

1 Challenging the Olympic Model?

2 Expected Consumer Interest in the Enhanced Games

3

4 **Background:** The Enhanced Games challenge the traditional Olympic model by
 5 openly embracing technological and pharmacological performance enhancement.
 6 This study examines whether spectator interest in this novel event format differs
 7 from interest in the Olympic Games, with a particular focus on the role of
 8 perceived fairness. **Methods:** An online survey of German-speaking respondents
 9 ($n = 229$) assessed awareness, general interest, viewing intentions, and
 10 motivational factors related to both the Olympic Games and the Enhanced
 11 Games. **Results:** The findings show that the Olympic Games continue to generate
 12 higher levels of awareness, preference, and viewing intention than the Enhanced
 13 Games. While peak athletic performance motivates interest in both formats,
 14 fairness emerges as a key normative factor shaping spectator attitudes. The
 15 perceived importance of fair competition is negatively associated with interest in
 16 the Enhanced Games. **Conclusions:** Overall, the results suggest that the
 17 Enhanced Games are not yet perceived as a viable alternative to the Olympic
 18 Games. The study highlights ongoing tensions between the fascination with
 19 enhanced performance and established fairness norms in elite sport.

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21 **Keywords:** Olympic Games, The Enhanced Games, Spectator Interest, Fairness

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24 Introduction

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26 Fairness is a fundamental prerequisite for credible sporting competitions (Costa
 27 et al., 2025). In competition sports, fairness can be understood as sportive actions
 28 performed according to specific rules whilst being guided by the principle of justice
 29 (Pawlenka, 2005). Spectators expect sporting competitions to be based on fair and
 30 equal conditions and that success results from rule-compliant, honest performance,
 31 not from improper means or the principle of winning at all costs (Durá et al., 2020).
 32 Doping scandals, corruption, or controversial referee decisions can undermine
 33 spectators' trust in the fairness of competitions and significantly damage it, thereby
 34 negatively affecting associations and sports (Otto et al., 2021). The Enhanced
 35 Games (TEG) thus see themselves as a transparent, scientifically monitored
 36 alternative to traditional elite sports. TEG presents itself as a futuristic project that
 37 aims to replace the allegedly outdated ideals and traditions of the Olympics with a
 38 techno-scientifically driven mega-event (Ekdahl & Krieger, 2024). At the Olympic
 39 Games, competitions serve to compare natural abilities within a historically
 40 developed value system (Koenigstorfer & Preuss, 2018). TEG is based on the idea
 41 that human performance can be enhanced through technology, pharmaceuticals, and
 42 conventional methods and optimization (Ekdahl & Krieger, 2024, Turnock, 2024).
 43 Therefore, the two events differ in the values they represent and seem to be at odds
 44 (Möller, 2025), and can be seen as contrapositives (Richardson, 2024). The Olympic
 45 Games are a global communal experience (Short, 2008), pointing towards the
 46 ancient harmony of mind and body. TEG primarily aims to fascinate through
 47 extreme performance framed as the full potential of human ability, whilst also

1 promoting fairness and opportunities to protect the individual's right to become
 2 extraordinary (Møller, 2025).

3 The fascination with top athletic performances is an essential part of spectator
 4 interest. People feel admiration when athletes exceed their physical and mental
 5 limits or set new records. Spectators experience moments when human performance
 6 is almost ideally realized, moments when something succeeds exactly as it should,
 7 and the athletic ideal is achieved. These moments also generate emotions that
 8 remain in the collective memory of the sporting world (Smith, 2020). Major
 9 international sporting events are defining stages for national identification. The
 10 collective emotionality that arises there allows spectators to develop a strong sense
 11 of connection to their own country. The decisive factors here are their level of
 12 emotional involvement in the sporting events and the intensity of their personal
 13 interest in the sport (Mutz & Gerke, 2018). The successes of their own nation
 14 awaken a strong sense of pride in many people and foster shared experiences that
 15 contribute to an understanding of collective unity (Hallmann et al., 2013). Today,
 16 major sporting events are much more than just competitions; they function as
 17 globally staged experiences in which media, commerce, and politics are closely
 18 intertwined. Through spectacular staging and mass media coverage, they generate
 19 cultural significance, create economic opportunities, and influence urban and social
 20 developments (Horne, 2015). The media's framing of athletes and events is
 21 influenced by various factors, including the media's own interests, the nature of the
 22 event, and the audience's expectations (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). In recent years, the
 23 Olympic Games have sought to attract a younger audience (Falcao et al., 2021;
 24 Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018), but now seem to have to compete with this new event
 25 format for spectators' attention (Møller, 2025). From a sociological perspective, the
 26 Olympic Games and TEG constitute competing legitimacy regimes, with the former
 27 grounded in fairness norms and traditional sporting values, and the latter oriented
 28 toward techno-scientific rationality and performance optimization. This fundamental
 29 tension structures how spectators evaluate and accept both event formats. This study
 30 aims to assess whether young adult spectators' interest in the Olympic Games, a
 31 well-established event, differs from that in the new TEG format by answering the
 32 following research question:

33

- 34 • To what extent does viewer interest in the Enhanced Games differ from
 35 viewer interest in the Olympic Games, and which factors influence audience
 36 acceptance of both events?

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38 The paper is structured as follows: After this Introduction, which outlined the
 39 paper's focus on spectators' interest in the Olympic Games versus TEG, the
 40 Materials and Methods section describes the empirical research design, including
 41 the survey methodology, participant recruitment, and data collection. The Results
 42 present key findings on consumer interest, and the discussion analyzes these
 43 findings in relation to previous research, highlighting the implications. Finally, the
 44 Conclusion summarizes key insights, provides recommendations for stakeholders,
 45 and suggests areas for future research to monitor the long-term impact of formats
 46 such as TEG.

1 **Materials and Methods**

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3 The study employs a direct primary empirical research design that focuses on
 4 consumers' perspectives on the Olympic Games and TEG. The questionnaire was
 5 available in the German language, tested for clarity of wording and logical structure
 6 beforehand, and revised accordingly. The participant's recruitment was conducted
 7 using the snowball sampling method, and no eligibility criteria were applied. The
 8 survey period was from October 23rd to November 23rd, 2025, and was accessible
 9 via the SoSci Survey online platform. Where possible and appropriate, a five-point
 10 Likert scale with (1) disagreement/ unlikely and (5) agreement/ likely was used to
 11 answer the questions. These scales have been widely used since they best reflect the
 12 participants' perspectives (Li et al., 2008; Revilla et al., 2014). The questionnaire
 13 was structured as follows (Table 1). The first section included socio-demographic
 14 variables such as age, gender, and income, as well as personal engagement in sports,
 15 both active and passive. The following section focused on participants' interest in
 16 the Olympic Games/TEG by asking questions such as "How interested are you in
 17 the Summer Olympics/ TEG in general?" or "How likely are you to watch the next
 18 Summer Olympics/ TEG?" The following questions covered the aspects that would
 19 most motivate respondents to follow the Olympic Games or TEG. For both events,
 20 the questions were asked separately. Furthermore, participants had to answer
 21 questions that aimed to assess the importance of fairness. "When watching sports,
 22 how important would the following aspect be to you: Fair competition under
 23 conditions that are as equal as possible"? or "What is your opinion on the statement:
 24 Creating a level playing field without any prohibitions"? If necessary, brief
 25 explanations were provided before the questions were asked to ensure that all
 26 participants had a similar understanding of the topic.

27

28 **Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire and brief description of items**

Item	Description	Level of Scale
Demographics	Age, gender, level of education and income	Nominal and interval
Personal immersion	General interest sports events	Ordinal
Olympic Games vs The Enhanced games	General interest in the events and likelihood of watching subsequent/ first holding of either of the events	Ordinal
Motivation for watching	Tradition, peak performances, fairness	Ordinal

29 The data were initially analyzed descriptively, and Spearman rank correlations
 30 were computed to assess associations. Group differences were calculated using a t-
 31 test. The size of the effect is determined using the r-value and classified according
 32 to Cohen (2013). The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29.0.2.

33

34 **Results**

35 A total of 320 questionnaires were completed. After removing questionnaires
 36 due to missing data, 229 could ultimately be used for the evaluation.

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1 *Participants*

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3 Regarding gender distribution, 61.1% of participants identified as male (n = 4 140), 37.1% as female (n = 85), and 1.7% as diverse (n = 4). The sample was 5 predominantly young: 67.2% of respondents (n = 154) were between 18 and 29 6 years of age, reflecting the study's focus on young adult spectators, a group often 7 discussed as increasingly critical toward traditional mega-sport events. Smaller 8 proportions were represented in older age groups. In terms of educational 9 background, the sample showed a relatively high level of formal education. 45.4% 10 of participants (n = 104) reported holding a high school diploma, while 37.5% (n = 11 86) had completed a university degree. With respect to monthly net income, the 12 largest share of respondents (55.0%, n = 126) reported an income between €2,000 13 and €2,999, indicating a predominantly middle-income sample. Participants also 14 reported varying levels of engagement with sport. More than half of the respondents 15 (55.5%, n = 127) indicated that they were often or very often physically active, 16 suggesting a comparatively sport-involved sample. In addition, general 17 consumption of major sporting events differed across respondents: while 9.6% (n = 18 22) reported never following major sporting events and 24.0% (n = 55) doing so 19 only rarely, 26.2% (n = 72) indicated occasional engagement, and 3.3% (n = 10) 20 reported very frequent consumption of major sporting events. Overall, the sample 21 represents a young, relatively well-educated, and moderately to highly sport-affine 22 group of respondents, providing a suitable basis for exploring perceptions of 23 traditional and alternative elite sport event formats such as the Olympic Games and 24 the Enhanced Games.

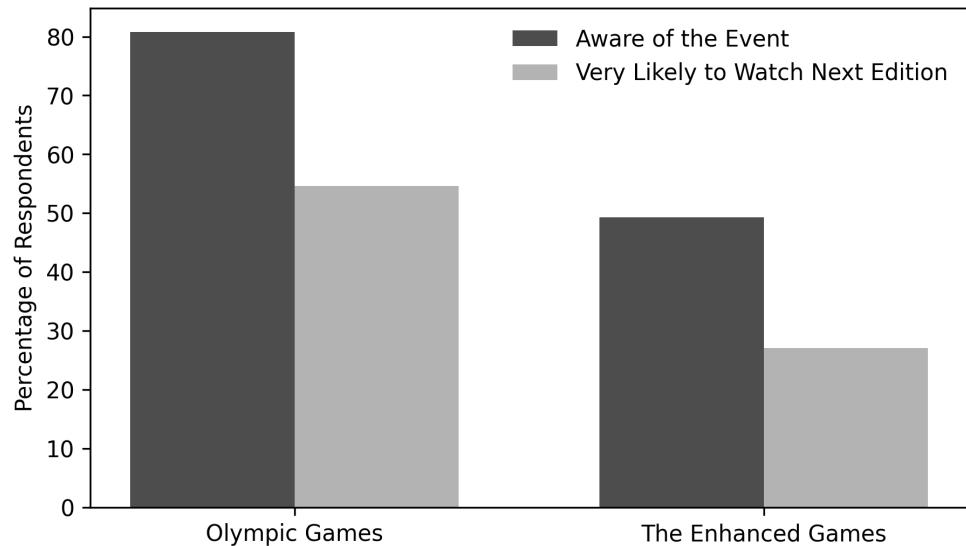
25
26 *Spectators' interest in the Olympic Games and TEG*

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28 Regarding the Olympic Games, 80.8% (n=185) reported having already been 29 watching them. In general, 25.7% (n=59) have little to no interest, 24.0% (n=55) are 30 neutral, and 30.5% (n=93) have a great deal of interest. In terms of the upcoming 31 Olympic Summer Games, 32.2% (n=74) (very) unlikely, and 54.6% (n=125) 32 consider it (very) likely that they would follow the subsequent holding.

33 Regarding TEG, the picture is balanced in terms of awareness: 49.3% (n=113) 34 were already familiar with them. A difference between the genders can be observed. 35 56.4% (n=79) of male participants have heard of the event, compared with 38.8% 36 (n=33) of female participants. In terms of general interest, 52.8% (n=121) have little 37 to no interest, and 29.9% (n=68) are (very) interested. Following the first holding of 38 TEG is for 55.9% (n=128) (very) unlikely, and for 27.1% (n=62) (very) likely. For 39 the Olympic Games, there exists a difference in the amount of sport the participants 40 engage in. For TEG, this effect was not visible.

1 **Figure 1. Awareness of the Olympic Games and the Enhanced Games and**
 2 **respondents' likelihood of watching the next (or first) edition (in %)**



3
 4 Viewer interest in the Olympic Games ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.19$) was notably
 5 higher than interest in TEG ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.26$). Similarly, the likelihood of
 6 following the Olympic Games ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.40$) exceeded that of TEG ($M =$
 7 2.46 , $SD = 1.28$).

8
 9 *Reasons for watching and event preference*

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 11 For both events, peak performances were cited as the main reason to watch.
 12 65.9% (n=151) chose this aspect regarding the Olympic Games, and 52.8% (n=121)
 13 for TEG. For the Olympic Games, national identification (59.0%, n=135),
 14 entertainment (39.7%, n=91), and the importance of individual athletes (36.2%,
 15 n=83) were subsequent reasons. For TEG symbolism (49.8%, n=114) and
 16 entertainment (36.2%, n=83) are the most relevant aspects. In general, fairness
 17 during events is regarded as (very) important by 83.5% of respondents (n=191). The
 18 statement "Creating a level playing field by not imposing any bans" is
 19 (firmly)rejected by 47.2% (n=108), whilst 30.6% (n=70) are neutral and 22.3%
 20 (n=51) (strongly) approve it. To examine whether viewer interest differs according
 21 to ethical attitudes toward performance enhancement, independent-samples *t*-tests
 22 were conducted comparing respondents with low versus high ethical objection. As
 23 shown in Table 2, no significant differences emerged between the two groups with
 24 regard to interest in TEG. Participants with low ethical objection ($M = 2.55$, $SD =$
 25 1.29) and those with high ethical objection ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.21$) reported nearly
 26 identical levels of interest. Similarly, the likelihood of following TEG did not differ
 27 significantly between respondents with low ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.29$) and high ethical
 28 objection ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.25$), although a non-significant trend toward higher
 29 viewing intention among ethically critical respondents was observed. In contrast,
 30 substantial group differences were found for the Olympic Games. Participants with
 31 high ethical objection expressed significantly greater interest in the Olympic Games
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($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.98$) than those with low ethical objection ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.16$; $p < .001$). A similar pattern emerged for the likelihood of following the Olympic Games, with ethically critical respondents reporting markedly higher viewing intention ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.12$) compared to respondents with low ethical objection ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.37$; $p < .001$).

6

7 **Table 2.** *Group Differences in Viewer Interest by Ethical Attitudes toward Performance
8 Enhancement*

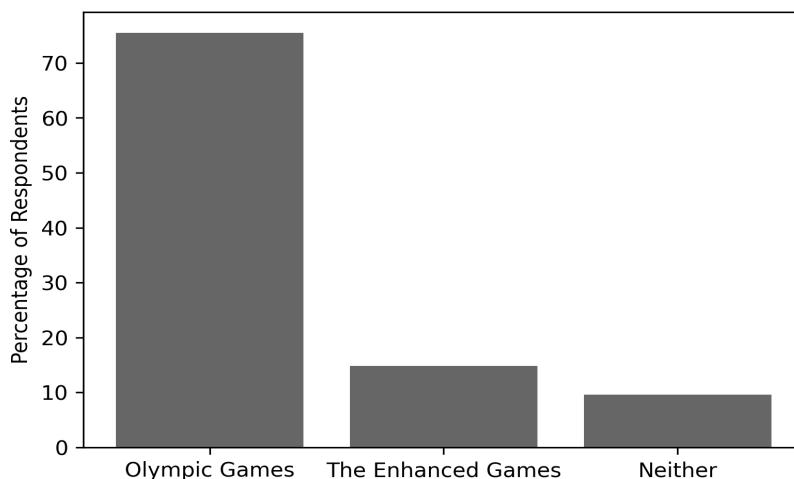
Variable	Low Ethical Objection (M , SD)	High Ethical Objection (M , SD)	p
Interest in the Enhanced Games	2.55 (1.29)	2.57 (1.21)	.940
Likelihood of Following the Enhanced Games	2.33 (1.29)	2.62 (1.25)	.096
Interest in the Olympic Games	2.86 (1.16)	3.82 (0.98)	< .001
Likelihood of Following the Olympic Games	2.82 (1.37)	4.02 (1.12)	< .001

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10 When asked which event they would prefer to attend, 75.5% ($n=173$) would
11 like to attend the Olympic Games, while 14.8% ($n=34$) prefer TEG, and 9.6%
12 ($n=22$) do not want to attend either event. Figure 2 illustrates this finding. Further,
13 the results show that the probability of watching the Olympic Games is positively
14 associated with the likelihood of watching TEG ($\rho = .231$, $p < .001$).

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16 **Figure 2.** *Preference for attending one of the sports events among respondents (in %)*



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18 Participants with high sport affinity reported significantly greater interest in the
19 Enhanced Games ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.25$) compared to participants with low sport
20 affinity ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.27$; $p < .05$). Similarly, respondents with high sport
21 affinity indicated a significantly higher likelihood of following the Enhanced Games
22 ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.26$) than those with low sport affinity ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.29$; $p <$
23 $.05$). In contrast, no significant differences by sport affinity were found for the
24 Olympic Games. Interest in the Olympic Games was comparable between

1 participants with low ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.19$) and high sport affinity ($M = 3.26$, SD
 2 = 1.18 ; $p = .970$). Likewise, the likelihood of following the Olympic Games did not
 3 differ significantly between respondents with low ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.40$) and high
 4 sport affinity ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.39$; $p = .672$).

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7 Discussion

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9 This study aimed to assess the potential spectators' interest in TEG compared
 10 to the Olympic Games. Since more than two-thirds of this study's participants are
 11 between 18 and 29 years old, the results provide valuable insights into the
 12 perspectives of this age group, which also appears to have a waning interest in the
 13 Olympic Games (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). According to the results of this study,
 14 there seems to be a medium interest in the Olympic Games since only around half
 15 of the participants show a (rather) high interest. This result appears to support the
 16 reduced interest among younger spectators in the Olympic Games (Wheaton &
 17 Thorpe, 2018). For TEG, there seems to be even less interest, as fewer than one-
 18 third of participants express (relatively) high interest in following the games. The
 19 Olympic Games are a global mega-event that is embedded in modern sports culture,
 20 with high media visibility, symbolic and historical roots, and therefore is deeply
 21 embedded in processes of media publicity, nation-building, and urban development.
 22 Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that, in the present sample, they are
 23 significantly ahead of TEG in both actual viewing and future viewing willingness.
 24 More than two-thirds of the respondents say they are somewhat or definitely more
 25 interested in the Olympic Games. At the same time, only 12.2% are slightly or
 26 definitely more interested in TEG. If respondents had to choose only one event
 27 hypothetically, the difference becomes even greater. 75.5% would choose the
 28 Olympic Games. The results indicate that TEG, as a deliberate counter-concept to
 29 the Olympic movement, is not yet perceived by spectators as a fully-fledged
 30 alternative. From a legitimacy perspective, these findings suggest that novelty alone
 31 is insufficient to generate sustained spectator support in elite sport. While the
 32 Enhanced Games attract attention by challenging established conventions,
 33 legitimacy in sport is not primarily derived from innovation but from historically
 34 embedded norms, symbols, and institutions. The Olympic Games function as a
 35 taken-for-granted reference point against which alternative formats are evaluated,
 36 providing spectators with a familiar framework of meaning and credibility. In this
 37 sense, the Enhanced Games operate as a normative provocation rather than as an
 38 accepted substitute, highlighting the difficulty of translating disruption into
 39 legitimacy in the absence of widely shared value foundations. However, TEG was
 40 known to only around half of the participants; therefore, if media coverage around
 41 TEG increases in the future as the first holding approaches, awareness of the event
 42 could rise, which could also lead to greater interest among spectators.

43 Top athletic performances are identified both theoretically as a key driver of
 44 viewer interest (Smith, 2020) and are also reflected in this study's results. Two-thirds
 45 of respondents cite top performances as the primary motivating factor for following
 46 the Olympic Games, and more than half cite this factor for TEG. This shows that

1 fascination with performance transcends formats. At the same time, the differences
2 show that, for a larger proportion of respondents, the Olympic Games represent the
3 preferred setting in which peak athletic performance is perceived as particularly
4 significant. The Olympic Games are perceived as a place where the athletic ideal is
5 realized (Smith, 2020). This corresponds to the significance of records and moments
6 of success, as well as the values and meaning represented by Olympism. The high
7 importance of fairness is particularly striking: 83.4% of respondents rate fair
8 competition under conditions that are as equal as possible as (very) important, and
9 there is a negative correlation between the importance of fairness and interest in
10 TEG, suggesting that the more important a fair contest is to respondents, the less
11 interest they have in TEG. Even though the effect sizes were weak, these can still
12 be regarded as meaningful in an exploratory context. Furthermore, those findings
13 are consistent with the media's portrayal of TEG as a format that explicitly
14 undermines the traditional concept of fairness and the ideal of naturalness
15 (Richardson, 2024). Fairness is not just an abstract rule requirement, but a central
16 component of the appeal of major sporting events. The enhanced format thus finds
17 itself in a field of tension. Its programmatic departure from classic fairness norms
18 attracts attention but also seems to limit its ability to connect with the central
19 expectations of many viewers. Major sporting events in the digital age increasingly
20 function as staged experience spaces in which media, commerce, and politics are
21 closely intertwined (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Lewis & Weaver, 2015). Show
22 elements, media frames, and narrative embeddings contribute significantly to the
23 appeal of mega-events. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether and how consumer
24 interest in TEG will change after the event's first holding. This will then allow
25 assessment of whether sports need to be divided into doping-entertainment and
26 serious sports (Møller, 2025).

27 Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that spectator interest in elite
28 sport is shaped by the interaction of performance, fairness, and legitimacy rather
29 than by any single factor in isolation. While fascination with peak performance
30 remains a fundamental driver of attention, it is the perceived fairness of competition
31 that anchors performance within a broader framework of meaning and credibility.
32 The Olympic Games benefit from this alignment, as athletic excellence is embedded
33 in widely shared norms that confer legitimacy and foster emotional investment. In
34 contrast, the Enhanced Games challenge these normative foundations by redefining
35 the conditions under which performance is achieved, thereby complicating their
36 legitimacy in the eyes of spectators. As a result, enhanced performance may
37 generate curiosity and debate, but without normative alignment, it struggles to
38 translate into sustained acceptance and support.

39 *Limitations*

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41 There are some limitations to consider when interpreting and drawing
42 conclusions from these results. First, the results are primarily limited to the German-
43 speaking, young, and highly educated context. This could lead to an
44 overrepresentation of respondents who already hold strong normative views about
45 fairness and elite sport, potentially inflating the observed importance of fairness-
46

1 related considerations. Since sports cultures vary internationally, with different
 2 doping-related discourses, other experiences of mega-events, or a stronger focus on
 3 technology and performance, assessments of TEG may differ. A second point
 4 concerns the temporal dimension. Therefore, the transferability of the results is
 5 limited. The survey was conducted at a time when TEG had been announced but
 6 had not yet been experienced. Many assessments, therefore, refer to media reports,
 7 self-presentations by the organizers, or intuitive considerations. Attitudes may
 8 change after TEG have actually taken place, depending on media coverage,
 9 scandals, or athletes' performances. Third, although established Likert-type scales
 10 were used, complex constructs such as fairness perceptions, legitimacy, and ethical
 11 acceptance were necessarily simplified. The fairness-related items capture general
 12 attitudes toward equal competition and rule enforcement but do not fully reflect the
 13 multidimensional nature of fairness in sport, which may include distributive justice,
 14 procedural fairness, and moral legitimacy. Finally, responses related to doping,
 15 fairness, and ethical evaluation may have been influenced by social desirability bias.
 16 Given the strong normative condemnation of doping in many sport cultures,
 17 respondents may have overstated their commitment to fairness norms or understated
 18 their curiosity toward enhanced performance formats. This bias could partially
 19 explain the strong support for the Olympic Games observed in the data. Future
 20 studies should take these limitations into account. Beyond these limitations, the
 21 results of this study highlighted aspects that sports federations and other
 22 organizations should consider to prepare for potential upcoming changes in the
 23 world of sporting events.

24

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26 Conclusion

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28 This study provides valuable insights into the potential spectators' interest in
 29 TEG compared to the Olympic Games. In general, fairness seems highly relevant to
 30 spectator interest. Interestingly, this is one of the reasons TEG promotes as a core
 31 element of the new event format. However, in the end, the spectators' understanding
 32 of fairness will determine whether the event becomes an established counterproposal.
 33 The tension among the Olympic ideal, media reality, and the enhanced format opens
 34 new perspectives. The conflict surrounding TEG illustrates how the markets
 35 surrounding sports events, ethics, and public opinion are being rebalanced in global
 36 sports. However, TEG currently fails to attract broad spectator interest not because
 37 of a lack of fascination with peak performance, but because it conflicts with deeply
 38 entrenched fairness norms that continue to underpin the legitimacy of the Olympic
 39 Games.

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