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Stakeholder reflections of the tourism and nation-branding legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup for South Africa

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Abstract

Over the past decade there has been a growing awareness of the significant impact that hosting mega sport events can have on a nation’s brand. This paper discusses the context of nation-branding as a tourism legacy and the role of mega sport events in generating a tourism and nation-branding legacy in relation to the 2010 FIFA World Cup held in South Africa. A nation brand is not owned or controlled by a single organisation, but rather jointly developed and delivered by a network of public and private sector organisations. A number of event and brand stakeholders play a role in co-creating the imagery portrayed during a mega sport event. The examination of stakeholder perceptions was therefore identified as an important research area. This paper discusses the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 2010 event and destination stakeholders from national and regional South African Government departments that detail their perceptions, experiences and reflections of the tourism and branding legacies for the host nation. Stakeholders specialising in event management, tourism, operations and communications reflect on the branding and exposure for the nation achieved as a result of the event and the degree to which this was coordinated and co-created between various stakeholders. Insights are also given as to the degree to which the branding gains achieved during the event have been leveraged post 2010. The paper concludes with an assessment of the degree to which the branding opportunity translated into a tourism legacy for the nation.

Key words: Nation-branding, mega sport event, legacy, 2010 FIFA World Cup, stakeholders.

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Introduction

The first ever FIFA World Cup on African soil was awarded to South Africa, and took place from 11 June to 11 July 2010. Despite the country’s publicised problems, such as rising crime rates, high unemployment, a lack of access to basic services such as housing and education, and a high HIV infection rate (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; Bob, Cornelissen & Swart, 2010), the hosting of the 2010 World Cup symbolised hope for South Africa. Crucially it became a chance to prove that this developing nation could host an event of this magnitude as efficiently as the developed economies who had hosted the previous editions of the event, such as Germany in 2006 and Korea and Japan in 2002. Although South Africa had hosted other mega sport events, such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Nations Cup (football) and the 2003 Cricket World Cup,
the 2010 FIFA World Cup represented by far the largest sport event to be hosted by the nation.

One of the principal issues for all concerned with the organisation of the 2010 event was that of legacy. An important aspect of the legacy was the long-term impact of the event on the actual nation brand of South Africa. Indeed, the 2010 Local Organising Committee made it clear that the vision for the event, and one of its main objectives, was to change the global perceptions of South Africa and the African continent (Jordaan, 2011). Not only was it important to attract short-term event visitors, but also that these visitors left with a revised (positive) impression of the nation and that the nation benefited long after the event, through increased tourism and investment.

A study of nation brand perceptions of South Africa conducted during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Knott, Swart, Turco & Bob, 2010) confirmed this need by showing that there were limited clear perceptions of South Africa’s nation brand. In addition, heightened media attention on the nation in the lead up to the mega sport event had focused on many negative aspects such as inflation, crime, xenophobic riots (Tomlinson, Bass & Pillay, 2009), casting doubt over the country’s ability to successfully and safely host the event. The 2010 FIFA World Cup therefore presented a platform for the nation to be showcased to the largest global television audience for any single-sport event ever, creating an opportunity to dispel common stereotypes about Africa and dispel Afro-pessimism (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; Tomlinson et al., 2009).

While the sentiment within the nation was that the event was a resounding marketing success (Cape Town Tourism, 2010), there has been little empirical evidence of the impact and legacy of the event on the nation brand. This paper therefore sets out to discuss the emergence of nation-branding, especially in the context of tourism legacies to be derived from the hosting of a mega sport event.

**Nation Branding**

In the struggle for competitive advantage, national reputation or ‘nation branding’ is becoming more and more significant as countries compete for the attention, respect and trust of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, media and governments (Anholt, 2007). However, the relationship between branding and places, such as nations and cities, is not always well understood (Morgan, Pritchard& Pride, 2010). According to Govers and Go (2009), place branding refers to branding and building brand equity in relation to national, regional and/or local (city) identity. They further explain that place branding is a representation of identity, building a favourable internal (with those who deliver the experience) and external (with visitors) image leading to brand satisfaction and loyalty; name awareness; perceived quality; and favourable associations.
Keller (2008) adds that an important ‘building block’ of a brand and a source of brand equity is brand image. Brand image refers to “the way people think about a brand abstractly, rather than what they think the brand actually does” (Keller, 2008, p.65). Brand image thus refers to the more intangible aspects of a brand that represent associations formed directly through customer experiences or indirectly through advertising, word of mouth, or other sources of information. Keller (2008, p.67) concludes that the challenge for marketers is to create “strong, favourable and unique” brand associations.

Applying this understanding to a country leads to the definition of a nation’s brand image as: the sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a nation (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2003; Govers & Go, 2009). Brand image is therefore a “subjective interpretation of reality” made by the tourist (Govers & Go, 2009, p.18). Kotler and Gertner (2002) explain the fact that most country images are, in the main, stereotypes and extreme simplifications of the reality and therefore are not necessarily accurate. They might be dated, based on exceptions rather than on patterns, on impressions rather than on facts, but are nonetheless pervasive.

In view of the importance of such impressions, the application of branding techniques to enhance a nation’s image or reputation is increasing. Anholt (2003) proposes six basic channels or areas of activity through which countries communicate with the world and thus build their image: tourism promotion (e.g. the efforts of tourism promotion bodies as well as tourists’ own first-hand experience of visiting a country); exports of products and services / brands; government policy (i.e. foreign policy as well as domestic policy and how this is portrayed in the media); investment (i.e. how the country attracts inward investment and recruits foreign talent/ skills); culture and heritage (i.e. music, art, and sport); and the people of a country (i.e. their behaviour, high profile leaders, media, sport stars and the general population).

South Africa faces branding challenges similar to most developing nations, given the unfamiliarity of its brand and also having potentially incorrect, out-dated or stereotyped associations (Anholt, 2007). The ‘Brand Africa’/ continent brand effect also results in all African nations being associated with the same attributes (Anholt, 2007). For “Brand Africa”, these tend to include all of the negative problems associated with the continent, such as crime, civil-war, famine, disease and corruption. An additional challenge is that country images can be long-lasting and difficult to change and may require a significant event or experience to alter (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Anholt 2006).

Mega sport events have become increasingly important in the contemporary era, and have become an object of policy for an increasing number of nations in the world, most notably “as a means to gain international visibility in some ways”
Mega sport events represent a “unique publicity platform and opportunity for place marketing” (Essex & Chalkley, 1998, p.201), or, as Berkowitz, Germano, Gomez and Schafe (2007) put it, “a great branding opportunity” for nations (p.164). The high media profile of mega sport events such as the FIFA World Cup can be harnessed to increase the awareness, prominence and standing of places and, according to several authors (Florek & Insch, 2011; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Higham & Hinch, 2009), serve as an agent of change in terms of imagery and place meaning. For example, the Olympic Games have long been used to serve the imaging or re-imaging of places (Higham & Hinch 2009). Florek and Insch (2011) cite the case of Sydney and the Olympic Games of 2000 that accelerated the awareness of Australia as a destination by up to ten years while they also cite the case of Germany’s image being “softened and boosted” through the hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

Methodology

While it is agreed that the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa represented a unique platform and opportunity for creating and/or managing the host nation’s brand, it was unclear exactly what this impact and legacy would be. In order to assess perceptions and experiences from individuals and organisations directly involved in the event management and implementation of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, a qualitative approach was adopted. Specifically, key informant interviews were conducted to support the use of secondary literature in the area. To ensure validity and credibility of the data, all interviews were recorded and later transcribed with full permission of the interviewees. Key informants are deemed to be resource persons as a result of information and experience they have in relation to a specific topic.

The criteria used to purposively select the informants included targeting government officials and related public sector organisations integrally involved in organising the World Cup in Cape Town. Their core mandate also had to be sport or tourism. As a result all three tiers of government representatives were included in the study as well as the Organising Committee, Cape Town Tourism and South African Tourism. The question themes chosen were pre-determined by the research team and included important aspects such as tournament organisation, legacy and branding (amongst others). Although guided by a set of questions or themes to cover, the interviews were semi-structured and therefore permitted the interviewer to probe issues raised. As the key informants were purposively chosen to represent the different levels of government departments involved in the management and implementation of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa each interview covered the same set of themes yet were allowed to develop according to the responses.
Representatives interviewed from the Organising Committee (OC) included the Head of the Office of the CEO and of the Legacy Unit of the OC. The Chief Director: Client Support, Liaison, Events and Facilities from Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) was interviewed as was the 2010 Coordinator from the Department of the Premier, Western Cape Provincial Government (WCPG). In the City of Cape Town (CoCT) the Director of Operations, Manager 2010 World Cup Integration (Financial Planning and Control), Director of the 2010 Technical Team and the Director for Communications and the official spokesperson for the 2010 World Cup for the City were interviewed. From Cape Town Tourism (CTT), the Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup was interviewed as was the Global Manager, Events Platform for South African Tourism (SAT).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted using an interview schedule as a guideline. Although these interviews covered many diverse aspects of event management, the focus of this paper is on the questions that related to the areas of branding, tourism and legacy, as well as the relationship between stakeholders in this regard. It is acknowledged that future studies could include stakeholders from civil society and organised labour. Due to budget constraints it was felt that the stakeholders identified were representative and valid for purposes of this particular study.

Results and Discussion
The results are presented according to several themes that emerged in relation to the nation branding and tourism legacy.

Mega sport events and branding opportunities
The FIFA OC for South Africa 2010 clearly stated that re-branding or repositioning the nation was one of their five key strategic areas. The CEO of the FIFA OC described this opportunity as “an image make-over for the country”. The CEO was delighted with the exposure that the country received as a result of the tournament, with examples of the media coverage of the event including: 700 million people watching the final and the final draw alone gathered 206 television crew from all over the world. Regarding the social media impact of the event, he considered the first day of the World Cup “bigger than the inauguration of Barack Obama” and in terms of social media coverage, “the biggest event in history”.

The CEO alluded to the positive impact of the media coverage of the event: “on a daily basis, if you switched on Sky and BBC and CNN and Aljazeera and others, it was about Cape Town, it was about South Africa, it was about the World Cup. Now if you think, what it would cost Cape Town to have 30 days, everyday, focus on your city and nation and the message is positive. What is the
sum total of that? And what will it cost you if you want to achieve that through a marketing or branding plan?"

The impact was also positive in that the media reached new markets (in terms of tourism and trade and investment) for the nation, such as China, Korea and South America. This impact was described by the CEO of the OC as “beyond all expectations”, with “many of these people seeing the country for the first time. Now there is much knowledge and understanding of the whole country.”

Another key aim for certain stakeholders was to promote South Africa as a travel destination using the World Cup as a platform to do that. The opportunity that the event offered the country is explained by the Global Manager - Events Platform, SAT, as the ability of mega sport events to create a “captive audience” and therefore to use the event to position South Africa as a travel destination. Besides the new markets already mentioned, many of the countries that participated in the World Cup were seen as “key markets for South African tourism” (Global Manager - Events Platform, SAT).

Images, messages and perceptions
Recognising the opportunity created by the event, it is necessary to look at what types of images and messages were generated. Some of the key images seen by television viewers across the world as well as visitors to the nation are described by the CEO, FIFA OC as: “the wonderful (Table) mountain in the background”; “people celebrating in the street, people walking, people happy, people smiling”. It appears the images of the South African people were considered a key feature of the media coverage. This is especially important, as traditional destination marketing for South Africa had tended to focus on wildlife and scenery. This is highlighted by the comment from 2010 Coordinator, Department of the Premier, WCPG, that “what the World Cup did was to show the rest of the world that we had much more than just our natural attributes.” Interestingly, South African Tourism designed their World Cup campaigns to highlight the “friendly side of South Africa” (Global Manager - Events Platform, SAT). Previously, the national tourism promotion organisation believed there was a perception that the country was considered to be “very unfriendly and unwelcoming”, which they attributed to the Apartheid past.

Redressing the media focus and perceptions of crime was also a notable factor. This was a topic mentioned by 2010 Coordinator, Department of the Premier, WCPG, as “the biggest negative aspect noted by visitors before the World Cup”. The 2010 Co-ordinator further elaborated that “safety and security and crowd control as well as individual safety and security” was a prominent theme of media messages. As a result of successful event management and the positive media coverage gained in this area, the country was now viewed as a place where “you won’t necessarily get stabbed when you’re walking down the road”
(Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT). “After the World Cup, no one talked about crime” declared the CEO, 2010 FIFA OC, continuing: “Everyone said this was a wonderful event. It was safe. We walked in the streets.”

Linked to this is the notable focus on urban imagery and a modern society, with images showing: “a dynamic, workable society” and “a vibrant urban setting that is relatively safe” (Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT); and a “very safe, fun and colourful place, where it was clean” (Director of Communication and Official Spokesperson 2010 World Cup, CoCT). The event “showcased our cities as vibrant urban destinations that are working, that are dynamic and embracing and showcased the culture of the people that are friendly and that extend themselves to the visitors” (Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT). South Africa was seen as a country with “world class infrastructure” (CEO, 2010 FIFA OC).

Overall, the successful hosting of the event displayed a sense of “capability”. The benefits from this association are described by the 2010 Coordinator, Department of the Premier, WCPG, as follows: “If you’re capable of running an event successfully, then you’re capable of hosting tourists successfully, then you are capable of keeping your residents safe, then you are capable of growing an economy through more investments…. So for me the World Cup was indicative of what we can do in this country.”

Despite the many positive legacies of the event, there was one aspect mentioned as a missed branding opportunity, namely using the event to forge a clear brand positioning. “Germany did this very successfully”, admitted the Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT. “Germany said ‘make a friend’ so what that they achieved with their World Cup was changing the perceptions of Germans being quite stern, quite unfriendly to a friendly nation. From a branding point of view there was not one single-minded message here in South Africa.”

**Internal branding**

As mentioned earlier, nation brands consist of an external component (e.g. international visitors and investors) and an internal component (e.g. local residents and businesses). Respondents noted the World Cup’s influence on local residents, in terms of increased sense of pride, social cohesion, and self confidence. Illustrating this, the CEO, 2010 FIFA OC noted that South African “people said, ‘You know what? This is the South Africa we want to live in. This is the country we want.’ Everyone was a proud South African, a patriotic South African, an appreciative South African and just a South African that was probably celebrating the fact of our special achievement.” The nation was “united, and in a more significant way than during the hosting of previous mega
sport events”, noted the Chief Director: Client Support, Liaison, Events and Facilities, SRSA.

The Head of the Office of the CEO and Legacy Unit, 2010 FIFA OC commented on the impact of the event on civil servants. For these workers and those involved in the operational aspects of the event, the World Cup gave them “the confidence to do anything”. It also left a legacy of “skills” and a “can-do attitude”. South Africans are now “engaging the world from a very secure base and are confident”. This confidence is also enhanced by the “human capacity” that has been developed internally to manage future events of this nature.

Role of the media
The various stakeholders continually emphasised the importance of the media in creating positive media coverage. The relationship between event managers, other stakeholders and the media is viewed as a crucial one. The media is described by the Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT, as potentially being “adversaries or friends”. Before the World Cup, journalists were recognised as being potentially negative about the country. There were early moves to bring the media “on board so that they can actually be your biggest marketers” (Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT). A year prior to the event, journalists were hosted in South Africa and shown the stadia and other infrastructures. According to the Global Manager, Events Platform SAT, the “perception started changing and the world started getting more and more excited as we got more positive coverage from the media”.

The event was also billed as Africa’s World Cup, with promises of the benefits extending beyond the borders of the nation to other parts of the continent. While prior perceptions were mainly related to Africa being “a continent which is underdeveloped and ridden with crime and corruption, visitors were very surprised to find first world conditions in this country, very good services, good hospitality, and tremendous organisation in terms of the tournament itself” (Chief Director: Client Support, Liaison, Events and Facilities, SRSA).

Legacy and Leverage
It was emphasised by several stakeholders that short-term event visitors should not be considered the only tourism benefit. Other aspects of tourism legacy are related to infrastructure and service changes, such as: upgraded roads; the improved public transport system; airport upgrades; and the ‘Gautrain’ (high-speed rail) project. An interesting observation was that the new stadia were not only functional legacies for the nation but also “iconic design legacies”, creating new landmarks that “enhanced the way cities were viewed and perceived” (2010 Coordinator, Department of the Premier, WCPG).
The successful hosting of the event was also seen as a means to “enhance our score card and our appeal for future events” (Director of Communication and Official Spokesperson 2010 World Cup, CoCT). The event showed capability in terms of “hosting and presenting events in a professional way” (Manager, 2010 World Cup Integration: Financial Planning and Control, CoCT). According to the Chief Director: Client Support, Liaison, Events and Facilities, SRSA, as a result of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, South Africa is now viewed as “among the number one international hosts for mega sport events”.

Significantly, there was much support for the fact that the branding benefits and impacts of the World Cup need to be leveraged beyond 2010. It was noted that on-going media exposure was “just as important as the positive publicity received during the tournament,” and that “building on the momentum” that the World Cup provided was vital (Communications Manager, 2010 World Cup, CTT). However, leveraging the branding benefits was considered a challenge. According to the 2010 Coordinator, Department of the Premier, WCPG, “much too little attention was paid to post tournament leverage”. Possible reasons for this was “a lack of budgeting” or “because people were just exhausted at the end of the event”. The same stakeholder noted the need to “gather the lessons learned” from the event as a possible platform for further leveraging of the benefits gained.

**Conclusion**

From the interviews conducted and the examples cited by stakeholders, it is evident that the 2010 FIFA World Cup presented South Africa with a unique opportunity to showcase its development, competency, natural beauty, as well as its culture and diversity on one of the largest global platforms. With South Africa being a developing nation brand overcoming negative media and public perception, a low base of awareness and knowledge of brand attributes were particular challenges. However, this study has shown how the event assisted in the development and depth of the South African brand perceptions, especially in terms of a more urban image and the attributes of its population. This is important in terms of growing the tourism demand, securing the hosting of future global events and longer-term investment procurement. The intangible perceptions of the nation brand formed through visitor experiences as well as favorable media coverage combined with the tangible tourism legacies, such as tourism infrastructure and services, appear to have accelerated the development of South Africa as a desirable destination and brand.

The internal branding development is also seen as an important factor and legacy of the event, with local residents enjoying increased national and civic pride and confidence in their skills and capability. Knowledge and human capacity
building are also seen as important legacies for the nation, especially in terms of hosting future mega sport events. Although it is still relatively early to conclusively evaluate the legacy of the mega sport event, this paper gives an indication of the branding and tourism benefits from hosting such an event, especially for a developing nation such as South Africa. The stakeholders certainly underscored the imperative to leverage the opportunities created by the event, even after the event has concluded.

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