

## *Full Length Research Paper*

# Exploring branding associations in festival branding

Me Adri Dreyer and Elmarie Slabbert\*

Socio-economic impact of Tourism, School of Business Management, North-West University,  
Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

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**Arts festivals in South Africa are growing tremendously and it has become more important for these types of tourism products to position themselves competitively. Branding plays a major role in positioning and the associations made with the brand. It is necessary to understand these associations as well as factors influencing the associations. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore brand associations in festival branding and to determine the influence of demographic characteristics on festival associations. Very little research in this regard has been conducted in South Africa. This study was done at the KKNK (Klein Karoo National Arts Festival) held annually in Oudtshoorn, by means of a structured questionnaire where 394 questionnaires were completed. The statistical analysis was descriptive in nature, including a factor analysis (to determine the brand associations) and the calculation of effect sizes (to determine differences between the brand associations and certain demographic variables). Firstly, the results revealed three brand associations, namely brand judgements, brand attributes and brand performance. Secondly, the results indicated no significant differences between age, gender, marital status, province, qualification, number of times visited and the identified brand associations. The results therefore confirm that brand associations exist but that demographic characteristics do not influence these associations.**

**Key words:** Arts festivals, competitive advantage, branding, brand associations, festival branding, demographic characteristics, Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK).

## INTRODUCTION

Festivals have become a very important part of the culture of South Africa and the country has been experiencing major growth in the number and types of events (Van Zyl, 2005). Not only do festivals portray the proud history of South Africa, festivals also have social, cultural and economic implications (Burke, 2004). It is therefore important for festivals to position themselves in the market, as this can be used to increase visitor numbers, the cost effectiveness of advertising as well as the market share (Saayman, 2006). Effective branding can assist in obtaining the optimum position and contributing to the sustainability of the festival.

During the latter part of the last century, brands have spread throughout practically all facets of marketing and therefore became one of the most important marketing phenomena of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Westwood et al., 1999).

Branding principles are implemented to improve marketing strategies and produce more tangible products (Mossberg and Getz, 2006). Branding strategies are therefore, effective strategic marketing tools and are no longer limited to tangible goods, but also to services, such as festivals (Mossberg and Getz, 2006; De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). Various studies have been done on the marketing of events (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Olberding and Jisha, 2005; Stokes, 2008) but, even with the prominence of branding in marketing literature, little has been published on the branding of events such as arts festivals (Getz, 2007). The purpose of this research is to explore brand associations in festival branding and to determine the influence of demographic characteristics on festival associations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Festinos (regular visitors to festivals) can be considered

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [Elmarie.Slabbert@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Elmarie.Slabbert@nwu.ac.za).  
Tel: +27 18 299 1806. Fax: +27 18 299 4140.

as persons who travel away from home to attend a festival, spend money, visit market stalls and watch shows. They comprise people with varying festival needs according to their age, gender, education level and previous experiences, and are constantly exposed to new festivals and what these festivals have to offer (Wheeler, 2006). This is done by innovative marketing efforts in which branding plays a major role. Branding assists consumers (festinos) in deciding which product to purchase or which festival to support (George, 2008; Dreyer, 2007). It is a marketing strategy used for the identification, anticipation and satisfaction of the tourists'/visitors' requirements (Drummond and Ensor, 2005). Through the creation of a distinctive brand image, a tourism product such as Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK) can position its product effectively leading to a competitive advantage (George, 2008).

Branding is often misunderstood and researchers differ in terms of its meaning (Bolt, 2003). Various authors have defined branding as a name, sign, symbol or design (George, 2002; Holloway and Plant, 2004) used to identify products and to differentiate products from similar competitive offerings (North and Enslin, 2004; Kurtz and Boone, 2006; Saayman, 2001). De Mooij (2005: 28), on the other hand, argues that a brand is more than a product with a name, a trademark, or a promise of performance, but that it is a system of associations which is created in the mind of the festinos.

According to Kotler (2003), brands have an indefinite meaning and a label with which associations can be made. It involves communication (Feldwick, 2003) and represents the product and service expectations to the festino (Pringle and Gordon, 2001). Gwinner and Eaton (1999) agree that the brand image is brand associations in the memory of the festino concerning the brand. The associations are therefore, the thoughts and feelings of the festino towards the brand (Shimp, 2003).

Brand associations originate in different forms. According to Keller (2008), they either reflect the product characteristics or aspects independent of the product. De Mooij (2005) adds that brand associations are based on the brand name and visual images, the products or services linked with the name, brand attributes benefits of the brand, past experiences with the brand, the brand users and the brand values. As a brand develops and expands marketers of tourism products such as festivals have to define the core brand associations to capture the important dimensions of the brand meaning and what the brand represents (Keller, 2008).

The associations which festinos make have an influence on the purchasing and travel decision-making process (De Mooij, 2005). Lee and Back (2007) agree when stating that brand satisfaction, which indirectly leads to the purchasing of a product or service, originates from positive brand knowledge which comprises strong brand awareness with positive brand associations. All brand associations will not be equally important to all

festinos and their value and favour will differ in different purchase situations. Certain brand associations may also be more important to older festinos whereas others may be more important to female festinos. This type of information is important in developing effective brands and implementing sustainable marketing strategies.

Although brand associations are situation- or context-dependent (Keller, 2008), the ultimate goal is to develop a strong association network that fits the target market's values and motivations (De Mooij, 2005). A brand therefore establishes important associations in the mind of the festino and builds brand identity, which adds meaning and value to the product (West et al., 2006).

Brand associations form part of the brand value chain and are particularly important for measuring the strength, favourability and uniqueness of perceived attributes of the brand. They represent key sources of brand value, because they are a means by which benefits sought are provided and needs are satisfied (Keller, 2008; George, 2008). According to Keller (2008), there are six possible brand building blocks by which associations can be measured, the level of awareness of the brand (brand salience), how well the brand meets the festino's functional needs (brand performance), the images formed of the brand (brand imagery), the festino's personal opinion and evaluation of the brand (brand judgment), the emotional responses and reactions towards the brand (brand feelings) and the level of identification with the brand (brand resonance).

If these associations are positive, brands can be of great value to festivals. Firstly, brands have an identification purpose, create awareness and simplify the management of the festival (Keller, 2008). Secondly, brands deliver sustainable long-term value to the tourism product (Butterfield, 2003) by attracting new festinos and maintaining current festinos (Jobber and Fahy, 2006; Gregory, 2004; Morgan et al., 2002; Kotler, 2003). Thirdly, unique associations may add value to the marketing strategy by easier differentiation from other festivals, repeat visits and accurate identification of visitors needs (Keller, 2008; George, 2008).

Fourthly, well established brands are an indication of quality which may encourage satisfied festinos to visit the festival again because they have confidence in the product to be experienced. These festinos are brand loyal and loyalty provides predictability and security of demand for the festival and creates barriers of entry which make it difficult for new festivals to enter the market (Keller, 2008). Fifthly, the income of the festival may increase as more satisfied festinos associate themselves with the festival and make use of the products offered at the festival (Jobber and Fahy, 2006; Gregory, 2004).

Lastly, the festival's appeal to potential sponsors and investors will grow, which can make the festival more sustainable and able to withstand the economic difficulties that the festivals are currently experiencing. Sponsorships provide opportunities to take advantage of

an association with a specific target audience in return for funds, services or resources (Fill, 2005). This enhances the sponsors' corporate reputation, raises brand awareness and brand associations, increases loyalty; builds ticket sales, increases press coverage, cuts through the clutter of commercial messages and reduces expenses (Kotler, 2003; West et al., 2006; Fill, 2005).

Even with the realisation of the importance of branding and brand associations, these concepts have not been properly researched in the tourism industry. Studies done by Gwinner and Eaton (1999), Mossberg and Getz (2006) and Olberding and Jisha (2005) focused on aspects such as brand image, stakeholder influences on the ownership and management of festival brands and brand equity in festival branding although not in the South African context. Only one study has been done on this topic in South Africa - an assessment of the South African National Parks brand in 2007 (Hood, 2008). He identified three factors related to branding, a successful brand, service and a positive brand image that emerged as perceptions of the brand. This type of research has therefore not been applied in the event tourism context in South Africa. As the KKNK is one of the most successful, well-known and well-established arts festivals in South Africa, it was deemed appropriate to measure the brand associations of this festival.

Knowledge in this regard will influence the development of future product and marketing strategies focused on attaining a competitive advantage, attracting a higher number of visitors and creating loyalty. Festival organizers will experience difficulty in positioning the festival as well as growing the unique character of the festival if these associations are unknown or if they are negative.

## METHOD OF RESEARCH

Quantitative research was conducted by means of a survey at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival held in Oudtshoorn, South Africa, from the 23 to 27 March, 2008. This festival receives the largest number of festinos of three national arts festivals in South Africa. The festival (offered over a period of 8 days) accommodates both visual and performing arts and attracts visitors from across the country. A similar study was conducted in 2007 for South African National Parks (SANParks) (Slabbert et al., 2007a) and served as a pilot study to measure brand effectiveness. The questionnaire used in this study was based on the SANParks questionnaire, adapted after an in-depth theoretical analysis of brand associations. The questionnaire focused on two main aspects: firstly, the demographic profile of respondents including gender, age, marital status, language, province and highest level of education and, secondly, brand associations based on the brand building blocks (brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, brand feelings and brand resonance).

A non-probability sampling method, namely convenience sampling, was used due to the inability to obtain a sampling frame (Wegner, 2003; Maree and Pietersen, 2007). It was therefore based on visitors' willingness to participate in the study. This method, however, leads to limitations in terms of representing the population and generalizing the results to the total population (Maree and Pietersen, 2007). The sampling procedure will be based on guidelines by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for general research activities,

which by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for general research activities, which recommend a sample size ( $S$ ) of 384 for a population ( $N$ ) of 1000 000.

According to research done by Slabbert et al. (2008), 35 224 people visited the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK) in 2008. However, this is an estimate since the precise number of visitors is not known. Four hundred questionnaires were therefore distributed and 394 were usable in the data analysis. These questionnaires were distributed by field workers at various areas on the festival grounds such as the eating areas and music theatres as well as the venues for shows.

The data were captured in Microsoft Excel and the descriptive statistical analyses were performed by using the Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS 14.0). The statistical analysis included factor analyses and the calculation of effect sizes. A factor analysis was done to determine the brand associations and effects sizes were calculated to determine the differences between brand associations and certain demographic variables.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Demographic profile of visitors to the festival

Based on the survey, female respondents represented 62% of the total respondents while male respondents were 38%. The average age of respondents was 37 years of age. Respondents were mostly married (51%) while originating mostly from the Western Cape (61%) and the Eastern Cape (21%). The respondents were well educated with matric (35%), or a diploma/degree (35%). Thirty-seven percent of the visitors have visited the festival once or twice and 36% have visited the festival between 6 and 14 times. This proves that respondents are familiar with the festival and some of them are loyal visitors. Research done at other national arts festivals in South Africa supports the fact that festinos are well educated and middle-aged (Viviers et al. 2008; Saayman et al. 2008).

### Brand associations

The underlying patterns of the reported brand associations, by means of a factor analysis, are explored here. To determine the appropriateness of a principle components analysis (data reduction procedure) for the collected data, a correlation matrix for the data, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity were used. The aim of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is to examine whether the strength of the relationship between variables is large enough to proceed to a factor analysis. The measure was .958 which is highly acceptable. The Bartlett test was also found significant ( $p < .000$ ). Therefore, the data reduction by principal components would be legitimate. A factor analysis with oblimin rotation was performed on the 26 brand association factors due correlations between the factors. The factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying dimensions of the respondent's brand associations. An eigenvalue of

**Table 1.** Identified factors.

The KKNK brand .....	Factor 1: Brand judgment	Factor 2: Brand attribute	Factor 3: Brand performance
Is fun and interesting	0.954		
Is creative	0.914		
Is admirable	0.854		
Is much talked about	0.808		
Is innovative	0.794		
Is persuasive	0.724		
Is proudly South African	0.702		
Portrays reliability	0.694		
Can be associated with the proud history of the festival	0.659		
Is across geographic boundaries and cultures	0.617		
Is recognizable as an international brand	0.599		
Is well established	0.535		
Portrays a good image	0.505		
Is credible	0.500		
Is simplistic		0.751	
Is easily recognizable		0.584	
Is highly visible		0.499	
Can easily be recalled		0.496	
Can be associated with high levels of service			0.920
Can be associated with high quality productions			0.868
The colours are appealing			0.814
Can be associated with integrity			0.748
Enhances marketing efforts of KKNK			0.714
Can easily be distinguished from other arts festivals			0.528
Captures the essence of the festival			0.451
Cronbach's alpha	0.949	0.800	0.903

1.0 was used as a factor extraction criterion and loadings of 0.40 were used for item inclusion. Cronbach's coefficients were also examined for each factor and values higher than 0.8 indicate the reliability of the data and serve as a measure of internal consistency among the items. All coefficients were higher than 0.8 as recommended by Cavana et al. (2001) (Table 1).

The factor analysis of 26 items resulted in 3 factors. These three factors accounted for 67.91% of the total variance. The factors were labelled according to similar characteristics: brand judgments (Factor 1), brand attributes (Factor 2) and finally brand performance (Factor 3).

In an analysis of the results, it is clear that certain associations were made with the brand. The three identified brand associations are similar to two of the brand building blocks identified by Keller (2008). Therefore, this research confirms the existence of brand associations as part of the branding building blocks. The associations were found to be positive, which adds value to current marketing strategies. If these results are compared with research conducted on branding, the following comments

may be made.

Firstly, the factor brand judgments focus on customers' personal opinions about, and evaluations of, the brand. This is based on the brand's quality, credibility and superiority (Keller, 2008). Brand judgments need to be positive as this will influence loyalty and repeat visits. Boo et al. (2009) stated that the ability to create customer loyalty is a major goal of brand management.

Secondly, the factor brand attributes refers to the more intangible aspects of the brand and the creation of abstract images in the mind of the visitor (Keller, 2008). The latter is very important for a tourism product as intangibility is one of the key characteristics and main challenges in marketing tourism products (Saayman, 2006). Positive associations with intangible aspects such as the visibility, simplicity and recognisability of the brand can create a competitive advantage in this industry. When developing a brand, attributes need to be selected, developed and managed. This helps to determine and shape competitiveness as well as the identity of the services delivered by the brand (Gnoth, 2002).

Thirdly, the factor *brand performance* describes how

well the festival meets the festival's functional needs. Visitors have certain needs regarding the festival and, when met, it is easier for visitors to become loyal visitors to the festival. However, if needs are not met visitors may consider attending other similar festivals. Brand performance is based on aspects such as service delivery, quality products and integrity and it is clear that the visitors are satisfied with the performance of the brand.

These findings differed from the factors identified by Hood (2008), namely, a successful brand, service and positive image. There is therefore no consensus in the terminology used to describe factors and associations in tourism branding research and this needs to be addressed with standardized questionnaires and concepts.

### **Relationships between the demographic profile of respondents and extracted factors**

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the influence of the demographic variables: gender, age, marital status, province, qualification and number of times visited on the dimensions of brand judgment, brand attributes and brand performance as determined in the factor analysis. Ellis and Steyn (2003) state that a natural way to comment on practical significance is by using the absolute difference between the groups (for example age: (1) 87 – 67; (2) 66 – 57; (3) 56 – 47) divided by square root of the mean square error. This measure is called an effect size, which not only makes the difference independent of units and sample size, but also relates it to the spread of the data (Steyn, 1999, 2000, as cited by Ellis and Steyn, 2003).

The following guidelines are given by Cohen (as cited by Ellis and Steyn, 2003) for the interpretation of the effect sizes in the current article:

- i. Small effect:  $d=0.2$
- ii. Medium effect:  $d=0.5$
- iii. Large effect:  $d=0.8$

In this analysis, the effect sizes were determined between the different brand associations (brand judgment, brand attributes and brand performance) and the following demographic characteristics: gender, age, marital status, province, qualification and number of visits. After analysing the means and standard deviations for the identified variables and their dimensions, it was found that there are no significant differences between the demographic variables; age, gender, marital status, province, qualification and number of times visited and the three identified factors. Effect sizes mostly ranged between -0.4 and 0.4 which indicates small effect sizes.

It is therefore clear that demographic characteristics did not lead to differences regarding brand associations. The current brand of KKNK is therefore focused on the general public which includes people with different

demographic characteristics. The results also revealed no differences between first-time visitors and more loyal visitors in terms of brand associations. It is expected that loyal visitors would be more positive towards the festival than first- or even second-time visitors. Currently, festival management can therefore not depend on the return of the supposedly more loyal visitors as they do not seem more positive about the festival than other visitors.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

The research confirms that brand associations exist and that visitors have different opinions concerning the brand. Positive associations were identified for this festival based on brand judgments, brand attributes and brand performance. These positive associations lead to the establishment of a distinctive brand image that should be used by festival marketers in positioning the festival to create a competitive advantage. It is important for festival marketers to capitalise on these positive associations by creating images and slogans that will portray this message in marketing material. Slogans such as '*KKNK - the preferred arts festival*' or '*The festival without boundaries*' can be implemented to support and emphasize the existing positive associations. The positive associations with the brand also create opportunities for positive word-of-mouth messages to be spread by visitors.

Festival organisers and marketers need to be aware of and use the specific brand associations related to the festival. These associations can be helpful in future marketing strategies as well as in the effective branding of the festival. Festival marketers can focus on brand attributes, such as increasing the visibility of the brand, as this leads to positive brand associations. This can be done by distributing marketing material not just a few months before the festival, but throughout the year. The importance of brand performance should not be underestimated, and programme planning should be focused on providing a quality product in terms of productions and service delivery.

Since demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, province and qualification did not have a significant influence on the brand associations, this implies that the current brand is more universal and developed for the general public. Such a universal brand is less expensive to maintain as various target markets can associate with the brand in the same way, thereby reducing marketing costs. However, seeing that the profile of visitors to this festival has stayed very much the same over the last five years (Slabbert et al., 2007b), it is possible that this universal brand only appeals to the current market and is not really attracting new markets. Thus, if the festival wants to grow a new segment of the market (for example a high-spending segment), it is advised that the universal use of the brand be reconsidered. Sub-brands (supportive of the universal

brand) can make provision for this where the basic format of the brand stays the same but an image or wording is added when developing marketing material for new markets.

As the number of visits to the festival did not have any significant influence on the associations festinos made with the brand, questions arise concerning their loyalty of festinos towards the festival. Greater efforts are needed from festival management to engage with loyal visitors and create benefits (especially as part of the loyalty club such as freebees, free tickets, and reduced parking fees) that will encourage a higher level of positive associations from loyal visitors than from first time visitors. This attitude of visitors also increases marketing costs as festival marketers must not only focus on a maintenance marketing strategy for loyal visitors but have to focus on an intense diversified strategy for all visitors. The current brand therefore leads to positive associations, but not necessarily higher levels of loyalty.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore brand associations relating to festival branding and the influence of certain demographic characteristics on the identified brand associations. The survey was conducted at the most prominent national arts festival in South Africa. The results revealed the existence of brand associations in festival branding. Brand judgments and brand performance were also identified by other researchers. However, the existence of brand attributes was highlighted by this research. It was also found that the current associations with the brand are positive thereby enhancing the festival's competitive position. From the research, it was evident that certain demographic characteristics of the current market such as age and gender, or the level of loyalty towards the festival did not cause brand associations to be more positive. Festival marketers need to do research focusing on brand associations on an annual basis to determine the type of associations and whether these associations are positive or negative. The results can assist in the development of more effective marketing (specifically branding) and product strategies. This article made a contribution by adding new research and supporting current research in this field of knowledge where little research is conducted regardless of the fact that there is growth in the number of festivals held annually in South Africa or the importance of branding. However, it is not nearly enough and more research, similar in nature, is recommended at festivals and other types of tourism products to make comparisons possible.

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