

# Where are the 2010 votes going to?

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#)

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As the South African electorate is preparing to cast their votes in the upcoming general elections, the world is watching closely, ready to cast the global vote on whether to invest their time and money in visiting the host country of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

According to a recent study by Grant Thornton, 483 000 foreign tourists will be attracted by the event, of which 151 000 will come from the rest of Africa. The research shows that the average soccer tourist will spend about a quarter of their budget on accommodation and nearly half on food, transport and entertainment. Given that foreigners are expected to bring in R8.5 billion, this represents more than R6.3 billion - a substantial sum provided the projected visitor numbers hold true.

## What can be done?

With just over 400 days to go, this begs the question what can be done to maximise global visitor numbers and brand this event as a once in a lifetime opportunity - in the midst of the global financial crisis and a severe downturn in long haul travel?

A recent event that attracted almost two million visitors from more than one hundred countries amid freezing temperatures (-6°C, to be exact) in the country that originated the banking meltdown, holds important clues as to the power of causal branding.

On January 20, 2009, the entire world turned their attention to the inauguration of US President Barack Obama whose election campaign had attracted donations from more than two million individuals and mobilised close to one million volunteers.

Said Drew Hood from Midland, Tennessee, who drove more than 12 hours to witness the event. "We really wanted to come. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. As soon as Barack Obama was elected, I knew I wanted to go to DC."

Added Nisha Chauhan of London, England, who spent three days traveling by plane and bus to make it to the inauguration: "It's very exciting to be part of history and part of the huge celebration."

## Promise of change

More than anything, it was the promise of change and the cause of building a better world that turned ordinary citizens from disillusioned bystanders to passionate activists.

Interestingly, causal branding is what enabled the past three hosts of the FIFA World Cup to go beyond merely staging a soccer tournament to enrolling their entire nation in collective mobilisation for good and fostering national cohesion.

- **Promoting national unity:** Prior to the 1998 FIFA World Cup, the host nation France was riddled by xenophobia and labeled "the most racially troubled country in Europe". Even the French team, which was composed of many players from immigrant backgrounds, was subject to verbal attacks from right-wing politicians. This all changed when the French team reaped one victory after another and eventually lifted the world cup trophy. Says Tom Sancton, Paris bureau chief of *Time* magazine at the time: "The soccer team did more to promote racial tolerance in France, and pride and a sense of belonging amongst its immigrant population, than anything the government could have ever done."
- **Building civic pride:** Sandwiched between economic giant Japan and rising superpower China, Korea, the 2002 FIFA World Cup hosts, had always shouldered an inferiority complex. Said bleached-haired midfielder Kim Nam Il on the eve of Korea's 2002 debut: "We want to show the world we are a team, and a nation, that can compete with the best, and win." Throughout Korea's fairytale wins, the entire country erupted in delirious rapture, with people crying and cheering wildly whilst others were left literally speechless. Says Sue Park, who runs her own public relations company in Seoul. "We've never been proud of our country before. We've had so many political problems, corruption, wars, even being divided between North and South. But today, I am so proud to be Korean."
- **Transforming the national brand image:** "From Humorless to Carefree: Transforming 82 Million in 31 Days" - this is how the *Spiegel* summed up Germany's brand transformation during the 2006 FIFA World Cup. British Prime Minister Tony Blair joined the chorus when he declared that "the old clichés have been replaced by a new, positive and more fair image of Germany." It was a view echoed by the Britain's *Times* newspaper: "Never mind the final, Germans are the real World Cup winners." And Chancellor Angela Merkel concluded that "Germany's image abroad has definitely changed incredibly. I liked this inner, happy self-confidence a lot."

Which national cause can South Africa tap into for 2010, in order to mobilise her people and attract as many visitors as possible? It was former President Nelson Mandela who summed up the task of causal branding when he said in his inaugural address in 1994 that "change needs unity of purpose. It needs action. It requires us all to work together to bring an end to division, an end to suspicion and build a nation united in our diversity."

## ABOUT DR NIKOLAUS EBERL

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