Destination branding though major sporting events: The case of the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon

Tembi M. TICHAAWA[1*], Janice D. HEMMONSBEY[2]

1. University of Johannesburg, School of Tourism and Hospitality, College of Business and Economics, Bunting Road Campus, School Cottesloe 2092, Johannesburg, South Africa, e-mail: tembit@uj.ac.za
2. Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Town, South Africa, e-mail: HEMMONSBEYJ@cput.ac.za

* Corresponding author

Abstract: The study elicits visitor perceptions on the destination brand of Cameroon through sport event hosting. The nations' brand is often reduced to its geo-political and socio-economic status, and it becomes challenging for Cameroon to overcome this powerful negative discourse. Sport events are proven to be a powerful vehicle for changing perceptions and reimaging nations. This study employed a quantitative approach to data collection whereby face-to-face survey questionnaires were conducted with sport event spectators (n=465) at the AFCON tournament to determine the brand images held in the minds of visitors and moreover to determine the consequential effects on destination branding. Results of the study not only reveal that positive brand imagery is linked to cultural diversity but that it also demonstrates strong associations to sport brand positioning. The results further expose elements of branding challenges linked to policy development and leadership. This research holds key significance for destination brand stakeholders in terms of utilising appropriate marketing strategies in event promotions. It also supports existing destination branding constructs linked to brand image and brand positioning.

Keywords: Destination branding, Cameroon, sport mega-events, tourism development, AFCON

Introduction

Branding can be viewed as an important and powerful tool to destination marketers, especially where the destination is confronted with perpetuating adverse media attention and subsequent negative brand images (Khodadadi, 2019). According to Morgan et al. (2002), the goal for every destination is to position itself in the minds of visitors so that their experiences of the place will result in repeat visits and so that visitors will become voluntary ambassadors for the destination. For African nations, Freire (2014) particularly emphasises the importance of branding as there is an increased flow of investment and development of improved businesses and tourism infrastructure, which has led to the development of a stronger middle class and a greater competitive place brand. Moreover, its diverse geography and climate, coupled with its rich natural resources such as oil, minerals, timber, wildlife, water, and a rich soil for agriculture, makes Africa a very attractive place to visit (Freire, 2014). Contrastingly, adverse narratives on the brand image of poorer and more economically, socially and politically vulnerable African countries still persist. Cameroon is particularly susceptible to such negative brand perceptions since it experiences a number of geo-political issues (Clarke, 2022; Harilal et al., 2022). According to Khodadadi (2019), it is extremely challenging for destinations to overcome such powerful negative discourse.

It has been proven that sport is a powerful tool to influence destination branding in order to achieve imaging and re-imaging objectives (Higham and Hinch, 2009; Knott and Hemmonsbey, 2015; Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa, 2018). Specifically, the mega-event is argued to yield high levels of tourism, media coverage, prestige, and positive economic impacts for the host destination (Bob and Swart, 2010; Getz, 2012; Tichaawa and Bob, 2015; Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2018; Hritz and Cecil, 2019; Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2020). Knott et al. (2017) have critically revealed that nation branding benefits linking to socio-economic, political, and tourism were experienced by South Africa when hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup Games. Strategically, sport events can also present long-term positive impacts that persist beyond the event hosting phase (O'Brien and Chalip, 2008; Tichaawa and Bob, 2015; Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa, 2018; Hemmonsbey et al., 2018).

The research dispensation on destination branding through sport for developing, African nations remains limited, thus presenting a knowledge gap for the emerging Cameroon brand when drawing on best practices for destination branding through mega-event hosting. Furthermore, while previous studies on the Cameroon brand have been conducted in the contexts of responsible tourism (Bama and Tichaawa, 2015), visitor profiles (Achu et al., 2015), business tourism (Tichaawa, 2017 and 2021) and sport tourism development (Swart et al., 2018; Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2020; Nyikana et al., 2021), no study has explicitly focused on destination branding. This study thus addresses this theoretical gap by applying destination brand constructs to the Cameroon brand. Additionally, this study offers empirical evidence of sport event attendees of the 2022 men's Africa Cup of Nations [AFCON] tournament on destination brand imagery through sport mega-event hosting.

Branding of places and destinations

With their book, 'Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination proposition', Morgan et al. (2002) were of the first scholars to make a landmark contribution to place and destination branding theories. A collection of papers from the book include one by Ryan (2002) on the politics of branding cities and regions; one by Hall (2002) on branding and national identities, and one by Palmer (2002) on destination banding and the web. Sport as a determinant for image perceptions of a place brand have been hugely underestimated in the literature. It is through the emerging field of nation branding that the role of sport in country image perceptions has gained recognition (Brown et al., 2001; Gilmore, 2002; Motion et al., 2003).

The definition of destination branding is ever evolving in the literature. One of the first and most applicable definitions was offered by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) and later by Blain et al. (2005) as follows:

"*…a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience*".

From the above definition, the unique associations linked to visitor experiences are based on prior perceptions of people about a brand. While Wijaya (2013) labels visitor perceptions towards the destinations brand image constructs, Bickford-Smith (2009) confirms that "destination branding would be a major way in which we are told both how to imagine and consume places". Brand images may influence peoples' reality of a place when visiting and may also further occupy a permanent space in the minds of visitors.

Cameroon is reputed to have an incomparable brand image in terms of the diversity of natural, cultural, and historical touristic attractions and potentials (Tegomoh and Molombe, 2020). A study by Kimbu (2017) found that Cameroon's main tourism products are typically linked to photographic wildlife and eco/nature safaris which are regularly combined with sun, sand, and sea. Moreover, the discovery/adventure, cultural, mountaineering, and hiking tourism segments are consistently growing. Kimbu (2017) cites that this diversity in the tourism sectors, coupled with its relative peace and bilingual people, allows tourism in Cameroon to compare favourably with its neighbouring countries, such as the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. Tegomoh and Molombe (2020) flag that through effective marketing and by employing strategic planning, such brand associations can match the changing trends in tourists' motivations and behaviours when visiting the destination as well as secure returns for investors.

Cameroon is however relatively unknown for its brand image and largely underexplored by key international tourism markets (tourisminformationcamerron.net). Furthermore, the Cameroon brand has been compromised by structural issues linked to socio-economic, cultural, and political issues which saturates the international media (Clarke, 2022) and thus adds to the obscure brand images of the nation. As a consequence for unclear visitor perceptions towards destination brands, benefits which are typically associated

with event hosting, such as media coverage, nation building, and economic development, might either go unrealised or be poorly planned by event and destination brand stakeholders (Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa, 2020). The literature on destination branding is however scant in the area of the brand image and positioning of Cameroon as a developing African nation. As such, the results of this study aim to uncover the perceptions of visitors at a sport event on the brand messages of Cameroon and determine the image and positioning for this underexplored African destination brand.

Destination branding through sport events

From a sport event perspective, some destinations use the hosting of mega-events as a re-positioning strategy with the expectation that the international media coverage of the event will contribute towards destination profiling and to increased prominence (Heslop et al., 2013). Specifically, the positive media coverage that the 1995 Rugby World Cup received helped in South Africa's quest to re-engage the international community and acted as an affirmation of the arrival of the "new" South Africa (Jago et al., 2010). Linking to re-imaging benefits, Higham and Hinch (2009) advocates for national identity benefits through positive brand identity and positioning as an interesting and unique place to host sport events.

Critically argued for developing nations are soft/ power public diplomacy benefits (Nauright, 2013). These refer to utilising events as a platform for building a nation's soft power by means of using dominant social and economic practices to influence current foreign policy (Al Thani, 2021). For example, Brazil uses the bidding and staging of mega-events as part of a broader government strategy to derive national recognition and symbolic power in the international arena (De Almeida et al., 2014). Elsewhere, Panagiotopoulou (2012) recognises the Chinese government's attempt to use the 2008 Beijing Olympics as a platform to promote their local economy as well as technological achievements and organisational capacities. A more recent study by Al Thani (2021) concludes that, while Qatar has been a source of global scrutiny due to contested human rights issues, their national government, together with event organisers, have employed mechanisms around the 2022 men's football World Cup in order to counter such discourse and to showcase accountability and commitment towards international standards and international development and thus, restoring its soft power abilities in the process.

Within the foreign policies of Cameroon, it is known that the Cameroon Vision 2035 strategy is positioned to guide tourism development in Cameroon with the aim of consolidating democracy and enhancing national unity, reducing poverty, and ultimately, to becoming a middle-income and newly industrialised country (Ministry of economy, planning and regional development, 2009). Through this policy, the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure aims to unite the people of Cameroon (Nonos, 2022) along with the aims of the Cameroonian Government to aggressively push the tourism agenda in the Western Hemisphere i.e., to attract one million foreign visitors to Cameroon by 2025 (tourisminformationcameroon.net). However, the study implies branding opportunities through sport tourists' perceptions and

experiences at the men's 2022 AFCON tournament that influence the trajectory in policy implementation for destination branding and policy development.

The Cameroon sport brand

Sport such as football, boxing, wrestling, basketball, cycling, table tennis, netball and handball hold prominent positions in the make-up of the Cameroon sport brand. Marathon running events such as the Mount Cameroon Race for Hope are also popular since they draws large numbers of participants. While Cameroon has three golf courses, it does not compare with other African golfing destinations, for example, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa (Knott and Hemmonsbey, 2017). It is without a doubt that football is the most popular sport in Cameroon, with most villages having their own team fixtures against each other (Pannenborg, 2008, 2010; Tichaawa and Swart, 2010).

The sporting success for Cameroon is immense. Previous accolades of their national football team include five African Cup of Nations titles. Other accolades highlight the great impact that the men's football team made on the field in the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Rome. In other global sport, the nations' first time competing in the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games was a great achievement for Cameroon (Pannenborg, 2010). While even greater achievements followed with their first silver medal for boxing in the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games, a gold medal for the men's football team at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, and Cameroon's first female medalist for the women's triple jump event in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Topendsports.com reports that Cameroon is also one of the few tropical states that has competed in the Olympic Winter Games.

From a sport event hosting perspective, Cameroon has hosted several major events. The most recent event was the 33rd edition of the AFCON tournament in 2022 which was only the second time Cameroon has hosted- the first time being in 1972. In 2016, Cameroon hosted the 12th edition of the Women's AFCON. These types of major sports events not only promise media attention for the Cameroon nation brand, but also create opportunities for inbound tourism and other sport business related benefits (Knott et al., 2017; Achu et al., 2022). Clarke (2022) reports that economically, businesses in Cameroon all have their eyes on a revival and boost in revenue through the 2022 AFCON tournament.

Materials and methods

A quantitative research approach grounded in the post-positivist paradigm was adopted for the current study. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), this approach delineates certain variables that are empirically measured and cannot be otherwise achieved through qualitative inquiries. With the intention to explore the perceptions of sport event attendees on aspects of the destination brand of Cameroon at a selected major event, the said approach was deemed appropriate. More specifically, a cross-sectional research design was adopted and survey questionnaires were selected as the quantitative approach for collecting the data from event attendees. Its usefulness in assessing large populations with relative ease

to yield meaningful results (Jones et al., 2013) is one of the key advantages for selecting this research design.

Due to Covid-19 regulations, the capacity of the stadiums hosting football matches at the AFCON was capped between 60% and 80% at six different stadiums in five cities across the country. The total capacity of these stadiums ranged from 20 000- 60 000. Using the sample size calculator, which includes the 95% confidence level as posited by Raosoft Inc. (2004), the sample size for this current study resulted in n=465 across various host cities in Bafoussam, Limbe, Yaounde, and Douala. The sample technique applied to this quantitative data collection was non-probability sampling with a random sampling approach. This technique is effective as it allows each event attendee an equal and independent chance to be selected. An additional advantage of this technique is that findings can be generalised to the broader population (Gratton and Jones, 2010; Acharya et al., 2013).

Face-to-face survey questionnaires were conducted by a group of trained fieldworkers. The quality of these surveys was supervised by the research leads of the study. The survey design was adapted from a previous research study conducted on the leveraging of sport tourism events for destination brand objectives (Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa, 2020). Moreover, questions on nation branding elements are guided by studies such as Feinberg and Zhao (2011). Close-ended questions were asked in a 5 point Likert scales to elicit the event attendees' level of agreement to various statements on 'brand messages of Cameroon through sport event hosting', 'promotional activities for brand engagement, and 'the role of stakeholders for destination branding practices'. Informed consent was requested before participants agreed to complete the questionnaires. All participants in the study remain anonymous and their confidentiality is guaranteed as there is no indication of their names on the questionnaires.

The data analysis process that followed included inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling the data in order to highlight useful and relevant information, to suggest conclusions, and to support decision making (Welman et al., 2005). The quantitative data obtained from a survey instrument was captured on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) (Version 27). This software permits researchers to not only run various statistical analyses on the data, but it is also useful to extract data summaries for visually presenting the study's findings. These visualisations come in the form of tables, which form part of the findings and discussions section.

Results
Attendees' profile
The results of this study reveal that sport event attendees to the AFCON tournament in Cameroon are traveling (young) adult males. To illustrate, the respondents' profiles illustrate that there were a significant number of male attendees (70.1%) compared to females (29.2%). The average age of the attendees ranged between 26-35 years (34.6%). The geographic results reveal that most of the event attendees were traveling from outside of the host nation including Gambia (24.1%), Burkina Faso (10.5%) and Tunisia (10.1%).

Cameroon's perceived brand messages and attendees' experiences

The respondents were asked about the perceived brand messages of Cameroon that are advertised in the event media. A 5-point Likert scale in table 1 reveals that all the brand messages were positively positioned in the minds of sport event attendees. Specifically, the brand messages that were mostly agreed to by respondents are the nation's 'cultural diversity' (37.9%) as well as being a prime 'destination for sport and leisure tourism' (36.3%). A reinforcement of the Cameroonian culture shows that brand messages linked to 'native music' (35.5%), and the 'community/local people' (34.1%) were also being avidly perceived. Moreso, brand perceptions on the nation's ability to be a 'competitive destination for sport in Africa' (32.7%) further reiterates the nations' position as a sport and leisure brand. Additionally, 'geographical landscapes and destination attractions' (32.0%) which can refer to the mountains, forests or coastline, were also positively perceived. Despite the agreement to brand imageries, the results show a close link to the neutral responses on perceived brand messages in the event media.

Table 1. The following brand messages of Cameroon are advertised in the event media

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Competitive destination for sport in Africa	14.3%	24.9%	16.0%	32.7%	12.1%
Destination for sport and leisure tourism	10.0%	16.5%	24.1%	36.3%	13.0%
Cultural diversity	8.1%	17.0%	22.9%	37.9%	14.1%
Community/ local people	7.9%	15.7%	24.9%	34.1%	17.5%
Native music	8.0%	17.3%	24.7%	35.5%	14.5%
Geographical landscapes/Destination attractions i.e. landmarks, museums etc.	10.0%	19.7%	18.8%	32.0%	19.5%

Table 2 illustrates the steadily high mean scores (above 3) that were obtained across all brand messages of Cameroon. A consistent average of mean scores of about 3.3 reflects for all variables linked to the cultural/ natural destination's brand, such as 'cultural diversity', 'native music', and 'geographic landscape' with the exception of 'community and local people' which scored (M=3.38). Sport brand variables (albeit in the lowest range of mean scores), is still in the range of a mean score of 3 which shows congruence with the cultural/ natural destination brand variables.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations relating to brand messages of Cameroon

Brand messages	Mean	Standard Deviation
Competitive destination for sport in Africa	3.03	1.278
Destination for sport and leisure tourism	3.26	1.177
Cultural diversity	3.33	1.155
Community/ local people	3.38	1.172
Native music	3.31	1.155
Geographical landscapes/Destination attractions i.e. landmarks, museums etc.	3.31	1.265

Respondents were further probed on whether their perceptions of the Cameroon brand had either changed, been reinforced or are in support of brand elements through hosting the AFCON tournament. Encouraging results, illustrated in table 3, reflect a grappling in responses between the agree and strongly agree categories to all the variables linked to the Cameroon brand. Concurring with the above-mentioned results on sport brand messaging, event attendees also articulated the brand positioning of Cameroon in Africa as a 'leading destination for sport' (38.5%) and more so, for Cameroon to 'attract future sport mega-events' (36.5%). Interestingly, sport event attendees believed that 'cementing government support for future event hosting' (35.7%) was a key imperative through the AFCON tournament. Brand image variables linked to the 'change or reinforce perceptions of the country's brand' (35.0%) was also strongly perceived thus positing the influence of sport for nation branding. Accompanying this brand perception is, 'promoting the country's brand to global sport tourism markets' (34.6%). Lastly, but not at all insignificant, to the business variables, it was revealed that respondents either opted to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the notion that the AFCON will help Cameroon to 'attract commercial sponsorship for future event hosting' (32.8%). Naturally, a fairly even number of respondents showed their 'support for local business' (32.1%), thus indicating opportunities for (new) business through event hosting.

Table 3. Hosting the AFCON will help Cameroon to (n=465)

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Attract future mega sporting events to the country	8.5%	11.1%	15.3%	36.5%	28.6%
Position the country's brand in Africa as a leading destination for sport hosting	6.1%	10.1%	19.5%	38.5%	25.8%
Promote the country's brand to global sport tourism markets	7.2%	11.4%	18.8%	34.6%	28.0%
Change/ reinforce people's perceptions of the country's brand	4.9%	11.8%	19.0%	35.0%	29.2%
Attract commercial sponsorship for future event hosting	5.5%	9.3%	19.5%	32.8%	32.8%
Support for local business	6.8%	12.4%	18.1%	32.1%	30.6%
Cement government support for future event hosting	4.5%	10.8%	19.0%	35.7%	29.9%

A deduction of respondents' overall experiences of Cameroon during their visit to the AFCON tournament reveal mixed results, however, most were linked to positive experiences. Specifically, respondents experienced Cameroon as 'very favourable' (36%), while a significant number indicated 'somewhat favourable' (30%). An equal number of respondents indicated 'extremely favourable' (15%) and 'not so favourable' (15%). The least number of respondents alluded to their experience being 'not at all favourable' (4%). These responses may reverberate the positively perceived brand messages, as well as indicate a level of future sport tourism for Cameroon when hosting sporting events.

Promotional activities that support destination branding and sport tourism to Cameroon

From their experiences of event media used during the AFCON tournament, respondents indicated that 'television' (28.2%) presided as the main media source for promotional activities. 'The event venue' (23.3%) also surfaced as significant for promoting brand messages since sport event attendees can directly engage with marketing activations within the space. Respondents viewed 'social media' (19%) as an additional important media tool for destination brand promotions which represents the 'young adult' sport attendees. Naturally, respondents also trusted the 'event website/ internet' (10.5%) to have some implication to the nation's brand messages. Traditional media, such as 'radio' (9%) and 'print media' (8.5%) showed the least interest among respondents, which consequently reiterates the trajectory of media promotions- from traditional to online/digital.

In addition to event media experiences, event attendees responded to their level of agreement on the promotions of the Cameroon brand for sport and other tourism because of the AFCON tournament. Table 4 illustrates that, for the most part, event attendees grappled with the promotions of the brand Cameroon as there is a close overlap between 'neutral' and 'agreed' responses. For the agreed responses, event attendees believed that there is 'potential for hosting new events in Cameroon' (33.8%), thus implying the successful staging of the AFCON. Furthermore, 'the promotion of local activities through tour operating companies' (31.9%) was also encouraged, however, whether or not visitors utilised the services for tourism purposes is unclear. That said, attendees also recognised that 'secondary motivations for traveling to Cameroon is stimulated via promotions' (31.7%) and that 'promotional packages compiled beyond event visitation' (28.5%). What was however disagreed with by a number of attendees was the matter of the 'synergy of event promotions between the AFCON and other destination attractions (24.8%) which reveals that the co-branding of events and destination is minimally leveraged.

Table 4. Please use the following scale to respond to the questions
on event promotions below (n=465)

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
There is clear synergy in the event promotions between the event (AFCON) and other destination attractions	18.1%	24.8%	18.8%	23.5%	14.9%
There are promotional packages that include additional tourism opportunities in Cameroon (i.e. beyond the event attendance)	9.5%	20.3%	27.4%	28.5%	14.3%
Other (local) activities are encouraged by tour operating companies during the AFCON	8.7%	17.2%	28.4%	31.9%	13.8%
There is a potential for hosting new events in Cameroon because of the AFCON	9.6%	16.4%	23.4%	33.8%	16.6%
Secondary motivations for traveling are stimulated through the event media/ promotional activities	9.8%	15.7%	27.4%	31.7%	15.4%

Considering the destination branding practices of Cameroon through sport event hosting, event attendees believed that not all stakeholders play an equal part in branding the destination. Results show that 'sport organisers' (26.7%), 'governments' (23.2%), and 'private investment companies/ sport brand sponsors' (20.6%) hold the most responsibility for branding practices. This may be the case as they are directly involved in event and destination marketing. Since sport events are a natural attraction for (sport) tourism, 'tourism companies/ organisations' including tour operations (14.8%) played a significant role in branding practices. Other variables, such as 'community' (9.8%) and media (5.0%) also surfaced as indirect stakeholders.

Discussions and implications

Current reports on the unknown and largely underexplored destination brand images of Cameroon by key international tourism markets (tourisminformationcamerron.net, n. d) coincide with the current study's results on the degree of neutral perceptions of sport event attendees towards the brand messages of Cameroon. Nonetheless, the study's results reveal that the brand messages of Cameroon are intrinsically linked to the cultural diversity that reflects through native music and its people/local community. Furthermore, the geographical landscape, such as the mountains, forests, and coastlines, communicate distinct destination brand messages. Such brand messages certainly relate to Cameroon's main tourism products such as cultural and eco-tourism as posited by Kimbu (2017). It further positively elucidates the leisure tourism features of Cameroon.

That said, it remains obscure and limited in the literature how sport tourism is advancing the brand positioning of developing African nations. From the study's results, it is apparent that the emerging Cameroon sport brand positioning is underpinned by the strong associations to Cameroon being considered a destination for sport and leisure tourism and moreover, being a competitive destination for sport in Africa. While such findings communicate a solid global sport brand position for Cameroon, it adds to the extant destination branding knowledge in the context of developing nations.

Notably, the results further reveal positive destination brand benefits that are commonly linked to reasons why nations bid for sport mega-events. For Cameroon, the AFCON helps to attract future (new) mega-events to the destination and evidently it helps to cement government support for future event hosting. Results also posit positive new business opportunities through commercial sponsorships for future events and a generous support for local businesses to increase through the AFCON. In addition, current studies reveal that nations bid for mega-events for specific benefits linked to media coverage (Heslop et al., 2013), national identity (Higham and Hinch, 2009), and related public diplomacy benefits (Nauright, 2013) in order to encourage lasting legacy. Al Thani (2021) in particular, advocates for the significance of such benefits as key imperatives for developing nations and emerging states such as Cameroon where structural issues remain prevalent (Clarke, 2022).

To this end, other developing nations such as Brazil, Beijing, and Qatar are known to have mobilised sport mega-events for nation branding benefits in order to positively change their image on the international stage (Al Thani, 2021). However, it remains unclear as to how national efforts are coordinated by Cameroon towards integrating foreign policy for sport tourism and destination brand development despite their adopted Cameroon Vision 2035 which acts as a guiding framework for public diplomacy (Ministry of economy, planning and regional development, 2009). The study's results clearly indicate a healthy (sport) tourism potential through sport mega-events and elucidates that the AFCON is a powerful agent for shifting the trajectory of (sport) tourism development and destination brand positioning for Cameroon within Africa and on global platforms. However, since there is no guarantee of a lasting positive perception from international visitors, it is up to established governing structures to strategically integrate with sport tourism policy objectives and interested groups of the community in order to successfully realise (sport) tourism development and destination branding outcomes.

Although not equally responsible for branding the destination to sport tourists, results reveal that a great responsibility for initiating, implementing, and managing branding practices through event hosting lies with the sport organisers, local/national government, and private investment companies/ sport brand sponsors. This may be due to their direct connections to the sport event and host destination. Tour operating companies and tourism organisations also prove to have their share in branding practices as they are favourably perceived to promote local activities- whether their branding practices are purposeful or inadvertent is not explained. The current study's results therefore correspond with Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2019) on the role of stakeholders in destination branding through sport.

It was found that the community and the media are perceived to have a small degree of responsibility for destination branding through sport. That said, media is persistently believed to portray positive brand images of Cameroon during the AFCON tournament. Kimbu (2011) however found contrasting results in relation to the significant role of community in promoting tourism for a cultural festival in Cameroon which in turn prompted the prioritisation of governments to not only financially support event organisers, but also to augment Cameroons' multicultural richness and diversity to national and international audiences. The findings of such studies are thus optimistic for sport to similarly be influenced by community support and initiatives, and to subsequently encourage governments' commitment towards greater efforts of promoting and developing the sport tourism industry. This may further fashion synergistic efforts through co-branding between role-players of sport and destination brand practitioners, including government and community (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019).

Conclusions and future research

This study sought to determine the perceptions of sport event visitors on the brand messages of Cameroon during a selected intercontinental mega-event. A quantitative methodology of face-to-face survey questionnaires was administered with event spectators at the AFCON tournament at various hosting venues. The

brand image and positioning constructs are underpinned in this study which reveals the importance of brand messages and imagery in the minds of visitors when reflecting on a developing African nation in the context of sport event hosting.

The Cameroon brand messaging is strongly linked to its culturally diverse brand images and such images hold a strong position in the minds of visitors. Mega-events reinforce extant brand messages and further position Cameroon favourably as a fierce competitor for sport mega-event hosting within Africa and on the global stage. Events like the AFCON demonstrates great potential to develop a strong identity and reputation amid perpetuating structural challenges as a destination. Best practices on policy development reveal how resultant nation building and brand imagery objectives can be strategically realised for Cameroon. What is more, a consideration for synergistic efforts amongst a range of stakeholders can enhance the promotion of brand messages provided it is effectively supported and managed.

While quantitative results reflect the position of the brand in the minds of sport event visitors, this can be further explored in order to establish brand intentions of key industry and government stakeholders through employing a qualitative inquiry. Such results can thus be used to support and validate the brand perceptions of Cameroon, as well as to provide deeper insight to the overall branding policies. Moreover, perceptions and experiences of non-sport visitors can be elicited for wide-ranging brand- related assessments. Resultant studies alluding to mega-event leveraging in this destination context can further contribute to extant practice and place branding theory.

References

Acharya, A.S., Prakash, A., Saxena, P., & Nigam, A. (2013). Sampling: Why and how of it. *Indian Journal of Medical Specialties*, 4(2), 330–333.

Achu, F.N., Nyathi, L.S., Bama, H.K.N., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2015). Profiles of visitors attending the 2013 Confederation of African Football (CAF) Nations Cup tournament in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, supp. 1, 220-232.

Achu, F.N., Lekgau, R., & Bob, U. (2022). Perceptions of the Socioeconomic Impacts of A Women's Major Sporting Event in Africa. *Tourism Review International*, 26(1), 73-85. https://doi.org/10.3727/154427221X16245632411908

Al Thani, M. (2021). Channelling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38(17), 1729–1752. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1988932

Bama, H.K.N., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2015). Major sporting events and responsible tourism: Analysis of the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation & Dance*, supp. 1, 205-219.

Bickford-Smith, V. (2009). Creating a city of the tourist imagination: the case of Cape Town, 'the fairest Cape of them all'. *Urban Studies*, 46(9), 1763-1785. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009106013

Blain, C., Levy, S.E., & Ritchie, J.R.B. (2005). Destination Branding: Insights and Practices from Destination Management Organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(4), 328-338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287505274646

Bob, U., & Swart, K. (2010). Sport events and social legacies. *Alternation*, 17(2), 72-95.

Brown, G., Chalip, L., Jago, L., & Mules, T. (2001). The Sydney Olympics and Brand Australia. In Morgan N.J., Pritchard, A. & Pride, R. (eds.), *Destination branding. creating the unique destination proposition* (pp. 279-305). Oxford: Butterworths, England.

Ministry of economy, planning and regional development (2009). *Cameroon Vision 2035*. Republic of Cameroon.

Clarke, J. (2022). Why hosting the Africa Cup of Nations is so important for a divided Cameroon. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-01-15-why-hosting-the-africa-cup-of-nations-is-so-important-for-a-divided-cameroon/ (Accessed: 19.04.2022).

Creswell, J., & Clark, V.L.P. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Los Angeles: SAGE, USA.

De Almeida, B.S., Júnior, W.M., & Pike, E. (2014). The 2016 olympic and paralympic games and Brazil's soft power. *Contemporary Social Science*, 9(2), 271-283. https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2013.83829

Feinberg, B.M., & Zhao, X. (2011). The Anholt—GfK Roper Nation Brands Index SM: Navigating the Changing World. In Go, F. & Govers, R (eds.), *International Place Branding Yearbook 2011* (pp. 63-76). London: Palgrave Macmillan, England.

Freire, J. (2014). Place branding in Africa. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 10(1), 32-34. https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2013.31

Getz, D. (2012). Sport event tourism: planning development and Marketing. In Hudson, S. (ed.), *Sport and adventure tourism* (pp. 49-88). New York and London: Haworth Hospitality Press, USA.

Gilmore, F. (2002). A country – can it be repositioned? Spain – the success story of country branding. *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4-5), 281-293. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540078

Gratton, C., & Jones, I. (2010). *Research methods for sport studies*. London: Routledge, England.

Hall, D. (2002). Branding and national identity: The case of Central and Eastern Europe. In Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. & Pride, R. (eds.), *Destination branding: Creating the unique destination proposition* (pp.87-105). Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, England.

Harilal, V., Tichaawa, T.M., & Saarinen, J. (2022). Ecotourism and Community Development in Cameroon: The Nexus Between Local Participation and Trust in Government. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 19(2), 164-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2021.1995034

Hemmonsbey, J., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2018). The effects of major sport event leveraging for tourism and destination branding: The case of South Africa as an emerging destination. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites,* 11(1), 213-225. http://digitalknowledge.cput.ac.za/handle/11189/7210

Hemmonsbey, J., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2019). Using non-mega events for destination branding: A stakeholder perspective. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 24(1), 252–266.

Hemmonsbey, J., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2020) Brand messages that influence the sport tourism experience: The case of South Africa. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 24(3), 177-194. https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2020.1822200

Hemmonsbey, J., Tichaawa, T.M., & Knott, B. (2018). Conceptual framework for strategic destination branding through leveraging home-grown sport events. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 40(2), 81-98. https://doi.org/10.10520/ejc-108600c26f

Heslop, L.A., Nadeau, J., O'Reilly, N., & Armenakyan, A. (2013). Mega-event and country co-branding: Image shifts, transfers and reputational impacts. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 16(1), 7-33. https://doi.org/10.1057/crr.2012.23

Higham, J., & Hinch, T. (2009). *Sport and tourism: globalisation, mobility and identity*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, England.

Hritz, N., & Cecil, A. (2019). Small business owner's perception of the value and impacts of sport tourism on a destination. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 20(3), 224-240. https://doi.org/10.1080/15470148.2019.1635547

Jago, L., Dwyer, L., Lipman, G., van Lill, D., & Vorster, S. (2010). Optimising the potential of mega-events: an overview. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 1(3), 220-237. https://doi.org/10.1108/17852951011078023

Jones, T.L., Baxter, M.A.J., & Khanduja, V. (2013). A quick guide to survey research. *The Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England*, 95(1), 5-7. https://doi.org/10.1308/003588413X13511609956372

Khodadadi, M. (2019). Challenges of branding Iran: Perspectives of Iranian tourism suppliers. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 16(1), 112-117. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2017.1415957

Kimbu, A.N. (2011). The challenges of marketing tourism destinations in the Central African subregion: The Cameroon example. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 13(4), 324-336. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.853

Kimbu, A.N. (2017). Cameroon. In Lowery, L (ed.), *The SAGE International Encyclopaedia of Travel and Tourism* (pp. 212-213). New York: SAGE Publications, USA.

Knott, B., & Hemmonsbey, J. (2015). The strategic value of sport for an African city brand. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation & Dance*, 21(2), 191-204. https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC182957

Knott, B., & Hemmonsbey, J. (2017). Golf in Africa. In Breitbarth, T., Kaiser-Jovy, S. & Dickson, G. (eds.), *Golf Business and Management* (pp. 223-234). London: Routledge, England.

Knott, B., Fyall, A., & Jones, I. (2017). Sport mega-events and nation branding: Unique characteristics of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, South Africa. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(3), 900-923. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2015-0523

Morgan, N., Pritchard, A., & Pride, R. (2002). *Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination proposition*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, England.

Motion, J., Leitch, S., & Brodie, R.J. (2003). Equity in corporate co-branding: the case of adidas and the All Blacks. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 1080-1094. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477672

Nauright, J. (2013). Selling nations to the world through sports: Mega-events and nation branding as global diplomacy. *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, 9, 22-27.

Nonos, F. (2022). AFCON is a winner for Cameroon. https://newafricanmagazine.com/27680/ (Accessed: 19.04.2022).

Nyikana, S., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2018). Sport tourism as a local economic development enhancer for emerging destinations. *EuroEconomica*, 37(1), 70-83.

Nyikana, S., & Tichaawa, T.M. (2020). Revisiting sport and tourism interrelationships: The case of Cameroon. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29(2), 756-771.

Nyikana, S., Tichaawa, T.M., & Kimbu, A.N. (2021). Managing sports for domestic tourism promotion in the African context. In Ngoasong, M.Z., Adeola, O., Kimbu, A.N. & Hinson, R.E. (eds.), *New Frontiers in Hospitality and Tourism Management in Africa* (pp. 193-208). Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

O'Brien, D., & Chalip, L. (2008). Sport events and strategic leveraging: Pushing towards the triple bottom line. In Woodside, A.G., Martin, D. (eds.), *Tourism management: Analysis, behaviour and strategy* (pp. 318-338). Washington: CABI, USA.

Palmer, A. (2002). Destination branding and the Web. In Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. & Pride, R. (eds.), *Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination proposition* (pp.186-197). Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, England.

Panagiotopoulou, R. (2012). Nation branding and the Olympic games: New media images for Greece and China. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(16), 2337-2348. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.744527

Pannenborg, A. (2008). *How to win a football match in Cameroon: An anthropological study of Africa's most popular sport*. African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Pannenborg, A. (2010). *Football in Africa: observations about political, financial, cultural and religious influences*. NCDO Publication Series, Sport and Development, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Raosoft Inc. (2004). Sample size calculator. http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html (Accessed: 03.02.2022).

Ritchie, J.R.B., & Ritchie, J.R.R. (1998). The branding of tourism destinations. In *Annual Congress of the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism* (pp. 1-31). Marrakech, Morocco.

Rodríguez-Molina, M.A., Frías-Jamilena, D.M., Del Barrio-García, S., & Castañeda-García, J.A. (2019). Destination brand equity-formation: Positioning by tourism type and message consistency. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 12, 114-124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.03.010

Ryan, C. (2002). The politics of branding cities and regions: The case of New Zealand. In Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. & Pride, R. (eds.), *Destination branding: Creating the unique destination proposition* (pp. 66-86). Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, England.

Swart, K., Tichaawa, T.M., Othy, J.D.O., & Daniels, T. (2018). Stakeholder perspectives of sport tourism development in Gabon - A case study of the Africa Cup of Nations. *EuroEconomica*, 37(2), 177-189.

Tegomoh, E.N., & Molombe, J.M. (2020). Potential of destination branding for tourism promotion in Cameroon. In Theodoropoulou, I. & Tovah, J. (eds.), *Research Companion to Language and Country Branding* (pp. 351-371). Routledge, London, England.

Tichaawa, T.M., & Swart, K. (2010). Cameroonian fans perceptions of the 2010 FIFA World Cup: A case of Buea and Limbe. *Alternations*, 17(2), 173-199.

Tichaawa, T.M. (2017). Business tourism in Africa: The case of Cameroon. *Tourism Review International*, 21(2), 181- 192. https://doi.org/10.3727/154427217X14939227920829

Tichaawa, T.M. (2021). Informal sector business tourism in Cameroon. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 38(4), 1289-1298.

Tichaawa, T.M., & Bob, U. (2015). Leveraging mega-events beyond the host nation: A case study of the 2010 FIFA World Cup African Legacy Programme in Cameroon and Nigeria. *Leisure Studies*, 34(6), 742-757. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2015.1035312

Welman, C., Kruger, F., & Mitchell, B. (2005). *Research methodology*. Oxford University Press, Cape Town, South Africa.

Wijaya, B.S. (2013). Dimensions of Brand Image: A Conceptual Review from the Perspective of Brand Communication. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 5(31), 55-65. https://doi.org/10.13140/ejbm.2013.55.65

Web-sites sources:

Topendsports. *https://www.topendsports.com/world/countries/cameroon.htm* (Accessed: 19.04.2022).

Tourisminformationcameroon.net. *https://tourisminformationcameroon.net/* (Accessed: 19.04.2022).