

Hosting mega sporting events in the extreme hospitality context: Why do hotel employees engage so intensively in their job duties?

Authors:

Mohamed Mousa, CENTRUM Católica Graduate Business School (CCGBS), Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), Lima, Peru. Email: mmousa@pucp.edu.pe

Ahmad Arslan, Department of Marketing, Management & IB, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland. Email: ahmad.arslan@oulu.fi

Katarzyna Szczepańska-Woszczyzna (Department of Management, WSB University, Dabrowa Gornicza, Poland, Email: kszczepanska@wsb.edu.pl)

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Hosting mega sporting events in the extreme hospitality context: Why do hotel employees engage so intensively in their job duties?

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to identify why hotel employees in the Egyptian context accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many mega sporting events and what outcomes they experience as a result.

Methodology: The empirical data is based on semi-structured interviews with 36 hotel employees working in reservations, front desk, and events management roles in four 4-star hotels located in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Thematic analysis was subsequently used to determine the main ideas in the interview transcripts.

Findings: The findings show that hotel employees accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting mega sporting events for the following four reasons: linking pay with performance, difficulty finding alternative jobs, proving their occupational identity, and being subject to patriotism. Furthermore, this paper highlights that the engagement of hotel employees in extreme work conditions during such mega sporting events might be detrimental to their mental health, resulting in increased cronyism and gender bias among them.

Originality/ value: This paper is a pioneering study to specifically investigate how hosting mega sporting events influences the extremity of work conditions for hospitality sector employees. Prior studies (to the best of our knowledge) have not theorised and empirically analysed this specific topic, especially in under-researched settings, such as developing countries in the global south.

Keywords: Mega sporting events, hotels, extreme work, social exchange theory, theory of comfort, extreme hospitality contexts.

1. Introduction

Mega sporting events (e.g., Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup), which are often organised to combat cultural bias and discrimination through involving sporting competitions between athletes affiliating to different countries, races, religions, gender, ages and ethnicities, are run, and managed by several international sports governing bodies (e.g., Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), International Tennis Federation (ITA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC)) (Philippou, 2022). Four decades ago, the majority of people thought that hosting mega sporting events required nothing more than the relevant infrastructure in the host country and active TV broadcasting (Coakley & Souza, 2013). However, it has been affirmed that hosting mega sporting events reflects an attempt to promote a given country's traditions, customs and soft power (Rookwood & Adeosun, 2021). It might also act as a tool to rebrand a political regime (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010). Noticeably, economic spending on organising mega sporting events is always a matter of discussion, particularly in countries that are characterised by sound political practices (Boykoff, 2020). Effective organising of mega sporting events requires collaboration between international sports governing bodies, host country ministries, municipalities, media companies and security organisations (Lee Ludvigsen *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, it necessitates a high level of public support (Hiller & Wanner, 2018; Kim & Manoli, 2022).

Surprisingly, a country like Egypt characterised by extreme socio-economic and political difficulties hosted 13 mega sporting events in 2021 and 11 in 2020 (Saeed, 2021). Such extreme contexts can be referred to

as “environments where one or more extreme events are occurring or are more likely to occur that may exceed the organisation’s capacity to prevent, and result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological or material consequences to – or in close physical or psycho-social proximity to – organisational members” (Hannah *et al.*, 2009, p. 898). In such extreme contexts, many regular/normal jobs in offices and factories have recently been perceived as extreme due to the long hours, need for continuous connectivity and psychological stress (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Tischler, 2005; Mousa *et al.*, 2023a, b). Furthermore, a job can be described as extreme if it includes “at least five of the following ten characteristics: unpredictable flows of work, fast-paced work under tight deadlines, the inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job, work-related events outside regular work hours, availability to clients 24/7, responsibility for profit and loss, responsibility for mentoring and recruitment, a large amount of travel, large amount of direct reports, and lastly physical presence at the workplace for at least 10 hours a day (Hewlett and Luce, 2006, p. 51). Accepting extreme work necessitates its holders to have fewer breaks, less social commitments, increased working hours, tough work schedules and sometimes availability 24/7 (Green, 2008; McCann *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, some earlier studies have referred to holders of such unusual jobs as workaholics (Fagan, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2006).

One industry typically characterised by extreme work is the tourism and hospitality sector, especially in the Egyptian context. Over the past 15 years, the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector, which employs 10% of its workforce and contributes 15% of Egypt’s gross domestic product, is perceived to be extreme (OECDilibrary, 2020; Mousa *et al.*, 2023). This sector was negatively affected by the political revolution in Egypt in 2011, and its subsequent violent protests, clashes and demonstrations (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023). Furthermore, it was hit by the crash of a Russian passenger flight over Sinai in 2015, in which 224 Russian and Ukrainian tourists died (Reuters, 2015). The spread of Covid-19 also caused the monthly income for this sector to decrease by 1 bn USD (OECDilibrary, 2020). The war in Ukraine, which started in February 2022, has also shocked the sector as Russian and Ukrainian tourists account for more than 33% of Egypt’s annual visitor numbers (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023). Accordingly, given the very few empirical studies on mega sporting events (Rookwood & Adeosun, 2021; Philippou, 2022), particularly in developing nations (Conn, 2018; Kim & Manoli, 2022) and the limited research on extreme work (Howard, 2022; Mousa *et al.*, 2023a, b) in non-Western countries (Mousa *et al.*, 2024), the current paper focuses on the following main question:

- 1. Why do hotel employees in the Egyptian context accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many mega sporting events there? and**
- 2. What are the main outcomes those employees might experience as a result of such extremity?**

The current paper is a pioneering work which contributes to the global dialogue on socioeconomic implications of mega sporting events (especially in developing countries) by specifically investigating their influence on the job duties of hotel employees (hospitality sector). Consequently, this paper has novel focus at topical level (mega-sporting events), contextual level (developing country context) and industrial level (hospitality sector). Moreover, the paper responds to the call by Mousa and Arslan (2023), who propose more interdisciplinary empirical studies on the antecedents and consequences of hotel employee engagement in extreme job duties, particularly in non-Western countries. In this case, the extreme job duties of hotel employees in the Egyptian contexts result from the large number of mega sporting events their country organises.

2. Literature review

2.1 Mega sporting events

Throughout history, many Western and non-Western countries have hosted mega sporting events. For instance, the Olympic Games were organised in Tokyo (Japan) in 1964, in Mexico in 1968, and in Seoul (South Korea) in 1988. The world cup had been hosted by South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), Russia (2018) and Qatar (2022). However, there have been two remarkable years concerning mega sporting events – 2001 and 2020 (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010). After 11 September 2001, all major sporting events have devoted a considerable proportion of their planning and budget to security-related issues. After the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, health-related procedures have been perceived as a major part of any plan to host large sports events (Lee Ludvigsen *et al.*, 2022). Mega sporting events are guided by international sports governing bodies (Phlippou, 2022). These bodies are non-governmental, non-profit organisations (Nowrot, 1999; Byrne & Ludvigsen, 2023); however, personnel affiliated with such bodies maintain personal communication with politicians, media, entrepreneurs, and social activists (Heine, 2018). This is due to the numerous commercial activities (e.g., broadcasting, sponsorship, and profit-maximisation) that are involved in such events (Boykoff, 2016). These bodies are mostly perceived as influencers who shape relations between countries (Eick, 2010).

2.2 Social exchange theory and extreme job duties in the hospitality context

Previously, it was challenging to consider routinised and low-status jobs, such as frontline hotel employees, as extreme in normal times, but after crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, when the demands on frontline employees increased, some regular jobs (hotel jobs in this case) have started to be perceived as extreme (Bozkurt & Grugulis, 2011; Bozkurt, 2015; Mousa *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, extreme jobs are currently seen as a form of work (Granter *et al.*, 2015), which can be referred to as activities involving "a clearly observable threat to one's physical and/or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence. The archetypal edge work experience is one in which an individual's failure to meet the challenge at hand will result in death, or at the very least, a debilitating injury" (Lyng, 1990, p. 857). Extreme work describes unpredictable antisocial work hours, which might last for a long period in which the worker has to intensify his/her performance even if this negatively impacts his/her mental and physical state (Turnbull & Wass, 2015; Dembe, 2009; Howard, 2022).

While the intensity of the work makes the job extreme, some other social trends (e.g., liberalisation, globalisation), organisational dynamics (e.g., flexible work arrangements, flatter organisational hierarchies) and developmental changes (e.g., technical advancement) can also contribute to the extremity of a job (Turnbull & Wass, 2015; Gascoigne *et al.*, 2015). At the macro level, the intense competition, changing nature of economies, and non-stop advancement of information technology have caused many normal jobs to be called extreme (Burchell *et al.*, 2002; Bloomfield & Dale, 2015). At the meso level, the lack of functional flexibility and downsizing decisions have resulted in employee exposure to and acceptance of extreme jobs regardless of the work stress and psychological trauma they might suffer (Green, 2004, Mousa *et al.*, 2021 a, b). The spread of some work motivation techniques, such as performance-related pay, is also perceived as a meso-level motive for extreme work. At the individual level, the tendency of many employees to engage in intensive work because of a belief in badges of honour often associated with risky jobs has activated the spread of extreme work (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). In this study, we focus only on the individual level as we address why hotel employees in Egypt accept their extreme job duties results from hosting mega sporting events in their country and what outcomes they might experience.

Social life is based on exchange among individuals. Therefore, the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964) considers the principle of give-and-take as the basis that guides relationships between individuals. Therefore, individuals perform well when they receive good salaries and/or financial incentives, or employees show commitment when they perceive care from their managers. However, this exchange is not always balanced (Prendergast & Topel, 1996). Therefore, power relations and social networks largely

determine the continuous exchange between humans in the workplace and social life (Blau, 1964). In most organisational contexts, employee behaviour is guided and controlled through the conditions stated in the employment contract (formal interactions) and norms, rituals, values, and practices acquired through communications, meetings, discourses, gatherings, and talks employees experience with work colleagues, including managers (informal interactions) (Turhan, 2014; Gouldner, 1960). This situation refers to the standard form of employment relations in developed and stable countries. However, in many developing nations, people in the hospitality sector, for instance, strive to find a job, and high unemployment rates hinder their ability to survive (Mousa *et al.*, 2023). In such nations, people must face and maybe adapt to the negative consequences of labour rights abuses (Mousa & Arslan, 2023). Therefore, the give-and-take principle (reciprocity) that guides relationships among individuals mostly becomes a principle of giving to survive. Since the social life (e.g., the exchange relations between employee and employer) is based on the give-and-take principle, the authors of the present paper seek to find out what hotel employees receive in return for their acceptance of extreme job duties during the periods of hosting mega sporting events.

When hosting mega sporting events, many hotels link to pay with performance (Mousa & Arslan, 2023). This requires employees to work more (Perlow, 1998). Moreover, and given the nature of the service they provide, some hotels across the developing nations of the world (Egypt in this case) grant higher assessment appraisals and developmental opportunities to those who spend more hours on the job, particularly during crisis periods or during different events in the countries they work in (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023). Unfortunately, employees have to accept that as in countries where economic volatility decides the performance and maybe the future of public and private organisations, people often struggle to find jobs (Mateen *et al.*, 2018). Egypt is one such example, and hence, employees in the hospitality and tourism sector struggle to find an alternative job and mostly have to bear the burden of any negative shock this sector encounters (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023). This shows why the exchange relationship between the employee and his/her hotel is not balanced in the Egyptian context. Specifically, extreme job duties in return for low salaries and employees have to accept that.

According to Perlow and Porter (2009) and Watts (2009), some employees, regardless of the sector they work in, accept long work hours and availability 24/7 just to show that they are superheroes who can manage any job duties without complaining. However, such extreme job duties might result in those employees' poor mental health, which reflects a deficit in one's internal equilibrium and hence inability of the individual to fulfil their social roles and manage life's challenges (Hennekam, 2019). Some employees tend to adopt cronyism, which is defined by Oxford English Dictionary (1989) as "an interconnected group of people or organisations having certain connections which may be explicated to gain preferment, information, etc.", in order to find more relevant job duties (Mousa *et al.*, 2023, 2024). Moreover, urging employees to accept long work hours and night shifts might entail an increase in gender bias as female hotel employees will struggle to balance their intensive job duties during the host of mega sporting events and their role as caregiver in the family.

It is worth highlighting that in 2019, Egypt hosted the following seven tournaments: the African Cup of Nations in football, the World Cup in squash, as well as the World Cup for diving, the World Cup for volleyball, the Junior Women's Volleyball Championship, the Mediterranean Handball Championship, and finally the Arab Golf Championship (Ghayat, 2019). In 2020, this country hosted 11 mega sporting tournaments, including the 2020 Gymnastics World Cup, the 2020 World Cycling Championships, the 2020 World Military Football Championships (Ghayat, 2020), while in 2021 Egypt hosted 13 mega sporting competitions, including the World Handball Championship, World Shooting Championships, World Weapon Championship for Youth and Juniors, Modern Pentathlon World Cup, Gymnastics World Cup, Junior Track Cycling World Championships and World Championship for shooting (Mugahed, 2021). Such

big number of mega sporting events Egypt hosts has necessitated the job duties of hotel employees to be extreme (Mousa & Arslan, 2023). Consequently, given the role of social exchange theory, which highlights that the relationship between employer and employee is based on an exchange of value, the authors of the present paper seek answers to the following questions: Why do hotel employees in the Egyptian context accept extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many mega sporting events? What outcomes do those employees experience as a result?

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research setting and sample

Given the lack of information known about hosting mega sporting events in non-western countries (Philippou, 2022; Lee Ludvigsen *et al.*, 2022) and the few empirical studies about why hotel employees might accept their extreme job duties during the periods of hosting such events (Mousa & Arslan, 2023), the author of the present study empirically employed qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This qualitative study is based on a sample of 36 hotel employees working in the following three departments: reservations, front desk, and events management in an attempt to identify the extent to which hosting mega sporting events makes the jobs of hotel employees extreme and how. The main reason to focus on employees working in the aforementioned three departments is their direct interaction with hundreds of guests who stay in their hotels during the mega sporting events. For the present study, the lead author used the snowball technique on three occasions in April 2023 by searching on LinkedIn for hotel employees currently working in one of the aforementioned three departments, but this approach did not result in finding any respondents willing to join the study. The same search was repeated on Facebook and 4 respondents were found and contacted. The aim of the present study was explained to them, and they were all eager to continue. Moreover, those respondents helped the lead author recruit the remaining necessary respondents. According to Seng (1998, p. 45), scholars who adopt qualitative research "do not really discover the "truth" ... rather they glean facts...that contribute to socially situated tentative, temporary understandings". Moreover, this research method is relevant for studying phenomena in new and/or ambiguous contexts (Maxwell, 1996). The main mechanism for collecting the data for the present paper was semi-structured interviews conducted between May and August 2023. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1 (composed by the author). Respondents' profile and interviews information

3.2 Data collection

The interviewees all work at four-star hotels in Cairo (the capital of Egypt), which has hosted numerous mega sporting tournaments. In addition, this capital has witnessed many extreme political events (January revolution and its subsequent violent demonstrations in 2011) and protests against the Muslim Brotherhood (2013) (Mousa, 2022). Furthermore, and similar to other capitals worldwide, it also witnessed a strict lockdown during the peak of Covid-19 (Mousa *et al.*, 2023). The semi-structured interviews were conducted through Telegram and Zoom in Arabic, the native language of the addressed hotel employees and the lead author of the present paper. The duration of each interview ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. Moreover, the translation of the conducted interviews from Arabic to English was done by a professional translator who virtually attended all the interviews alongside the lead author who is also experienced in publishing qualitative research papers. It is worth highlighting that all the respondents (interviewees) were informed that they could ignore any question of a sensitive nature or that caused them embarrassment. Furthermore,

and in line with the generally accepted ethical guidelines, all interviewees were advised about the main research question of this paper and were assured that their answers would remain anonymous and confidential. The authors used (Mousa *et al.*, 2023), which addresses why nurses accept their extreme job duties during the crisis time, to prepare their interviews questions. Specifically, they used the same questions after adapting them to match the hospitality sector/industry. The following were the main interview questions used.

Table 2 (composed by the authors): interviews' questions

Question
1- Do you perceive your job duties as extreme, and why?
2- To what extent do you feel happy hosting mega sporting events in your country and why?
3- To what extent does hosting mega sporting events in your country affect your job duties and how?
4- Does the hosting of mega sporting events in your country make your job duties extreme, and how?
5- Do you accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting mega sporting events in your country, and why?
6- To what extent do you find an organisational support during the periods of hosting mega sporting event in your country?
7- And what are the main outcomes you might encounter as a result of your acceptance to extreme job duties during mega sporting events in your country?
8- Do you prefer to continue with your current job position despite the extreme job duties you sometimes experience? Why?

3.3 Data analysis

The data was analysed manually using the six steps of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2012). Accordingly, the authors first sought to establish familiarity with the collected data. The objective of this stage was to understand the nature of the work the employees feel committed to before and during periods of hosting mega sporting events in their country and what changes occur concerning working hours, duties, relations with managers, relations with guests, reporting and financial bonuses. This was done by reading the transcripts collected from each hotel separately. Moreover, each author read the main notes taken and listened to the audio-recorded interviews. It is worth elaborating that Alvesson and Karreman (2011) see respondents' answers as a link between the author and the phenomenon investigated. Second, the authors started to conduct open coding procedures (Lune & Berg, 2016), whereby the authors read the transcripts and created distinct units of meaning through the keywords identified. The objective of this stage was to understand how intense the duties of addressed employees turned out to be during mega sporting tournaments in their country. In this stage, the authors started to pay attention to keywords such as log work hours and availability 24/7. Third, the authors moved on to axial coding, dividing the previously formed open codes into sub-themes (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). This helped to identify similar, distinct and unimportant units. In this phase, the authors focused on the discourse of the respondents regarding unpredictable flows of work, the inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job, work-related events outside regular work hours, availability to guests 24/7, being required to submit regular formal reports to their superiors, and lastly, being required to be physically present for long hours at the hotels during mega sporting events in Cairo. Fourth, the authors carried out selective coding by selecting

the most significant words they could hear and notice (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Upon completing the selective coding procedures, we reviewed the themes and compared them with the notes they formed throughout the interviews. Finally, we found that hotel employees accept extreme job duties during mega sporting events in their country (Egypt in this case) because of the following four motives: linking pay with performance, difficulty finding alternative jobs, proving occupational identity, and a sense of patriotism.

4. Findings

The paper aims to find out why hotel employees in the Egyptian context accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many mega sporting events there and what the main outcomes those employees might experience as a result of such extremity. The findings highlight that hotel employees accept extreme job duties during mega sporting events in their country (Egypt in this case) because of the following four motives: linking pay with performance, difficulty finding alternative jobs, proving occupational identity, and a sense of patriotism. The following are the answers in detail.

4.1 Why do hotel employees accept their extreme job duties during the host of mega sporting events?

All of the addressed hotel employees confirm that their job duties become extreme during mega sporting events in Egypt. They all asserted the necessity of accepting long working hours, submitting regular formal reports, being available 24/7, being physically present at least 12 hours a day and being responsible for any loss and/or negative impression foreign guests might express. Those five characteristics are included among the main characteristics specified by Hewlett and Luce (2006) for what qualifies as extreme work. Accordingly, hosting large sporting events in Egypt intensifies the duties of hotel employees, as they have to effectively host and then satisfy dozens if not hundreds of delegations, sports teams, fans, journalists, media personnel and both foreign and local guests.

When a mega sporting event is organised in Egypt, the hotel manager I work in requires me and my colleagues to be present at the hotel for at least 12 hours a day and be available 24/7. This happens mostly when the country hosts a team, not an individual tournament. Respondent 2

During any large sporting event, the hotel expects dozens if not hundreds of fans, journalists and other types of guests. Accordingly, my colleagues and I have to accept long working hours, physical presence at our hotel and continuous demands from our management and also guests. Respondent 12

When asking why they accept such extreme jobs with so few breaks, less social commitments and tough work schedules (Green, 2008; McCann *et al.*, 2008), the following four motives have been identified.

4.1.1 Linking pay with performance

Many hotels link pay with performance when hosting mega sporting events in Egypt. Moreover, and given the nature of the service they provide, some hotels across the developing nations of the world (Egypt in this case) grant higher assessment appraisals and developmental opportunities to those who spend more hours on the job, particularly during crisis periods or during different events in the countries they work in. Accordingly, the respondents have no option but to accept the long working hours and availability 24/7 in order to meet the demands of the dozens of fans, teams and guests that choose their hotel.

During mega sporting events, the administration of our hotel links financial rewards with long working hours and physical presence at the hotel. I have to accept such

temporary extreme duties to continue with my salary and receive financial rewards. Respondent 30

Once a large international sports competition starts in Egypt, the administration of the hotel becomes tough with starting work and leaving the workplace. They associate my financial rewards with accepting long working time at the hotel and the level of guest satisfaction. Respondent 21

4.1.2 Difficulty shifting careers or finding alternative jobs

In countries like Egypt, where ineffective governance decides the performance and maybe the future of public and private organisations, people often struggle to find jobs. Hence, employees in the hospitality and tourism sector struggle to find alternative jobs and mostly have to bear the burden of any negative shock this sector encounters.

I have to accept any job duties because it is rare to find a job in a different hotel and/or place given the severe economic situation Egypt is passing through. Respondent 1

Rejecting any intense job responsibilities or even criticising them might cause the administration to include me in any plan to downsize the staff. I have a family. Respondent 20

4.1.3 Proving occupational identity

Employees in developing countries prioritise work over other facets of life in an attempt to form what is called an “occupational identity”. Accordingly, employers accept working long hours and force their employees to do the same. When such countries host mega sporting events, it is common for some hotel employees to not only display a workaholic personality but also to go after the delegations, teams and journalists and encourage them to stay at their hotel.

During the period of hosting mega sporting events in Egypt, it is proper to prove my capabilities, effectiveness, and ability to work under pressure. I enjoy this also because of the connections I cultivate with many of my guests. Respondent 36

During any mega sport and non-sport event, I try my best to show my functional and personal commitment to any assigned set of work duties. It is the way I can show loyalty to my managers and the hotel I work in. Respondent 19

4.1.4 Subjecting themselves to power relations and a sense of patriotism

People who influence outcomes for others tend to possess power, and subsequently, they are able to grant rewards and deliver punishments. In the case of hotel employees in Egypt, they accept intensive work responsibilities during the hosting of mega sporting events because they fear being punished and/or fired. Some of the addressed employees consider hosting mega sporting events in their country as a moment they can show their sense of inclusion and feeling of patriotism towards their country. Accordingly, they accept the temporary extreme work duties to make their guests (including sports teams, media personnel, journalists, and fans) satisfied and hence present a good image of their country.

I know my status as a traditional employee, and I know the authority my managers hold. Better for me to accept any assigned task to continue in my position. Respondent 16

I accept any work-related duties during the time of the mega sporting events organised in my country to express my feeling of patriotism and affiliation to my country. I try to give a good image of myself, the hotel I work in, tourism in Egypt and the capabilities of Egyptians in order to convince the guests to revisit my country again. A simple way to attract more tourists/visitors and hence activate the economic status of the country.

Respondent 10

4.2 Outcomes of extremity of work duties due to mega-sporting events

4.2.1 Poor mental health of hotel employees

Hosting mega sport events in Egypt requires hotel employees to work at least 12 hours a day, submit regular formal reports, and be available 24/7, they encounter a massive change in their work conditions. Such sudden new conditions tend to result in employees displaying the symptoms of poor mental health. Poor mental health is often associated with the experiences of stress, psychological trauma, and continuous anxiety that negatively influences employee performance.

Many of my colleagues and I encounter a high level of work stress and anxiety during the periods of the mega sporting events in Egypt because of the intensive job duties we feel committed to during that time. Respondent 29

Because of my commitment to different responsibilities and my need to make both managers and guests happy, I constantly take sedatives and also pills for reducing high blood pressure during any sporting, arts, economic, environmental or political mega event in Egypt. I feel I am in slavery during such events. Respondent 11

4.2.2 Greater gender bias

During mega sporting events, hotel employees have to engage in extreme work duties that include being available to clients 24/7, working a 60-hour week, in addition to being responsible for losses and mentoring. However, this raises the question of how female hotel employees manage to balance their intensive job duties during such periods and their role as caregiver in the family. In normal times, female employees, especially in traditional societies such as Egypt, face difficulties guaranteeing a balance between their family obligations and work responsibilities. Accordingly, the intensity of extreme work raises concerns about its relevance for female hotel employees. One might think differently when considering a male hotel employee who holds an extreme job and leaves his wife to navigate home-related aspects and family responsibilities on her own. Consequently, females will bear the burden of that temporary extreme work even if they are staying at home as well.

As a married woman I can't work 12 hours a day and be physically present for such a long time at the hotel. Accordingly, my managers accuse me of being an unproductive employee. Respondent 6

Only male colleagues can respond to the extreme job conditions during the periods of organising global events in Egypt. However, the managers of the hotels mostly don't care about the family obligations of their female employees. Respondent 22

4.2.3 Increased cronyism

Accepting work in extreme conditions for long hours involves challenges for employees who are unable to exercise their social commitments and/or family obligations. Consequently, hotel employees, regardless of their gender and position, will consider adopting an exchange of mutual cronyism, in which both managers

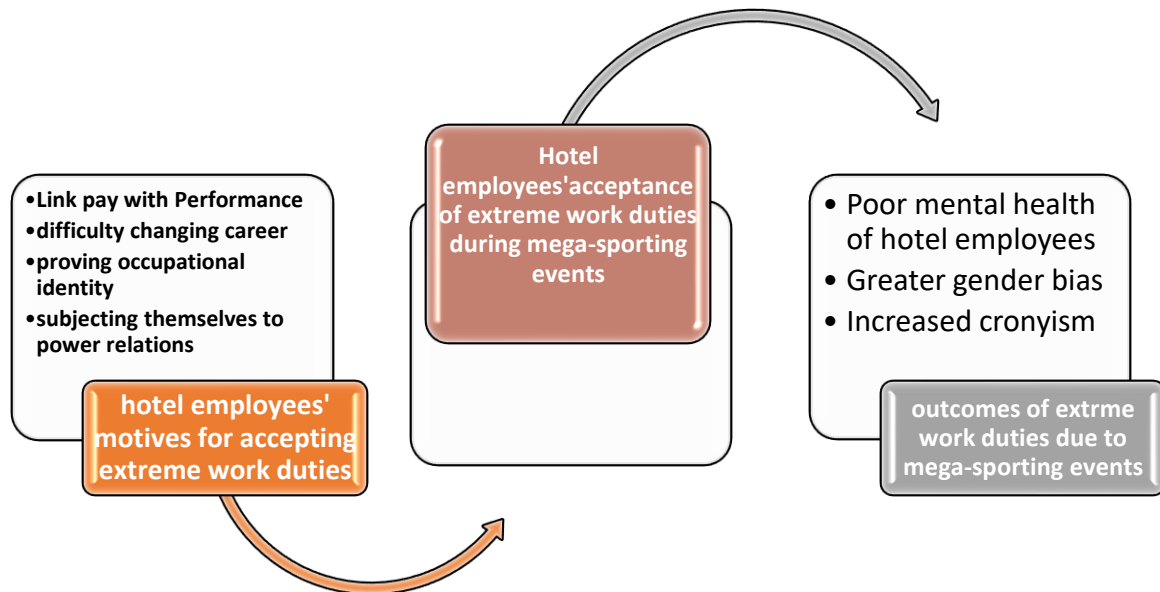
and subordinates tend to exchange benefits without paying attention to the interests of their organisation (their hotel in this case). Such cronyism spreads across developing nations. Accordingly, some hotel employees will tend to show deaf obedience in terms of work matters to their managers in return for a reduced workload and fewer work hours.

Unfortunately, some of my colleagues say nice words to our manager such as you are the best manager, you should be the owner not the manager of the hotel in order to convince him to exclude them from the long work hours. I don't have such a talent.
Respondent 9

My manager tends to assign intensive job duties to those who don't say nice words to him or provide him with gifts. The extreme job conditions are applicable for those who can't be cronies such as me. Respondent 26

The following figure summarises the main findings of the present study.

Figure 1. Hotel employees' motives for accepting extreme work duties due to mega-sporting events and the outcomes of that acceptance (composed by the authors).



5. Discussion

As previously mentioned, the objectives of the present study are to identify why hotel employees in the Egyptian context accept the extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many mega sporting events and what outcomes those employees experience as a result of their acceptance. "Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organisation of power" (Hawley, 1963; p. 422). Power appears in terms of the control one exercises over the lives and behaviour of others (Wrong, 1988). This can include changes in followers' behaviours, attitudes, cognitions, and needs, among others (French & Raven, 1959) and is also a basic component in social relationships (e.g., Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). Moreover, it includes an enforcing will one exercise over other entities (e.g., people, organisations, processes) (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). People who influence outcomes for others tend to possess power, and subsequently, they can grant rewards and deliver punishments (Keltner *et al.*, 2003; Simpson *et al.*, 2014). In the case of hotel employees in Egypt, they accept intensive work responsibilities during the hosting of mega sporting events because they fear being punished and/or fired. Some of the addressed employees consider hosting mega sporting events in their country as a moment they can show their sense of inclusion and feeling of patriotism towards their country. Accordingly, they accept temporary extreme work duties to satisfy their guests (including sports teams, media personnel, journalists, and fans) and hence present a good image of their country.

Furthermore, employees in developing countries (Egypt, in this case) prioritise work over other facets of life in an attempt to show their workaholic personalities (Watts, 2009). Accordingly, employers accept working long hours and force their employees to do the same (Perlow & Porter, 2009). Unfortunately, in some contexts, employees usually have no option but to obey their managers, otherwise, they risk being made redundant (Mousa, 2022). People in such countries get used to being abused in work contexts. Moreover, there is no space to discuss many of their employee rights (Mousa *et al.*, 2022). When such countries host mega sporting events, it is common for some hotel employees not only to display a workaholic personality but also to go after the delegations, teams, and journalists and encourage them to stay at their hotel.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The current study's findings offer several theoretical implications. The first implication relates to extending the boundaries of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) by showing its applicability in this specific context and also highlighting how contextual specificities extend it. The findings highlight that hotel employees accept the extreme job duties during mega sporting events in their country (Egypt in this case) because of the following four motives: linking pay with performance, difficulty in finding alternative jobs, proving occupational identity, and a sense of patriotism. Hence, the assertion by Cook and Emerson (1978) that exchanges among individuals are not always balanced gets further empirical proof in the under-researched Egyptian context. For the theorisation of social exchange in such a context, a key implication essentially is that the give-and-take principle guiding relationships among individuals (Blau, 1964) shifts to become a "give in order to survive" principle (Mousa *et al.*, 2022). This means accepting extreme work conditions, long working hours and being available to clients 24/7 during mega sporting events (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Cham *et al.*, 2021; Mousa *et al.*, 2023).

The study findings also offer implications for power relations and work environment (conditions) literature streams. Traditionally, power might involve a change in a follower's behaviour, cognitions, attitudes, and needs, among others (e.g., Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). However, in many contexts (especially in developing countries), power becomes a tool to exploit powerless individuals, e.g., employees (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023; Mousa *et al.*, 2024). According to social exchange theory, power relations is a major determinant of

continuous exchange in the workplace (Prendergast & Topel, 1996). However, given the lack of sociocultural rights in the hospitality and tourism sector in Egypt (Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2023), hotel managers who hold power might use their position to exert pressure on their employees to accept extreme jobs at a time when mega-sporting events are being held in the country.

Furthermore, and in line with both Mousa *et al.* (2023, 2024) the findings of the present study affirm that the more acceptance of extreme job duties hotel employees exercise during the time of hosting mega sporting events, the more mental health problems, gender bias challenges and cronyism activities they implement.

5.2 Practical implications

For hospitality sector managers, a key takeaway from our paper relates to providing the addressed employees with psychological counselling and workplace fun activities during the hosting of mega sporting events. This might help them to know how to deal with the extreme job duties they have and hence how to maintain their smiles when dealing with guests. Also, as hotel earnings tend to increase due to an increase in a number of guests (sports fans) when such events are organised. Hence, the hotel management should develop some kind of motivational reward and bonus policy for hospitality employees for their extreme work duties during these times. This will alleviate some of the negative emotions associated with increased work extremity due to the hosting of mega-sporting events. Further on, offering work flexibility is vital especially due to cultural norms prevalent in contexts such as Egypt. Offering some kind flexible work possibilities to hotel employees will ensure that they are able to take care of other responsibilities (especially familial) and continue with their careers as well. As hospitality sector work during mega sporting events involves working late hours, managers should consider offering some extra facilities to their employees especially such as transportation. Depending upon the organisational needs, should consider hiring temporary part time workers as well to meet high demand due to mega-sporting event. This would help in offsetting some of the challenges linked with cronyism. In addition, the hotel administrations should create a reward for the “good colleague”, the employee who receives the highest positive feedback from guests during a sporting mega event. This might encourage hotel employees to actively care about their guests and seek client satisfaction. The hotel administration might also collaborate with the ministries of tourism and sport in Egypt and develop a mechanism for granting hotel employees financial rewards during the periods of hosting such sporting events.

6. Limitations and future research directions

The current study has several limitations. First, our study focuses only on the perceptions of hotel employees who work in three departments (reservation, front desk, and events management). Consequently, the opinions and perspectives of their colleagues in other departments and the managers of those hotels are not incorporated in the analysis, which limits the generalisability of findings, as has been the case in similar prior studies (e.g., Mousa & Arslan, 2023). Despite this, the current study, being a pioneering one on this specific topic in such an under-researched context, has highlighted critical issues which can be explored further from the perspective of other employees and managers by future scholars. Moreover, the current paper focuses on the four-star hotels' employees in Cairo (Egyptian capital) while overlooking their counterparts in other hotels, particularly those located outside Cairo, which can be considered a limitation. However, it is logical to argue that if employees in capital working in relatively well-known hotels face these issues, such aspects' visibility will probably be higher in other hotels and cities. Finally, future researchers should try to study the influences of mega-sporting events on hotel employees in other contexts (other developing countries as well as developed Western countries) and see if their findings support our study or if some new aspects emerge from their research.

7. Conclusion

The authors of this paper have aimed to identify why hotel employees accept extreme job duties resulting from hosting too many sporting mega events in their country and what outcomes they experience as a result. The empirical data was based on semi-structured interviews with 36 hotel employees working in four 4-star hotels located in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. The findings showed that hosting mega sporting events (in Egypt, in this case) contributes to the extremity of work duties for hotel employees. Moreover, hotel employees accept such extreme job duties due to the following four motives: linking pay with performance, difficulty finding alternative jobs, proving their occupational identity, and being subject to patriotism.

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Table 1. Respondent profiles and interview information

#	Years of experience	Date of the interview	Duration of the interview (minutes)	Gender	Department
1	<5	04/05/2023	41	Male	Reservation
2	<5	04/05/2023	51	Male	Reservation
3	<5	04/05/2023	44	Male	Reservation
4	<5	11/05/2023	44	Male	Reservation
5	<5	11/05/2023	41	Male	Events management
6	<5	11/05/2023	51	Female	Frontline
7	5-10	18/05/2023	51	Female	Frontline
8	5-10	18/05/2023	50	Female	Frontline
9	5-10	18/05/2023	50	Male	Events management
10	5-10	06/06/2023	42	Male	Reservation
11	5-10	06/06/2023	41	Male	Reservation
12	5-10	06/06/2023	47	Male	Reservation
13	5-10	13/06/2023	51	Female	Frontline
14	5-10	13/06/2023	50	Male	Reservation

15	5-10	13/06/2023	44	Male	Reservation
16	5-10	20/06/2023	44	Male	Events management
17	5-10	20/06/2023	41	Male	Frontline
18	5-10	20/06/2023	41	Male	Frontline
19	5-10	04/07/2023	41	Male	Frontline
20	5-10	04/07/2023	41	Female	Frontline
21	5-10	04/07/2023	44	Male	Frontline
22	5-10	11/07/2023	42	Female	Frontline
23	5-10	11/07/2023	42	Male	Events management
24	5-10	11/07/2023	41	Male	Frontline
25	5-10	18/07/2023	41	Female	Frontline
26	5-10	18/07/2023	41	Male	Reservation
27	5-10	18/07/2023	44	Male	Reservation
28	5-10	01/08/2023	44	Male	Reservation
29	5-10	01/08/2023	44	Male	Reservation
30	5-10	01/08/2023	44	Male	Reservation
31	5-10	08/08/2023	50	Male	Reservation

32	5-10	08/08/2023	48	Male	Reservation
33	5-10	08/08/2023	51	Female	Frontline
34	5-10	22/08/2023	51	Female	Frontline
35	5-10	22/08/2023	49	Male	Reservation
36	5-10	22/08/2023	49	Male	Reservation