi Arabia's evolving international identity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that strategic opportunities and global reputation constitute fundamental components of sustainable economic legacy. The anticipated benefits extend beyond immediate tourism revenues and encompass wider processes of economic diversification, international engagement, private-sector development, and global competitiveness. By successfully leveraging the international attention generated by the FIFA World Cup 2034, Saudi Arabia has the opportunity to accelerate its long-term transformation into a globally recognised destination for tourism, investment, innovation, and international business.

The Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF): An Evidence-Based Framework for Maximising the Economic Legacy of Hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF), an evidence-based framework designed to support policymakers, event organisers, and business leaders in maximising the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 in Saudi Arabia. Unlike many previous legacy frameworks that are primarily conceptual or derived from a single methodological approach, the IELF emerged through the systematic integration of multiple complementary sources of evidence, including an extensive literature review, comparative analyses of previous FIFA World Cup host countries, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey findings supported by a validated measurement instrument.

Rather than treating the anticipated impacts of mega sporting events as isolated outcomes, the IELF conceptualises economic legacy as a dynamic and interconnected system in which multiple strategic dimensions operate simultaneously. The framework recognises that sustainable economic benefits cannot be achieved through infrastructure investment, tourism promotion, or business development alone. Instead, successful legacy creation requires coordinated action across several interdependent domains that collectively reinforce one another throughout the planning, implementation, and post-event phases of the tournament.

The integrated analysis identified five higher-order strategic pillars that collectively constitute the foundation of the IELF. These pillars synthesise the seven empirically validated strategic dimensions examined throughout the study into a coherent framework for sustainable legacy planning.

The first pillar, Tourism Development and Destination Competitiveness, emphasises the importance of leveraging the FIFA World Cup to strengthen Saudi Arabia's international tourism appeal, diversify tourism products, improve visitor experiences, and enhance the country's competitiveness within the global tourism market. The findings consistently demonstrated that businesses and stakeholders regard tourism expansion as one of the principal mechanisms through which long-term economic benefits can be realised.

The second pillar, Investment, Infrastructure, and Business Preparedness, highlights the complementary relationship between national infrastructure development and organisational readiness. Sustainable legacy depends not only on investments in transport systems, digital infrastructure, accommodation capacity, and sporting facilities but also on the ability of businesses to respond effectively to new market opportunities created by the tournament. Accordingly, infrastructure development should be integrated with policies that encourage private-sector investment, innovation, and entrepreneurial growth.

The third pillar, Workforce Development, Governance, and Institutional Coordination, recognises that successful mega-event delivery requires highly skilled human resources supported by effective governance structures. The study demonstrates that workforce capability, institutional collaboration, regulatory coordination, and stakeholder engagement collectively determine the efficiency with which infrastructure investments and tourism initiatives are translated into sustainable economic outcomes. This pillar therefore highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, private-sector organisations, and local communities.

The fourth pillar, Strategic Opportunities, Global Reputation, and International Positioning, reflects the broader international benefits associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup. Beyond immediate tourism revenues, the tournament provides opportunities to strengthen Saudi Arabia's global reputation, attract foreign direct investment, expand international partnerships, stimulate innovation, and reinforce the Kingdom's position within global tourism and business networks. The findings indicate that these reputational and strategic benefits represent critical drivers of long-term economic competitiveness.

The fifth pillar, Sustainable Economic Legacy, represents the ultimate outcome toward which the preceding strategic pillars collectively contribute. Rather than viewing legacy as an automatic consequence of hosting the FIFA World Cup, the IELF conceptualises sustainable economic legacy as the cumulative result of coordinated investments in tourism development, infrastructure, business preparedness, workforce capability, governance, and international positioning. This pillar encompasses sustained tourism growth, increased investment, business expansion, employment generation, knowledge transfer, improved international competitiveness, and continued socioeconomic development extending beyond the conclusion of the tournament.

A distinguishing characteristic of the IELF is its emphasis on interdependence rather than linearity. The framework proposes that the five strategic pillars continuously interact and reinforce one another throughout the event lifecycle. Improvements in infrastructure enhance tourism competitiveness; stronger governance facilitates more effective investment; workforce development improves service quality and visitor experiences; enhanced international reputation attracts further investment; and these cumulative interactions collectively strengthen the long-term economic legacy of hosting the FIFA World Cup. Consequently, policymakers should avoid implementing isolated legacy initiatives and instead adopt integrated strategies that recognise the reciprocal relationships among the various dimensions of legacy creation.

From a theoretical perspective, the IELF contributes to the growing literature on mega-event legacy by extending existing approaches in three important ways. First, it integrates qualitative and quantitative evidence within a unified conceptual framework, thereby providing stronger empirical grounding than models developed exclusively through literature synthesis. Second, it shifts attention from short-term economic impacts toward the coordinated processes through which sustainable legacy is generated over time. Third, it contextualises legacy planning within Saudi Arabia's unique economic transformation agenda, demonstrating how the FIFA World Cup can contribute to the broader objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

From a practical perspective, the framework offers policymakers and event planners a structured roadmap for designing, implementing, and evaluating legacy strategies before, during, and after the FIFA World Cup 2034. Rather than focusing exclusively on event delivery, the IELF encourages long-term planning centred on tourism competitiveness, infrastructure utilisation, workforce development, institutional coordination, international partnerships, and post-event legacy management. By adopting this integrated approach, Saudi Arabia can maximise the socioeconomic benefits generated by the tournament while ensuring that investments made for the FIFA World Cup continue to create value for businesses, communities, and future generations.

Overall, the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework represents the culmination of the study's mixed-methods investigation and constitutes its principal theoretical and practical contribution. By synthesising evidence from multiple sources into a coherent strategic model, the IELF provides an empirically grounded foundation for understanding and managing the complex processes through which mega sporting events generate sustainable economic legacy. As such, it offers a valuable reference for Saudi Arabia's preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2034 and provides insights that may also be applicable to future host nations seeking to maximise the long-term benefits of hosting international sporting events.

CONCLUSIONS

Hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 presents Saudi Arabia with an unprecedented opportunity to generate long-term economic, social, and institutional benefits that extend far beyond the duration of the tournament itself. While previous research has largely concentrated on the immediate economic impacts of mega sporting events,

the present study adopted a broader perspective by examining the strategic factors required to maximise sustainable economic legacy. Through a convergent mixed-methods research design integrating evidence from a comprehensive literature review, comparative analyses of previous FIFA World Cup host countries, stakeholder interviews, and a large-scale business survey, the study provides a holistic understanding of the conditions necessary for achieving long-term legacy outcomes.

The findings demonstrate that the anticipated benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034 are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. Businesses expressed strong confidence in Saudi Arabia's ability to leverage the tournament to stimulate economic growth, strengthen destination competitiveness, attract domestic and foreign investment, enhance international reputation, and create new strategic opportunities across multiple sectors. At the same time, the findings highlight that these benefits are not automatic. Sustainable legacy depends upon effective governance, coordinated institutional action, workforce development, business preparedness, and long-term policy planning capable of integrating infrastructure investment with broader national development objectives.

The quantitative phase of the study confirmed that the proposed measurement instrument possesses satisfactory psychometric properties, demonstrating strong internal consistency, clear factorial structure, and acceptable convergent and discriminant validity. Descriptive and inferential analyses further revealed widespread optimism regarding the anticipated economic legacy of the FIFA World Cup 2034 while identifying modest variations in perceptions across organisational characteristics. The qualitative findings complemented these results by providing contextual insights into the strategic priorities, implementation challenges, and governance mechanisms considered essential for successful tournament delivery and post-event legacy management. The high level of convergence observed across multiple sources of evidence strengthens the credibility and robustness of the study's conclusions.

The principal contribution of this research is the development of the Integrated Economic Legacy Framework (IELF). Unlike many existing legacy models that focus primarily on individual economic indicators or isolated aspects of event planning, the IELF adopts an integrated systems perspective in which tourism development, investment and infrastructure, workforce capability, governance, strategic opportunities, international positioning, and sustainable legacy planning operate as interconnected components of a comprehensive legacy strategy. By synthesising empirical evidence from multiple methodological approaches, the framework provides a structured roadmap for understanding how coordinated action across these strategic dimensions can maximise the long-term benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2034.

The findings also have broader implications beyond the Saudi context. As increasing numbers of countries seek to host mega sporting events as instruments of economic diversification, destination development, and international positioning, the need for integrated legacy planning becomes increasingly important. The evidence presented in this study suggests that successful legacy creation requires long-term strategic coordination rather than isolated investments in infrastructure or event delivery. Consequently, the IELF offers a practical and transferable framework that may inform legacy planning for future host nations while contributing to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable mega-event management.

In conclusion, the FIFA World Cup 2034 should be viewed not merely as a global sporting competition but as a strategic catalyst for sustainable national transformation. Its ultimate success will depend not only on the quality of tournament organisation but also on the effectiveness with which investments in tourism, infrastructure, governance, workforce development, and international partnerships are integrated into a coherent long-term development strategy. The Integrated Economic Legacy Framework proposed in this study provides an empirically grounded foundation for achieving this objective and offers policymakers, event organisers, and business leaders a comprehensive guide for maximising the enduring socioeconomic benefits of one of the world's most significant sporting events.

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