

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPORT MEGA-EVENTS FOR NATION BRANDING

ABSTRACT

Background & purpose – Sport mega-events have received much criticism of late. However, there has been increasing awareness of the brand-related benefits from hosting a sport mega-event, with their hosting being a deliberate policy for many nations, most notably among emerging nations. One such nation is South Africa, which explicitly stated its nation branding ambitions through the staging of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Through this single case, this paper identifies the unique characteristics of the sport mega-event that were leveraged for benefits of nation branding.

Design/methodology/approach – An interpretivist, qualitative study explored the insights of nation brand stakeholders and experts, elicited using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n=27) undertaken two-to-three years after the staging of the event.

Findings – Three characteristics of the 2010 sport mega-event were deemed by stakeholders to be unique in creating nation branding opportunities, namely: i) the scale of the event that created opportunities for transformational development; ii) the global appeal, connection and attachment of the event; and iii) the symbolic status of the event that was leveraged for internal brand building and public diplomacy. The paper proposes that while sport mega-events provide nation branding opportunities, the extent of these benefits may vary according to the context of the nation brand with lesser-known, troubled or emerging brands seemingly having the most to gain.

Originality/value - While acknowledging the critique of mega-events, this paper highlights a pertinent example of an emerging nation that leveraged the potential of a sport mega-event for nation branding gains. It extends the understanding of sport mega-events and their potential for nation branding.

Keywords - Nation branding, sport mega-events, stakeholders; 2010 FIFA World Cup

Article classification - Research paper

1. Introduction

Sport mega-events have received much criticism of late. As Giulianotti *et al.* (2015) acknowledge, beyond the “spectacular sport and starry headlines” (p.119), a plethora of social conflicts, problems and criticisms may exist. The current global scandals surrounding FIFA, as well as other controversies linked with certain Olympic sporting codes combined with allegations of corruption and over-spending by recent FIFA and Olympic Games hosts, has resulted in a lack of popular support for recent bids by a number of cities for future mega-events. This was evidenced most recently by the city of Hamburg’s decision to withdraw from the 2024 Olympic Games bidding process. There is also a groundswell of opinion within the destination management literature that advocates a portfolio of events or the consideration of smaller, home-grown or non-sport events rather than continuing with a mega-event focus (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2004; Chalip and Costa, 2005; Westerbeek and Linley, 2012). The wider literature reflects this with a greater acknowledgement of issues of sustainability and increased references to legacy (Preuss, 2007) and leveraging (Smith, 2014) of event benefits.

Despite this criticism, sport mega-events have become increasingly important among emerging nations. So much so in fact, that they are now considered to be an object of policy for many nations. One such example of an emerging nation that clearly stated its objective for hosting a mega-event for brand-related benefits is South Africa, host of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Although viewed as a

resounding success (Cape Town Tourism, 2010), with a government report concluding that the event resulted in many important intangible legacies for the nation (SRSA, 2011), very little empirical evidence exists that justifies such an outcome. In the immediate pre- and post-event period of the tournament, there was a proliferation of evaluative literature (see for example the special journal issues of *Urban Forum*, 2009; *Soccer & Society*, 2010; *Development Southern Africa*, 2011; and *African Journal for the Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance (AJPHERD)*, 2012). The majority of these papers reviewed the social, historical and political context of the event, emphasising the importance of the event in national identity formation and political symbolism for the host nation. While previous papers by the authors (Knott et al., 2015) have indicated the types of nation branding opportunities created by the mega-event, as well as the means by which these opportunities were leveraged, this paper uses the same case to address the question: What were the unique characteristics of the 2010 sport mega-event in creating these nation branding opportunities? The contextual and conceptual underpinning for this question is outlined in the review of the literature that follows.

2. Literature review

2.1 Countries as brands

Nation branding is an emerging and contested discourse at the convergence of diverse fields such as management, tourism, and the social and political sciences. While branding theory has developed as a means of competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive and cluttered global marketplace, the brand concept has more recently been applied beyond consumer marketing to a number of different environments including places such as cities, destinations and countries. Although there was initial uncertainty over whether a country could be considered to be a brand (Olins, 2002), many today would agree with Kapferer (2012, p.2) who stated, “whether they like it or not, (countries) act *de facto* as a brand - a summary of unique values and benefits”. A sub-set of the broader place branding theory, nation branding has strong ties with mainstream branding theory as it argues that a nation’s brand needs to be carefully created and skilfully managed in order to realise its competitive potential.

While acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the nation brand construct, Dinnie (2016, p.39-41) conceptually distinguishes the relationship between nation brand image and nation brand identity as follows. Key components of nation brand identity (e.g. language; political regime; history; architecture; literature; food and drink; sport) are communicated to a desired audience through a variety of means (such as branded exports; sporting achievements; cultural artefacts; brand ambassadors; tourism experience; and prominent personalities) that result in the development of a subjective image shared by consumers (e.g. domestic or external consumers, firms investors, governments and media) about a nation, i.e. nation brand image. This paper proposes that a sport mega-event should be included in the list of nation brand identity ‘communicators’ as it possesses the potential to aid the development or re-positioning of a nation brand image.

2.2 Events and their impacts and legacies

Although sport events occur on a number of levels or scales, the most significant of these is the ‘mega-event’. Although event impact studies have focused on tangible impacts such as economic growth, infrastructure development and tourism promotion, less tangible impacts such as benefits for the national image and identity are now recognised. Beyond event impacts, many now advocate a longer-term focus on creating legacies from sport mega-events (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2011; Chappelet, 2012) with legacy being both of a planned or unplanned nature (Preuss, 2007; Van Wynsberghe, 2014). Although there has been a greater acknowledgement of unintended consequences (Spracklen, 2012), legacy has become a crucial aspect of sport mega-event planning (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2011). However, there is still limited consensus on its definition, what it entails and how it should be conceptualised (Van Wynsberghe, 2014), and measured, with Preuss (2007) advocating the importance of future research attempting to develop more generic approaches and methodologies to address this. This inability to define legacy with any precision is a major reason why some are advocating a new focus with an emphasis on a more “systematic and purposeful” approach, called ‘leveraging’ (Grix, 2012, p.309). Leveraging can relate to short-term or ‘immediate’ activities by event hosts or long-term activities before, and after, the taking place of the event (e.g. “to build the host community’s image in order to enhance the quality of its brand or market position”) (Chalip, 2004, p.228).

2.3 Background to South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup

The opportunity presented by nation branding is of particular interest to countries that neither have a strong brand identity and reputation nor have an image that is either misplaced or unhelpful to its broader developmental aims. Freire (2014) explained how nation branding has become particularly important to African nations in particular. Nation branding has in fact served as a basis to assist African nations to overcome what Anholt (2007) refers to as the “Brand Africa” dilemma, where all African nations are viewed as a collective by outside nations, usually associated with the many negative aspects of the continent that are continually in the media such as violence, corruption and disease. Proclaimed as “Africa’s World Cup” due to FIFA’s newly instated rotational hosting policy, the following quotation by the CEO of the 2010 Local Organising Committee (LOC) clearly states that one of its main objectives for hosting the event was to facilitate nation branding:

“[The World Cup] is about nation-building, it’s about infrastructure improvement, it’s about country branding, it’s about repositioning, it’s about improving the image of our country, and it’s about tourism promotion” (Allmers and Maennig 2009, p.500).

Cornelissen (2008, p.486) suggested that the hosting of the mega-event was part of a larger national agenda for nation building as well as showcasing the state as a “global middle power”. The significance of sport mega-events to the nation is evidenced by its previous staging of a series of major and mega sport events which include the Rugby World Cup in 1995, the African Nations Cup (football) in 1996 and the 2003 Cricket World Cup. The 2010 FIFA World Cup, however, represented the largest sport event to be hosted by the nation by far.

From the outside, South Africa appeared to be a good choice as it represented Africa’s most developed economy, boasted the wealthiest football league system in Africa and was host to the continent’s largest sports’ media and television companies (Knott and Swart, 2011). Although South Africa had its share of publicised problems, such as high unemployment, rising crime rates and a high HIV infection rate (Donaldson and Ferreira, 2009), the staging of the World Cup represented hope for the nation and an opportunity to show that this emerging country could stage an event of such magnitude as well as any other developed or developing country (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2011).

2.4 Sport mega-events and nation branding

Hosting a sport mega-event has increasingly been recognised as a powerful agent in the imaging, re-imaging and branding of cities and nations (Higham and Hinch, 2009). Berkowitz *et al.* (2007, p.164) were among a limited number to connect these impacts with the nation brand, stating that sport mega-events create “a great branding opportunity” for nations. Sport mega-events have previously been associated with some degree of brand-related benefits for the host nation. However, to date, no studies have clearly revealed these opportunities or investigated their impact on the development of brand equity for a nation.

The perceived brand-related opportunities that a mega-event provides for a host nation have been mentioned among the primary reasons for bidding to host such an event, and particularly so among the recent number of emerging or “middle-income” mega-event host nations (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2011). For example, Table 1 indicates the sport mega-events hosted by the BRICS emerging nations since 1990, alongside their nation brand ranking. Indicating the increased prominence of sport mega-events as part of strategic nation branding in emerging economies, Balakrishnan (2016) noted that mega-events form a strategic part of the global reputation management of the global UAE brand, with Formula One racing, the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the 2020 World Expo featuring prominently among a host of other major events. Heslop *et al.* (2013, p.13) articulated the perceived nation brand benefits for emerging nations from hosting sport mega-events:

“Many emerging nations have risked a great deal in betting that hosting of a mega-event can be a fast-track to world recognition and reputation enhancement, and there is considerable evidence that this bet has payoffs in positive impacts on country images and reputations as producers of products and as tourism destinations.”

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE: BRICS emerging economies & sport mega-events]

The following brand-related benefits have been associated with sport mega-events:

Media attention:

Sport mega-events “generate intensive media-coverage and international broadcasting” (Heslop *et al.*, 2013, p.12). The media profile of mega-events can be harnessed to increase the prominence and standing, or ‘salience’ of host cities and nations. For example, the case of Sydney and the Olympic Games of 2000 was cited by Florek and Inch (2011) as a mega-event that provided a catalyst for the heightened awareness of Australia as a destination for over a decade. Custódio and Gouveia (2007) confirmed this impact by explaining the power of the written word by journalists and their contribution in shaping how foreigners view a country.

National identity development & pride:

Higham and Hinch (2009) noted that sport mega-events have become increasingly important to build place identity and to position destinations as being interesting, attractive and unique. Gratton and Preuss (2008, p.1929) claimed that sport mega-events are noted as producing “cultural ideas, cultural identity and cultural products”, with opening ceremonies being a prime example. The ability of such events to shape the identity of a host nation is confirmed by Roche (2000), who affirms the context of a sport mega-event as an opportunity for a nation to define, invent or imagine its future and how it desires to be perceived by other nations. Gratton and Preuss (2008) described how citizens might become ‘emotionally involved’, exhibiting increased levels of national pride as the sport events create a context for “local identification, vision and motivation” (p.1928).

Image change:

Sport mega-events are described as having the potential to serve as a catalyst for change in terms of imagery and place meaning (Higham and Hinch, 2009), providing an opportunity to publicise and re-image a place on a global scale. For example, the South Korean government capitalised on the publicity originating from the nation’s co-staging of the 2002 FIFA World Cup to increase global recognition of the nation’s brand-name products (and thereby boost exports) and raise the nation’s brand image abroad (Dinnie, 2016). In the case of Germany, the 2006 FIFA World Cup brought about “one of the most fundamental changes in global attitudes to Germany”, with the nation being considered far more “friendly” and “welcoming” as a result. The event was a catalyst for the re-branding of Germany as “a hip and trendy place” (Zollner, 2016, p.101). Zollner (2016) argues, “No PR campaign could have garnered such an outcome” (p.101). Stevens (2016) claimed that with the world’s attention on it, the London 2012 Olympic Games presented the United Kingdom with a “once-in-a-generation opportunity to refresh both its marketing strategy and its global positioning” (p.205).

Mendes *et al.* (2011, p.371) referred to the experiential nature of events, explaining that an event provides a chance for visitors to “carry out a gratifying experience with access to the local cultural scene”. Although this may be limited to the moment, its value remains as a memory and contributes to the process of image formation for a nation (Mendes *et al.*, 2011). Not only can mega-events create positive associations for the host place brand, but they could also assist improve the negative images associated with the place. For example, Kim and Morrison (2005) found that the 2002 FIFA World Cup improved negative associations of security for tourists in Korea.

“Soft power” / diplomacy:

Nauright (2013) specifically linked the nation branding aims of host nations with global diplomacy. He claimed that increasingly diplomacy has evolved into “shaping international views of nations as sites for business development and tourism” (p.23) and considers sport mega-events as “significant players in public diplomacy efforts” (Nauright, 2013, p.26). Grix (2012) concluded that ‘soft power’ provides a worthy lens by which to capture the motives of advanced capitalist states and, increasingly, ‘emerging’ states, for bidding for and hosting sport mega-events. He noted the increase in willingness

of governments “of all political hues” to stage sport mega-events and that many “states have and do ‘instrumentalise’ sport to promote their country’s image or ‘brand’ and attempt to gain prestige” (p.289). Furthermore, Grix and Brannagan (2016) expanded the link between soft power and sport mega-events, drawing evidence from Germany’s staging of the FIFA World Cup in 2006 and Qatar’s proactive sport diplomacy strategy for 2022. Another example is the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, viewed as an attempt by the Russian government to “signal its strength in the contemporary international order” (Alekseyeva, 2014, p.159). In Brazil’s case, the bidding for and staging of sport mega-events were part of a wider government strategy to give the country “recognition and symbolic power in the international arena” (De Almeida *et al.*, 2014, p.271). The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games were described as the Chinese government’s attempt to use the “platform to demonstrate [China’s] economic and technological achievements and organisational capacities” (Panagiotopoulou, 2012, p.2343).

There are also a number of criticisms and challenges linked with these benefits. Two concerns for the image benefits from mega-events are that the media attention is short-lived and that the stakeholders have little control over the imagery portrayed. Ritchie and Smith (1991) appeared to be the first to measure an increase in city awareness in response to staging a sport mega-event, in this case Calgary and the 1998 Winter Olympic Games. Over the five-year period of their study, they found that the event increased awareness significantly and greatly modified the image of the city of Calgary. However, they also noted what has become a legitimate concern of event sceptics, namely a significant rate of decay of both awareness and image post-event. Panagiotopoulou (2012, p.2343) used the case of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens to warn that although a mega-event may be a “key moment in attracting the whole world’s attention”, this opportunity does not last for long. Gratton and Preuss (2008) further noted that the exposure of the event, the host city and its culture depends much on the media and how they choose to represent it; something that for the most part cannot be controlled. They gave the examples of negative incidences such as “a bomb attack, hooligans, organisational shortcomings or just bad weather” that can influence the host nation image (p.1928).

A positive image effect for a host city or nation is not guaranteed. Fullerton and Holtzhausen (2012) concluded their study on South Africa by cautioning that, “no country should expect blanket improvement of its reputation among all citizens in all countries” (p.281). Panagiotopoulou (2012) also raised a serious concern related to the longevity of the brand image benefits. After the successful delivery of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, it was reported that the event “helped to re-brand Greece as a country” as “mythological and traditional images combined with modern, dynamic design” (p.2343). However, Panagiotopoulou (2012, p.2343) claims that six years after the event, Greece had lost any advantage, with the country currently in a “severe image crisis”.

Importantly, none of these studies clearly linked the brand-related benefits for a destination with nation branding specifically. Furthermore, given the number of criticisms linked with these benefits, it is surprising that neither solutions nor alternative event strategies are recommended specifically. This study therefore aimed to address these issues by identifying the specific advantages that sport mega-events provide for nation branding. The methodological approach adopted to address these issues is outlined below.

3. Methodological design

This study adopted a qualitative approach in order to ascertain the key experiences, perceptions and lessons learned by selected, definitive brand and event stakeholders, following the approach of several studies that have used stakeholder perceptions as a source of similar information (e.g. Chan, 2015; Parent, in press). Data were elicited using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n=27) that occurred two-to-three years after the event. As part of a broader study that assessed the strategic contribution of sport mega events to nation branding (see Knott *et al.*, 2015), this paper pays particular attention to the unique characteristics of the 2010 sport mega-event that created nation branding opportunities for the host nation.

Stakeholders were selected on the basis that they were the population group most likely to be able to answer the research questions based on their first-hand experience and expert knowledge of the mega-event. A set of respondents was selected, using the list of stakeholder types found in the

literature. Further to this list, in the case of a sport mega-event, sport organisations, government agencies and event owners/organisers can be added (Weed and Bull, 2009). The framework of power, urgency and legitimacy by Mitchell *et al.* (1997) was applied to these lists, clustering stakeholders according to their degree of power or influence in brand development; the degree of legitimacy or recognised authority or brand leadership that the stakeholder exhibits; and the extent to which the stakeholders had a measure of urgency or vested interest in the specific organisation and success of the FIFA event. The framework describes stakeholders that have high levels of each of these aspects as definitive stakeholders. Through this process, the media and the local residents were excluded from the list of stakeholders. Ultimately, potential respondents were identified to represent each of the following sectors:

- Event 'owners' or rights holders, responsible for the national event organisation (i.e. FIFA Organising Committees);
- Regional government event management and strategic co-ordination;
- Host city (local government) event management and strategic co-ordination;
- National government agency for tourism promotion;
- National government agency for nation branding (domestic and international);
- National government department for sport and recreation;
- Regional (Southern Africa) tourism destination promotion agency;
- Tourism destination promotion agency at a host city level;
- National tourism destination and services providers;
- Business and investment promotion agency at a host city level;
- Top-tier event sponsor;
- Research co-ordination for sport event tourism and consultation at a national level; and
- National academic researchers in mega-event impacts and sport event tourism studies.

In total, 19 brand and event stakeholder interviews were conducted. An additional eight key informants/experts were identified to be interviewed in order to provide an informed external perspective of the 2010 event and its impact on the host nation brand and to compare this with their experiences from other sport mega-events. These respondents were mega-event or nation branding experts, having gained experience from other mega-event contexts (such as Manchester 2006 Commonwealth Games; London 2012 Olympic Games; and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games), or as consultants to nations and cities bidding to host mega-events, or regarded as leading academic researchers in this field of study.

All interviews took place during the period March 2012 to November 2013 allowing respondents to be more objective in their reflections and to reflect on the post-event legacy and the degree to which the opportunities had been leveraged. For each organisation, the researcher identified the most suitable candidate to be interviewed as the most senior member of the organisation or department that was directly involved in the event. The disclosure of respondent identities raises important ethical considerations for the researcher. In this paper, it was decided to keep the identities and specific organisation of the respondents confidential and the nature of the sector or organisation are only described where relevant to the discussion. Direct quotes reference a respondent number (e.g. R3) as a form of distinction only.

The experiences, lessons and insights from these subjects were elicited using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, guided by a set of questions related to topics identified through the literature. The interviewer was able to probe or clarify issues raised and to explore particular areas of experience or expertise of the respondent. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with all except for three international interviews that were conducted by Skype. Interview times varied, with most between 35 to 75 minutes duration. Respondents were generally very responsive and supportive of the research process. Many actually indicated that it was useful to reflect on their experiences and pass on observations and lessons learned, noting that there had not been many such opportunities to do so. This highlights the need to record the knowledge and experiences of mega-event stakeholders.

The interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed, verbatim. The transcriptions were then analysed and manually coded using the software programme Atlas.ti. An inductive or 'bottom-up' approach to the coding was followed, allowing data to take primacy rather than

deductively adopt predetermined analytical frameworks, to allow the voices of stakeholders to take priority, with codes being developed from key words as each response was reviewed. From the resultant long list of codes, characteristics related to the development of the nation brand were developed.

4. Findings & Discussion

Although the semi-structured and emergent nature of the interviews allowed a range of findings to emerge, the data indicated that respondents were, to differing degrees, broadly positive about the overall contribution of the mega-event to nation branding, perhaps reflecting Hall's (2006) contention that, "Sport is very hard to argue against" (p.67), with the idea that simply "doing something in the face of global competition" (p.68) in itself will be viewed positively. Numerous specific examples of branding opportunities created by the event were, however, cited (Knott et al., 2015) as well as ways in which stakeholders leveraged these opportunities (Knott et al., 2015). The findings from the broader study led to the development of a conceptual model that indicates the manner in which sport mega-events facilitate nation branding development, or as Dinnie (2016) stated, act as 'communicators' of brand identity. This is depicted in Figure 1. The focus of this paper is the first aspect of the model, namely, the characteristics of the mega-event that facilitated the nation branding opportunities.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE: Conceptual model of the role of sport mega-events in nation branding]

Respondents were clear that only a handful of events provide the type of branding benefits that are associated with an event like the FIFA World Cup. Indeed, the only events agreed upon by all respondents were the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games. There was consensus that mega-events play a significant role in nation brand development, although some differences in what this role is and how effectively it can do so emerged. The following quotation is typical, with a positive agreement as to the role of sport mega-events, while cautioning that mega-events are not stand-alone brand development agents, but rather that they play a part, along with other important elements:

"Hosting sport mega-events is a very important part of building a country brand along with its tourism offer, its investment track record, its return on investment, its national icons.... It's an important part of it" (R8).

From the probing of respondents, three unique characteristics of sport mega-events that play a role in the nation branding process were identified. These are not characteristics that define mega-events, but rather unique characteristics, as determined by the interview respondents, that set sport mega-events apart from other event types, in terms of their nation branding capacity. These are summarised in Figure 2 and now elaborated upon.

[INSERT Figure 2 here: Unique characteristics of sport mega-events that create strategic nation branding opportunities]

4.1 The scale of a sport mega-event: global reach & transformational catalyst

By definition, the scale of a mega-event is greater than that of any other event type. Two particular aspects of this scale were highlighted in terms of the nation branding potential, namely the scale of the global reach of the event and the degree to which the event has a significant transformational development impact upon a host nation. When elaborating on the significance of the global reach of the 2010 mega-event, some respondents also noted the specific role that sport plays. The context of sport gains the attention of a wide global audience:

“[A mega-event] has a significant number of countries involved, as in participating on some basis. Both participants and spectators.” (R7).

“The difference [between a mega-event and other event types] is the fact of broad viewership and interest” (R7).

The 2010 mega-event was significant for the host nation as it went “beyond just a national media reach” (R24), “reaching a television audience of over one billion people” (R13). Beyond television audiences, the number of international sport fans was also noted as making up a very sizeable market. Translating this into tourism terms, the mega-event attracted “significant numbers of international visitors” (R3) to the host nation. The large number of media representatives travelling to the host nation is also considerable in size. An often overlooked aspect of the reach is the number of the participants, coaches and team staff members, as well as the media representatives that travelled, as explained below:

“Specifically here for the World Cup, the numbers were around 309,000. That number excluded the FIFA family [teams, administrators, global sponsors]. All of them make up the FIFA team and that number we were given was about 150,000. So that is why I say there were actually about 500,000 visitors here in total. These numbers reflect visitors specifically here for the World Cup, who stayed for an average of 10 nights” (R4).

However, it was also noted that the issue of ‘place’ for a sport mega-event has become more complex with the advent of social media and multiple media platforms, with Respondent Five commenting: “In today’s world, [the] spectators don’t all have to be in the same place” (R5). The tourist is able to collect and distribute their own images and observations through a variety of new and social media platforms. These more personalised, authentic and experiential-based images, words and videos “went out viral on social media – YouTube, Facebook, Twitter – and people sending videos” (R24). The respondent further explained the power of this media form and the branding opportunities that it created:

“The people who came were upmarket people who came with 3G phones and they found a country with first world infrastructure. They were first world, savvy, tech-conscious people. So in their own languages they were sending the message home: ‘You guys should be here!’ The moment they got off the aeroplane they were overloading the network as they were sending messages. Even just the fact that they could carry on with their normal daily life, doing the social stuff, just showed them that this is a normal country. So that message got out” (R24).

The significance of social media platforms is that visitors themselves can become brand ambassadors for the nation, if they are reporting on positive experiences, reports which may be seen as more trustworthy or credible given their first-hand, or ‘immediate’ nature. The scale with which the social media was used by event visitors as well as global fans resulted in what at the time was “the biggest [social media] event in history” (R1). According to measures of social media trends, “the first day of the World Cup was bigger than the inauguration of Barack Obama” (R1). This clearly indicates the scale of a mega-event and the growing usage and importance of social media within the tourism and sport environments.

Due to their scale, sport mega-events were also described as having an ability to fundamentally change certain physical attributes of a host city or nation and thus the way in which it is perceived. Several respondents cited Barcelona as an example of a city whose brand image was transformed

through the hosting of a sport mega-event, namely the 1992 Olympic Games. The following responses reveal how this event influenced the long-term perception of the city's tourism destination brand:

“Barcelona is a great case study in terms of transformation of the city. It's now in the top six in tourism city breaks. They totally changed that city's perception out of the Olympic Games” (R15).

“An example like Barcelona – a fundamental change in the way that people perceived Barcelona as a place. The impact that has had on that city is endless” (R5).

A key contributor to this change in brand perception was how it sustained and leveraged these perceptions. A further example of this was cited as Manchester, host of the 2002 Commonwealth Games, where the mega-event was described as “a catalyst for regeneration” (R13) in the city. The scale of the 2010 mega-event in South Africa was also associated with urban development in that large-scale construction projects, both specifically for the event itself, in terms of facilities and stadia, as well as associated or related public and or private construction of transportation hubs (upgraded or new airports and railway stations), media facilities, tourist accommodation and urban regeneration projects were developed. As a result, the mega-event involved high levels of financial commitment by local, provincial and national host governments as well as private investment.

The large scale of a mega-event also carries with it a larger degree of risk. Although largely overlooked in the literature, the risk associated with mega-events could lead to potential problems or detractions from the brand. This was evident in the respondents' reference to their pre-event ‘anxiety’. In the lead up to the 2010 mega-event, it was not assumed that the impact for the brand would necessarily be positive. Respondent Five made reference to this ‘risk’, referring to the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games that they believed had negative consequences for the nation brand:

“There was also the concern about the risk involved to our image, because if something had gone wrong it would have been terrible. Just look at what happened in Delhi with the Commonwealth Games. It must have been immeasurable the damage it did to their image. If the same thing had happened here, if one of our stadiums had collapsed or something like that, it would have been an utter disaster.” (R5).

Respondents further linked the transformation potential of a mega-event with its ability to bring together large numbers of stakeholders, public and private, who need to work together to facilitate the event. The assessment of stakeholder relationships and partnerships during the event period was, overall, described very positively, with descriptions and specific examples given of successful partnerships that were formed. Some of the organisations worked together or collaborated to leverage the opportunities, in one case even forming a new umbrella brand. The mega-event provided a context for the public and private sectors to work together and a much-needed impetus to make this relationship work for the greater success of the event. The following quotation reveals the dynamics of this interaction and improved relations between public and private sectors:

“The public and private sectors worked relatively well together at a City and Provincial level on related projects. I think government in South Africa has always struggled to work with the private sector. The public sector had to trust the private sector here. Normally the sectors don't trust each other. There were some issues, but they managed to get past that” (R7).

In contrast, Hall (2006) argues with specific reference to sport mega-events, that such partnerships are a consequence of a broader neoliberal agenda generally resulting in more favourable long-term outcomes for the private sector, perhaps prioritising economic development issues rather than the welfare of the host community. To counter this, however, the 2010 mega-event also required different levels of public sector organisations to work together. Although differences and challenges were noted in these interactions, a city government stakeholder explained that the mega-event forced the local government to find “alignment with National and Provincial Government, along with other role players” (R10). The mega-event forced these departments to budget and plan together and also added an “energy that inspired some outstanding results” (R10). This may have been an “unintended

consequence” (Spracklen, 2012), yet it surely is an important consideration and expectation for future mega-event hosts.

4.2 Global appeal, connection & attachment

The second unique aspect of a sport mega-event emerging from the analysis is the emotional appeal, connection and degree of attachment that the event creates with its global audiences. The FIFA World Cup was described as an event with so large a global appeal that “people who are not normally a soccer fan will watch the soccer World Cup” (R7). It is hard to find other examples of events or occurrences that capture the attention of the global audience combined with the shared emotional attachment of passion that transcends many global divisions such as language, race, religion and nationality. As Rein and Shields (2007, p.83) concluded, sport stimulates an “emotional heat” between participants and audiences and, more broadly, between places and their markets. The nature of the sport mega-event links with or creates a passion among a widespread audience, such that the mega-event is at worst noticed, but more likely, passionately followed by global fans.

Especially through the medium of sport, a mega-event is able to generate a very high level of international attention, appeal and interest. As a result, it stimulates considerable media coverage distributed to the widest global audience during the event period as well as significant levels of media attention in the lead up to the event. However, one respondent contested this aspect, saying that for some events it may not be possible for large numbers of visitors to travel to the event, but the media appeal and reach of the event may be of such a high extent that it could alone determine an event as ‘mega’. In the case of South Africa, the mega-event was claimed to have brought a sizeable number of new or non-traditional tourists and a high proportion of first time visitors to the nation during the event, creating new tourism market opportunities.

Importantly, the impact of social media was identified by participants, and it was indicated that this might enhance the global connection with the event. A mega-event is expected to generate the highest levels of social media content. Confirming this, social media giants Twitter and Facebook acknowledged that the FIFA World Cup in Brazil was the “top global topic” and “most talked about global moment” of 2014 (Finn, 2014).

However, beyond merely reaching and gaining the attention of a sizeable global audience, the findings indicate that a sport mega-event is an experiential phenomenon. It has a unique ability to connect with fans and create emotional attachment and engagement with the event and with other fans through the shared passion of sport. The data also suggested that this extends to creating an attachment with the host nation. The ability of a sport mega-event to generate a wide global appeal and connection or even attachment is of great value to nation brand stakeholders, especially as they noted the challenge of gaining global attention in a cluttered competitive environment. A respondent representing a top-tier mega-event sponsor noted that the FIFA World Cup represents a “captive environment” for reaching their target audience, and described football in particular as one of the “passion points” of their consumers, around which they build sponsorship campaigns (R27). The following quotation captures this emotional appeal:

“It’s that ‘wow factor’ - that big moment. That’s what this mega-event delivered... It’s on a level that we, in South Africa especially, will never see another event like that in our lifetime. It was such a momentous occasion” (R2).

This was the first mega-event of this scale to be hosted on the continent. It appears that the context of the mega-event in an emerging, African nation added to the emotional appeal in this case, especially for host citizens. Although the 2010 mega-event was seen to be of “global importance” (R3), it was also of great importance to the host nation - “something that would get the full nation’s attention” (R3).

Another aspect of this connection is how the experiential nature of a sport event in particular captures or showcases a sense of place identity, as explained by Respondent Eleven:

“Sport is a unique tourist attraction. Sport gives you a window or portal into a place. If you want to get a sense of a place, go to the local cricket oval, the local ice rink. There are all sorts of ways to experience a place through sports - especially at the sport (event). Taking part, you get a physical embodiment of place”.

As well as experiencing place through the sport itself, the mega-event also allowed the enhancement of a sense of place through showcasing the broader infrastructure required to host such an event. The mega-event was a catalyst for the improvement of many tourism-related services and infrastructure such as airports, public transportation, accommodation and urban gentrification. The event itself also added an extra dimension to the traditional travel experience, creating a festival or carnival atmosphere in which to experience the nation. One stakeholder pointed out the uniquely South African “vibe” during this period, claiming that, from his perspective, visitors “were really quite struck by how electric it [the atmosphere] was” (R25). A respondent explained that one of the enduring impressions from the 2010 mega-event was of a “country that’s together, that’s passionate, that’s welcoming, and that’s exciting” (R18). Respondent Eleven takes the argument of sport events as a showcase for place identity further, indicating how there is also the element of “emotional attachment” that is fostered between the event and the sport event fan. The respondent argues that this emotional attachment and connection is also transferred to the setting of the event, in this case the host nation:

“A key thing I would like to emphasise in terms of sport as an attraction is that there’s an emotional attachment. They (fans/ spectators) are connected to that event and therefore, I would argue, to that place” (R11).

A sport mega-event was described as providing opportunities for a host nation to tell a “controlled story” (R11). This relates to branding narratives that are consciously developed and communicated through a number of platforms, such as opening ceremonies, the media and promotional campaigns. Although many aspects of a sport mega-event are uncontrollable and not all messages can be controlled or interpreted in the manner intended, respondents noted that a mega-event nonetheless does provide controlled messaging opportunities. Respondent Eleven cautioned that the kind of experience that you deliver at the mega-event needs to “jive with the controlled story” (R11). The example of opening ceremonies from the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympic Games were given to illustrate one such opportunity created for a more ‘controlled’ story telling for the host place brand, among other types of campaigns and media coverage. The following quotation links these elements and stresses the importance of the controlled story in creating competitive positioning:

“These [mega-] events are all into articulating place identity. So the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics was a narrative very consciously developed about ‘who we are’. London used the picture of middle-England as one picture of who they are.... So opening ceremonies; controlled stories; ways that you host the media; promotional campaigns. These are all ways to get your message out as to who you are and what competitive advantage you have as a destination, as a place for investment and as a player in the global marketplace” (R11).

A strength of sport mega-events was described as being their ability to be a “connector” of people. The respondents emphasised the role of local residents in creating experiential branding opportunities. Respondent Eleven noted, “The key is the ‘residents’ - the kind of connection that the visitors and the television audiences get with the local residents of the host city”. Another respondent gave an example of how the event created opportunities for business connections to occur, citing the example of the Australian Business Club - a business and investment promotion organisation that was established to leverage the opportunities provided by the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and was used as a model for a similar initiative called ‘Connected Cape Town’. Explaining the rationale for this initiative, Respondent Five stated, “They recognise that sport is a great connector. People from all sorts of industries love sport and they actually use it as a way to drive business connections”.

The consumer engagement literature recognises the importance of elements such as passion, immersion, activation, interactive experience and the co-creation of brand value (Hollebeek, 2011). While practitioners have been using this concept more widely, the scholarly understanding of the term has been slow to develop (Hollebeek, 2011). Anholt (2010, p.12-13) appeared to endorse this application as he advocated a new management approach for nation brands, stating that, “Places must engage with the outside world in a clear, coordinated and communicative way”. In light of this theoretical development and from the stakeholder responses, this paper proposes that sport mega-events create brand engagement opportunities on a global scale. While many stakeholders alluded to this, two stakeholders specifically mentioned the opportunity that the 2010 World Cup provided in

terms of creating a “global engagement” (R8) opportunity for the host nation brand, while Respondent 14 explained:

“Hosting major sporting events does connect a nation to the rest of the world – it builds those bridges. Sport has been chosen strategically as one of the drivers of that” (R14).

Even beyond specific references, it is clear from the stakeholder responses that the mega-event created opportunities for immersive brand experiences and engagement with a variety of market segments (i.e. tourists, business leaders and investors and the broader global population) through the context of a shared passion for sport.

4.3 Symbolic status: Identity and soft power

The third unique characteristic of a sport mega-event that creates nation-branding opportunities is the symbolic status of the event for the host nation and the degree to which this fosters national identity and global engagement. Getz (2003) explained that mega-events have a ‘prestige factor’. Confirming this, respondents referred to the sense of “momentous occasion” (R2) that a mega-event delivers, compared to other events. A mega-event creates political symbolism for a nation, where the prestige of hosting and basking in the media attention may be used for political signalling and public diplomacy, as Nauright (2013) explained. For example, in the case of Brazil, host of the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and Olympic Games in 2016, de Almeida *et al.* (2013, p.1) concluded, “Sport mega events support and reflect the intention of many Brazilian political officials intention to increase the status of Brazil in the international sphere”. Similar political symbolism and prestige has been attributed to sport mega-events through many decades, most notably, the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Through the symbolic status of the mega-events, host nations are given opportunities to position or re-position their brand. The events themselves also create public diplomacy opportunities and assist in brand identity formation. This was especially important in the case of South Africa, in light of the nation’s turbulent and isolated political history. The 2010 mega-event was perceived as a tremendous opportunity for greater international engagement between the host nation and the world, as the following quotation reveals:

“[The 2010 sport mega-event was] also very important in terms of global integration. South Africa has had a lot of catching up to do in terms of integrating its global economy and being part of the globalised world. And sport is a great global thing, obviously the pinnacle being the Olympics, which remains 3000 years later as the forum of international competition and sportsmanship. Hugely, hugely important. I don’t think one can really over-emphasise the importance of sport as a theme and mega sporting events as a focus for building that kind of re-branding and international engagement” (R8).

The findings revealed that this characteristic might be of particular importance to emerging nations seeking to stake their place in the global environment, and particularly so for nations that have had an isolated or negatively viewed past. The example of Qatar was given as a nation that has similarly used sport mega-events for the purpose of global engagement. Respondent Fourteen claimed that Qatar is similarly “leveraging sport as a key pillar for growing the brand of the country”, and elaborated:

“Hosting major sporting events connects them [Qatar] to the rest of the world – it builds those bridges. Sport has been chosen strategically as one of the drivers for that. They’ve got the FIFA World Cup in 2022. They’ll bid again for the Olympic Games. Just the process of bidding actually gains them exposure, very much so positively. And ultimately winning gets them on the map. How many people can say they visited or even heard of Doha ten years ago? But now it’s firmly on the map. [Sport mega-events] has been a key driver in making that happen” (R14).

Furthermore, although national pride has been mentioned in the literature as a brand-related benefit, the findings indicate that the symbolic status for the host nation citizens creates opportunities for internal brand development. The respondents highlighted the crucial role that citizens play in the process of brand identity development, especially the manner in which they interact with event visitors or how this is broadcast to the spectators. The media images and experience of the event visitors featured a diverse local population united in their celebrations and having fun in urban public spaces

that were safe. This was said to have impacted significantly on the creation of an improved brand image for the nation as fun loving, warm, hospitable and friendly. All of these are brand personality attributes most closely associated with the nation's citizens and formed because of their shared engagement with the event and the event visitors. This engagement was actively encouraged or mobilised by other brand stakeholders such as SA Tourism and Brand South Africa. These organisations designed campaigns and activities aimed at stimulating citizen interest, support and pride in the hosting of the event.

As a result of the widespread support and enthusiasm of the local population and the pride they experienced through the perceived successful hosting of the event, the internal component of the South African nation brand was impacted very positively. As one stakeholder noted, it was "a huge morale boost and consolidation of identity" for the host nation citizens (R8). The stakeholders noted this translated into the workplace, with employees exhibiting a newfound national confidence. Citizens regarded themselves, their organisations and their nation as a whole as more competent and capable of delivering large projects and overcoming infrastructural challenges. The capability and confidence of the citizens therefore became an important part of developing a new internal brand identity for the nation. In addition, these attributes are significant for the re-positioning of the nation brand in the competitive global arena. Overall, the event appeared to have strengthened the nation brand identity most notably in terms of its rootedness in 'social-cohesion', 'diversity of culture' and 'hospitality'.

The important role of the local citizens is evidenced by the experience of Brazil in 2014 whereby public protests surrounding the mega-event were a result of public citizens over inflated expectations and the perceived costs of hosting the event compared to the perceived benefits for citizens (De Onis, 2014). This cast a more negative association between the event and the brand and therefore limited the degree to which this opportunity could have assisted the brand development more positively.

4.4 Beyond sport mega-events

While the respondents were positive in their overall assessment of the nation branding opportunities that the 2010 sport mega-event created, many were critical of the post-event period that they described as a period of "brand silence". There was an overall emphasis on a portfolio of events that should be hosted in the post mega-event period in order to sustain the legacies gained from the 2010 FIFA World Cup for the host nation. The success of the 2010 event was seen as enhancing the appeal of the nation as a host of future events, with one stakeholder referring to the "blueprint" for a future mega-event already being in place (R9). There was a great deal of support among respondents for the future bidding and hosting of sport mega-events in South Africa. A future Olympic Games bid was mentioned by a number of respondents, possibly as it has previously been considered by the government. Cape Town bid unsuccessfully for the 2004 Olympic Games, and at the time of this study, there were media reports relating to government support for a national bid for the 2024 Olympic Games. However, there were many who were against such a bid in the immediate future. These respondents urged for the building of capacity for a multi-sport mega-event bid first, through the hosting of a range of other smaller sport events, perceived as "building blocks" towards a larger-scale event (R4). To this effect, respondents referred to such other events as: Youth Games; IAAF World Athletics Championships; and Commonwealth Games (for which Durban has recently won the right to host in 2022). However, the timing of future event bids was noted as an important consideration. An interesting response from one stakeholder indicated that it might not be in the best interests of stakeholders to host the biggest mega-events in a short space of time. The case of Brazil hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games was given as an example of what the stakeholder would not support, noting, "It helps to have [these mega-events] a little bit spread out" (R5). This also indicates an acknowledgement of the role of mega-events in sustainable development.

Besides mega-events, there was also consensus among respondents in support of a range of other, smaller scale, regularly occurring, "home-grown" events, advocating "a good portfolio of small to medium range events" that could be as profitable and as successful as a bigger event (R10). This is consistent with the literature, which heightens the significance of a portfolio of events in the establishment of a destination or place brand (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2004; Chalip and Costa, 2005; Westerbeek and Linley, 2012; Giampiccoli *et al.*, 2015). One of the respondents specifically

highlighted the need for an events portfolio as part of leveraging the nation-branding legacy, referring to the example of Barcelona following the 1992 Olympic Games:

“We need to build on the success of this World Cup. What happened in Barcelona, for example, after the ‘92 Olympics? The Olympics creates a platform for you to start growing your events industry. Barcelona is where they are today because they aggressively went after events” (R4).

There was support for “smaller, regular, local [home-grown] sporting events”, especially as this was viewed as a means of not having to deal with strict rules imposed by international governing bodies and rights holders such as FIFA. These types of events were also described as more easily managed and very importantly, perceived as more “sustainable” (R17). There was also support for hosting a range of smaller scale, regularly- occurring events as these involve lower hosting costs and provide more niche benefits that can be leveraged for special interest markets. Respondent 18 captured this sentiment, stating:

“We need to be careful we don’t get hung up on mega-events as being the sole solution.... Maybe there are a lot of smaller events that we can get on a regular basis that are not so cost intensive, that we can leverage, and where we can really target the special interest market”.

More broadly, the future events do not necessarily need to take place in the original host country to be useful as post-event leveraging opportunities, with respondents mentioning two examples of programmes that leveraged benefits at other sport mega-events internationally: The ‘*iKhaya*’ programme linked with a tourism road show was linked with sport mega-events in 2011 in New Zealand and 2012 in London (R8). The business promotion umbrella brand ‘Connected Cape Town’ was also planning to leverage events held internationally, based on the Australian Business Club model that has arranged similar leveraging activities since the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games (R5).

Non-sport events, mega in scale or of a smaller scale, were also included in the types of events that could be hosted to leverage the 2010 legacy. Even seemingly unrelated events, such as Cape Town’s application to host the ‘World Design Capital’ in 2014, that features a large number of mostly non-sport events, conferences and exhibitions throughout the year, was perceived as a means of leveraging the improved nation brand image post 2010 by Respondent Five. Similarly, international conventions and conferences were also mentioned as potential leveraging opportunities. Stakeholders should therefore not feel restricted to sport events in order to leverage nation-branding opportunities.

4.5 Sport mega-events and emerging nation brands

The case of South Africa reveals a number of significant opportunities for enhancing a nation’s brand equity through the staging of a sport mega-event. Applying the literature and the experiences of experts involved in other contexts has assisted with assessing the degree to which these opportunities may be transferable to other host nations or nation brands, especially those that may be at different stages in their brand development. The respondents indicated that there might be slight differences in how these strategic brand opportunities are perceived by different host nations.

Grix (2012) observed that the systematic and purposeful leveraging of a sports mega-event to alter a nation’s image is easier for states that suffer or have suffered from a poor national image. Similarly, Tomlinson *et al.* (2011, p.38) proposed that mega-events offer what they term “middle-income countries” an opportunity for national perception development in a quite distinct manner to high-income countries. They referred to the example of the London 2012 Olympics that was presented as an opportunity for urban regeneration rather than for prospective gain to the image of the United Kingdom. This indicates that opportunities may be different depending on the state of or stage of development of the nation brand.

From the responses of the stakeholders, there were noted differences between emerging and developed nations in terms of the nation branding gains as a result of hosting mega-events. For example, South Africa was a far lower rated and known nation compared to some other recent mega-event hosts such as Germany and the United Kingdom. These brands were already well established, well known, and well defined prior to hosting a mega-event. This can be seen in the fact that these nations feature in the top brackets of most nation brand indices. Table 2 sets out the top three nation brands according to recent rankings and lists the sport mega-events that they have hosted over the past

two decades. It is notable that this small number of nations have hosted so many of the recent sport mega-events. However, for these brands, it appears that their branding aims from hosting their respective mega-events were more related to re-positioning, revitalising or re-enforcing their brand image. In contrast, South Africa was relatively unknown, associated with incorrect or outdated, stereotyped or even amalgamated negative continental brand images. At this earlier stage of brand development, it is not surprising that the nation would expect to focus on achieving greater awareness and knowledge of the nation, correcting the incorrect perceptions and establishing a global competitive positioning.

[INSERT Table 2 here: World's top nation brands and their hosting of sport mega-events (post-1990)]

One respondent raised some of the hosting challenges currently being experienced by mega-event rights holders. This is especially pertinent given the small number of cities (two) that recently bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games and the number of cities that pulled out of the process due to expected hosting costs or lack of public support. The respondent claims that emerging nations are being viewed more favourably as host nations by rights holders seeking to engage new markets for the sports and for the sponsors, as well as finding host nations that are willing to invest in the event and its hosting requirements. This may be partly the result of the mega-events reaching a level of maturity among the developed nations. The following quotation explains this scenario:

“Developing nations (or possibly South Africa is rather an ‘emerging’ nation) are the ones that have the capital to make these things work. They are the ones that are really driving the sports hosting agenda, because the rights holders are facing many challenges right now. Many cities can’t afford to host these mega-events. Where do they take their events next? Many sports have a declining appeal especially among young people and they don’t have the investment coming in. Sponsors want to get access to new markets. So it’s the emerging nations that are capital rich that are in the driving seat right now. The examples from FIFA and the IOC are very clear: the 2016 Olympics will be in Rio, the 2018 winter Olympics will go to South Korea. They are exploring new markets; new territories to give those events access to new sets of fans that will help grow those events further. Sponsors will naturally be attracted to those markets and those sports will be able to grow with more people taking part. FIFA 2010 South Africa, 2014 Brazil, 2018 Russia and 2022 Qatar – they’re all going to new markets. Ones that have the ability to host, but also they help the rights holders grow their own asset” (R14).

5. Conclusion, implications and future research

5.1 Conclusions

This study is unique in that it focuses on the nation-branding opportunities facing a mega-event host in the developing world, namely South Africa, whereby national identity, improved global reputation and political symbolism were identified at the outset as deliberate post-event legacies to be achieved. The fact that the 2010 FIFA World Cup was the first mega-event to be held in Africa provides the study with a unique geographic and policy context with nation branding bundled together by the South African event organisers with infrastructure development, country image and tourism promotion as explicit post-event legacy ambitions. With nation branding benefits acknowledged as key outcomes from the event for the host nation, this paper investigated the unique characteristics that this mega-event provided that created these nation-branding opportunities.

It is interesting to note that the inductive, data-primacy, approach adopted in this study concluded that it is in fact the scale of mega-events which is critical to their transformational branding role along with their global reach and symbolic status. Firstly, the large scale of the mega-event made it a transformational catalyst for a wide range of urban regeneration or development initiatives such as sport facilities, tourism infrastructure and services, public transportation and urban infrastructure; all, in turn, contributing to a more appealing destination. In the case of South Africa, the mega-event drew on large-scale public and private funding sources that resulted in a wide variety of tangible impacts that significantly improved the tourism services offered and the destination experience of the host

nation in a manner unlike any previous event hosted by the nation. Secondly, the sport mega-event was able to reach the largest global audience possible for an event. Moreover, through the passion associated with the sport, this particular mega-event appealed to and connected with this audience in a positive, engaging, passionate manner. Beyond this substantial global attention, the mega-event was also an experiential phenomenon that created an emotional attachment with its audience with the destination central through the imagery projected, warmth of its people and authenticity of the overall experience. Finally, the sport mega-event held a symbolic value for the host nation that exceeded any other previous event, apart from perhaps the 1995 Rugby World Cup. This symbolic status was leveraged for internal brand identity as well as public diplomacy objectives by the host nation that was eager to re-image and re-brand itself to the world as it sought to position itself as a global middle power. With it only being 16 years since the fall of the rogue Apartheid regime in the country, the hosting of a mega-event was considered to be one of the fastest routes to world recognition and enhancing its reputation on the world stage and there was no other comparable event or platform to achieve such an outcome so quickly. Based on these findings, it is proposed that there are unique characteristics carried by sport mega-events, that provide significant opportunities for nation branding for a host country.

5.2 Theoretical implications

With the majority of the mega-event literature focused on tangible legacies in the developed world, this study begins to redress this imbalance with a focus on the intangible legacies to be achieved by a developing host country. With nations only truly having been recognised as brands for the past 10 to 15 years, nation branding is behind the curve vis-à-vis definition, theory and conceptual development with it relying on advances in destination branding, itself a relatively new discourse, for critical investigation. As such, this paper's contribution to this emerging field of knowledge is fourfold: First, it is evident that emerging nations have the most to gain from the systematic and purposeful leveraging of a sports mega-event to alter a nation's image, especially those with a troubled history such as South Africa. Second, and in the specific context of Africa, nation branding serves as the many negative aspects of the continent that are continually in the media such as violence, corruption and disease burden an effective means for African nations to overcome the "Brand Africa" commodification problem whereby all nations. Third, the study identifies the need for authenticity of the nation brand so as to avoid awareness and image decay post-event and the short-lived phenomenon of branding legacies as evident with the examples of Beijing in 2008 and Sochi in 2014 where the public saw through the shallowness of the Chinese and Russian branding propositions. The sheer complexity and myriad of stakeholders involved with the determination of a nation brand necessitates the need for a genuine, robust and transparent proposition with control of imagery and the external environment limited even when compared to destination branding. It is in this context when citizens play a key ambassadorial role in the development and longer-term sustainability of the nation brand and all that it represents. Finally, the study advances a conceptual framework, unique to the nation brand context, which serves as a platform for future studies to build on, preferably using a longitudinal research methodology that will more adequately tap into the dynamics of legacy in the longer term.

5.3 Practical implications

The significant benefits from sport mega-events for nation branding is of particular importance for emerging nations such as South Africa that struggle to gain newsworthy global attention for positive reasons. Although this paper highlights the distinct advantages offered by sport mega-events, stakeholders should not feel restricted to these events alone in order to gain or leverage brand-related benefits. Smaller events or even non-sport events are also acknowledged, either providing valuable brand-related benefits in their own right at a lower cost and risk to the nation, or to be used as stepping-stones to bidding for other mega-events. Even events not hosted directly by a nation can provide branding opportunities. The paper therefore confirms the prevailing view in destination literature that advocates the sustainability, planning and management of a portfolio of events for a destination.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

The scope of this study did not consider the costs incurred in attaining these branding opportunities. It should also be noted that this study was conducted before the more recent damning revelations related to FIFA corruption, which may have tainted the longer-term perspective of the benefits from this event. It would therefore be particularly interesting to determine any potential changes in the views of these stakeholders towards hosting future sport mega-events. Finally, the proposed conceptual framework, unique to the nation brand context, serves as a platform for future studies to build on, preferably using a longitudinal research methodology that will more adequately tap into the dynamics of legacy in the longer term.

In closing, despite these revelations and the prevailing critical perspective of mega-events globally, South Africa is today a well-respected and increasingly popular international tourism destination with the combination of scale, global reach and appeal, connections and attachments, symbolic status and soft power derived from the 2010 FIFA World Cup contributing to its nation brand development and continued appeal.

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