

A SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF THE 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP: A CASE STUDY OF KEY INTERNATIONAL SOURCE MARKETS

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Abstract keywords

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

This study undertakes a media analysis of key source markets in relation to South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Africa's first mega-event provides an ideal opportunity to examine how a host country (in this case South Africa) is profiled in key source markets, including shifts in sentiment over time. This research critically examines how South Africa has been profiled through the media during specific phases: pre- (two years to one year prior), leading up to (one year prior), during and post-2010 (one year after). The intention is to establish what has changed about the media perceptions of South Africa as a result of hosting the World Cup. Additionally, the study draws on the results to inform future positioning of South Africa as a tourism destination.

Theoretical background or literature review*

Florek et al. (2008) assert that the improvement of the host country's image is one of the potential benefits of organising mega-events. Donaldson and Ferreira (2007) argued that in the South African context persistent negative media focus has had detrimental effects on its tourism industry. South Africa is a major tourism destination on the continent and its hosting of the World Cup attracted significant positive and negative media coverage. The desire to host a mega-event is associated with destination profiling in the media. However, very few studies examine the shifts in sentiment over time in specific markets despite widespread recognition that the media is a powerful force in destination profiling and marketing. Barford (2010) and Swart et al. (2012) state that the 2010 FIFA World Cup was deemed to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to position the country as a competitive tourism and investment destination globally.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The media content analysis was conducted in four key markets, viz: UK, Germany, the Netherlands and USA. These were purposively chosen since they represent South Africa's main tourism markets. Additionally, the four countries were also represented in the World Cup finals and had significant numbers of ticket sales for the event. The methodological approach adopted is a qualitative analysis including content sourcing, content identification, semantic cluster analysis and the use of Leximancer which is an analytic tool that is used to evaluate the content of textual documents. To analyse the

specific themes/ imperatives selected, semantic cluster analysis was used to uncover the relationships between concepts adopting the approach outlined by Smith and Humphreys (2006) who validate Leximancer's use by researchers in media content analysis and concept mapping. Online versions of major newspapers with the largest daily circulations in the selected source markets were accessed. In total, 400-600 articles per market over the four time periods were analysed.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

The findings reveal that there were both positive and negative sentiments associated with South Africa's hosting of the event. The main negative sentiments related to crime and safety and ability to successfully host the event (including infrastructural readiness). The main positive sentiments related to the natural beauty/ scenery of the destination and the atmosphere associated with the event. A key finding from the analysis was that for all markets the overall weight of sentiments changed to a more positive perception over the four time periods of the study, with a single exception. Having shifted to a more positive view leading up to and during the event, the UK market reverted to its initial sentiment weight following the negative media attention over the Dewani murder. The period immediately preceding the tournament registered increases in both positive (reasons to attend) and negative (concerns over readiness and safety) coverage in the German and US markets but shifted positively based primarily on a reduction in negative coverage in the UK and Dutch markets. Hence, the lead-up period in particular emerged as vital for all markets. This period reinforces the importance of setting and addressing expectations for upcoming events prior to the event as highlighted by Swart et al. (2012). While safety and security concerns expressed in the lead-up period decreased considerably during the hosting period, this gain was not associated with an attendant increase in positive perceptions of the nation as the majority of positive attributes were ascribed at the city rather than nation brand level. Thus, whilst the positive sentiments emerging during the event should be capitalized on, South Africa should leverage the unrealised concerns to challenge the negative perceptions that persist despite the successful hosting of the mega-event and consolidate the nation brand's position in sustained positive territory.

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