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Resident, local business, and international visitor perceptions of the nation-branding impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™

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Background: In the struggle for competitive advantage in the modern world, the factor of national reputation is becoming more and more significant (Anholt, 2007). Nations have a brand image that is made up of collection of: images, symbols, history, perceptions, media, experiences, observations and stereotypes. A nation's image needs to be skillfully created and carefully managed just like any other brand (Anholt, 2007). Sports events may provide an opportunity to create or promote an image and also re-brand a nation. There has been a growing awareness of the potentially significant impact that hosting mega-events, such as the FIFA World Cup™, can have on a country's image (Gibson, Qi & Zhange, 2008). Mega-events represent a "unique publicity platform and opportunity for place marketing" (Essex & Chalkley, as cited in Gibson *et al.* 2008). This paper sets out preliminary findings related to the perceptions of the South African nation brand, as perceived by residents, local business owners/ managers and international visitors, prior to and during the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, within the host city of Cape Town. The study forms part of a broader national research agenda seeking to identify the impact of the mega-event for the host nation.

Objective: The main aims of the study were: to identify the expectations and perceptions of residents and local business owners/ managers regarding the event and its impact on the nation brand and tourism, prior to the event; and to identify perceptions of international visitors to the event, regarding the nation brand and its key attributes, during the event.

Methods: Four hundred residents of the Green Point suburb (surrounding the Cape Town stadium) were interviewed and 180 owners or managers of businesses (including formal and informal businesses) in the city were surveyed two months prior to the event. Houses/ apartments and business within a 2km radius of the Cape Town stadium and along the official fan walk were selected using a systematic sample approach, with every third residence or business in the defined area selected. Over 400 international visitors to Cape Town were interviewed in the official fan park or stadium precinct during the event. This consisted of face-to-face interviews, employing a spatially-based, purposive sampling approach. Both open- and closed-ended questions related to nation branding perceptions were asked. The closed-ended questions asked respondents for their level of agreement with a batch of statements, testing perceptions related to Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon (Anholt, 2007). The computer software Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS for windows) was used to analyse the quantitative data through various statistical tests.

Results: While the results of this study still need to be fully tested, reviewed and set in a broader national and international context, this paper highlights the major preliminary findings and observations. These are compared to previous and similar studies conducted in Cape Town and Durban (Swart & Bob, 2009), which indicated strong awareness and support of South Africa's readiness to host, the ability of the event to act as a regional showcase, as well as concerns over high crime levels, among local residents and business owners/ managers prior to the event. A profile of the international tourists surveyed is presented along with the general perceptions of the nation brand of South Africa, the degree to which these perceptions changed as a result of the travel experience and the influencing factors of this change.

Conclusion: While it is too early to identify the full extent of the impact of the event on national and international perceptions of the nation brand, preliminary results indicate the sense of expectation of the local residents and businesses regarding the impact of the event, while the international visitor perceptions offer an indication of how the nation brand has been and is currently perceived, and provides an indication of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that exist for nation brand development in South Africa. The context of the broader event impact study and further research opportunities concludes the discussion.