



# Tourism destination competitiveness using brand essence: Incorporating the 'zuluness' of the Zulu Kingdom

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## Abstract

Tourism brand essence, described as the functional and emotional benefits that tourists derive from visiting a destination, if crafted to reveal a clear value position, can offer a strategic competitive advantage to a tourism destination. This paper aims to develop a conceptual brand essence model for the Zulu Kingdom Tourism, in South Africa. This paper is exploratory in nature, involving descriptive analyses of the Zulu Kingdom's tourism products and services. The *zuluness* factor, identified by this paper, can be used by the Zulu Kingdom to foster its clear and unique value position in the global tourism marketplace. Further research is needed to validate the dimensions of functional and emotional benefits of visiting the Zulu Kingdom by the tourists, to proffer a conclusive brand position statement to the Zulu Kingdom Tourism. Incorporating the *zuluness* factor in the Zulu Kingdom tourism will provide a strategic competitive advantage to the region.

**Keywords:** Tourism destination competitiveness, tourism brand essence, Zulu Kingdom, sub-Saharan Africa.

## Introduction

Much of the recent studies on sub-Saharan African tourism focussed on general tourism development, market segmentation, change management, local economic development, sub-Saharan Africa's brand positioning, destination image, niche tourism and ethical concerns (such as Rogerson, 2002; Stiebel, 2004; Hayward, 2007; Mathers & Landau, 2007; Marschall, 2008; Mazel, 2008; Francis, 2009; Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Marschall, 2012; Ezeuduji, 2014; Matiza & Oni, 2014; Rid, Ezeuduji & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014; Ezeuduji, 2015a,b; Phiri, 2016). This study however will dwell on how a tourism region can compete within a country and globally, using its unique brand essence. The authors who studied tourism market segmentation in sub-Saharan Africa (such as Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Rid et al., 2014; Slabbert & Viviers, 2014) found tourists' motivations to be knowledge seeking, historical and nature experience, rural idyll, new activities, nostalgia, novelty, escape, and relaxation.



In South Africa, the Zulu Kingdom in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, is popular for its heritage and cultural experiences. This region is quite distinct for its local communities' pride in local heritage, most especially the isiZulu language, culture and the prevalence of the spirit of 'Ubuntu'. *Ubuntu* is a very old African word that means 'humanity to others'. It has been also explained to mean 'I am what I am because of who we all are' - '*umuntu umuntu ngabantu*' (Ubuntu, 2016). The isiZulu concept of respect (*ukuhlonipha*) portrays the manner in which native Africans have always approached "respect, as a concept, experience and practice with spiritual and cultural dimensions of great breadth, depth and height. Such practice is recognized as crucial for the promotion of local, international and global health and wellbeing" (Mbele, Makhaba, Nzima, Hlongwane, Thwala, Edwards, Sibiyi, & Edwards, 2015: 87). The Zulu nation is also known to possess the attributes of caring (*ukunakekela*) and sharing (*ukuphana*). Some other authors who conducted research in the Zulu Kingdom concurred that this region in South Africa is unique for its well-rooted history of peculiar national pride and a robust sense of Zulu nationhood (Wylie, 1994; Deflem, 1999; Cele, 2001; Beall, Mkhize, & Vawda, 2005; Carton & Morrell, 2012). Zulu traditional ceremonies such as the Reed Dance (*uMkhosi Womhlanga*) has attracted a significant number of tourists to the Zulu Kingdom (Nkosi, 2013).

The Zulu Kingdom (also known as the Zulu Empire), started off as a monarchy in Southern Africa, spreading along the Indian Ocean coast from the northern Pongola River to the southern Tugela River. This kingdom, once led by the popular but controversial warrior - King Shaka Zulu (1816-1828), expanded to occupy mostly today's KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa, and other areas of Southern Africa. According to Carton & Morell (2012), King Shaka ka Senzangakhona was the man behind the birth of the Zulu Kingdom. Through King Shaka's brilliance, war strategies and tactics were invented (tactics include usage of the short spear), for his regiments (*amabutho*) who fought countless wars (*izimpi*) against other African tribes that were bitterly defeated. For the purpose of this study, however, the Zulu Kingdom will be referred to as the KwaZulu-Natal Province in present day South Africa (South African History Online, 2016).

Wijethunga and Warnakulasooriya (2014) posit that the tourism industry is recognised as a main contributor to the global economies and in many developing countries, including South Africa, serves as a source of income generation. The South African tourism industry had contributed more than 9% to the national Gross Domestic product (GDP), in 2014, via its direct and indirect impacts, and also provided over 1.4 million employment opportunities (South African Tourism, 2015).

Matiza and Oni (2014) lent their voices to the common knowledge that tourism plays a significant role in the development of the African continent, as tourism-related income is the key impetus for economic diversification, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Phiri (2016) also concurred particularly, that tourism is important to the economic growth of South Africa. In as much as Africa has a known image challenge (perceptions around poverty, diseases and underdevelopment), which has resulted to the continent's unfavourable share of the global tourist numbers, Matiza and Oni (2014) implored African destination management organisations to learn how to proactively manage their identities so as to positively influence the images that their nations have as tourist destinations, especially amidst increased global competition for tourists in the global tourism marketplace.



As part of this proactive management strategy, this study will dwell on how a tourism region (Zulu Kingdom) can compete within a country (South Africa) and globally, using its unique brand essence. This will help other regions, particularly in Africa, and globally, to know how to manage their identities and positively influence tourists to see their nations as favourable tourist destinations.

### **Brand attributes of the Zulu Kingdom's tourism**

As earlier mentioned, some African authors did study the tourist segments visiting sub-Saharan Africa (Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Rid et al., 2014; Slabbert & Viviers, 2014), and found tourists' motivations to be knowledge seeking, historical and nature experience, rural idyll, new activities, nostalgia, novelty, escape, and relaxation. In South Africa, the Zulu Kingdom in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, is popular for its heritage (cultural and natural) experiences which relate to all the motivational dimensions outlined above.

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal 2013-2018 Strategic Plan (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2012) has the slogan – 'Zulu Kingdom, exceptional' as a provincial tourism identity emanating from the South African Tourism slogan – 'inspiring new ways'. Tourism KwaZulu-Natal is building on its eight attributes of warmth, heritage, adventure, trade gateway, Zulu identity, fun, family-friendliness, and beaches to strive after its vision of 'making KwaZulu-Natal a globally renowned Africa's top beach destination with a unique blend of wildlife, scenic and heritage experiences for all visitors, by 2030'. The effort to position this province as Africa's leading tourism destination, nationally and internationally, will be possible if the Zulu Kingdom uses its unique attributes, which are rare, not easily found in any other part of the world, including South Africa. Tourism's contribution in terms of Gross Domestic Product and employment, during the time the strategy was formulated, are expected to grow from about R28 billion<sup>1</sup> in 2012 to about R60 billion in 2017, and about 129 000 employments in 2012 to about 153 000 in 2017 (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2012).

The rich heritage (cultural and natural) of the Zulu Kingdom (a rich mix of diverse cultures with exciting history, variety of music, dance and food, two World Heritage Sites – the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, to mention but a few) is a key anchor to its tourism industry. The societal attitudes and values in the Zulu Kingdom, such as the concept of *Ubuntu* – the spirit of humanity, respect for strangers and the elderly; and the energetic and colourful dances of the Zulus are pivots of the Zulu nation's identity which distinguish the people of KwaZulu-Natal from the rest South Africans. This paper must note that it is though sad, according to the researchers' personal knowledge, that some of the younger generation of South Africans born in this kingdom (especially those born after 1990) are fast losing these unique Zulu Kingdom attributes through much embracing of the Western lifestyle instead of keeping their unique and exciting African communal lifestyle values (see also Marschall, 2008).

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, as a governmental body should therefore try to roll-out more cultural events directed to this younger generation to support instilling the societal attitudes and values of the Zulu nation in these youths. It is no gainsaying however that the older generation in the Zulu Kingdom and still some significant number of the youthful population are popularly known to have a strong sense of pride in their Zulu identity. It is not uncommon therefore to be told in the Zulu Kingdom, the rich history of the Zulus,

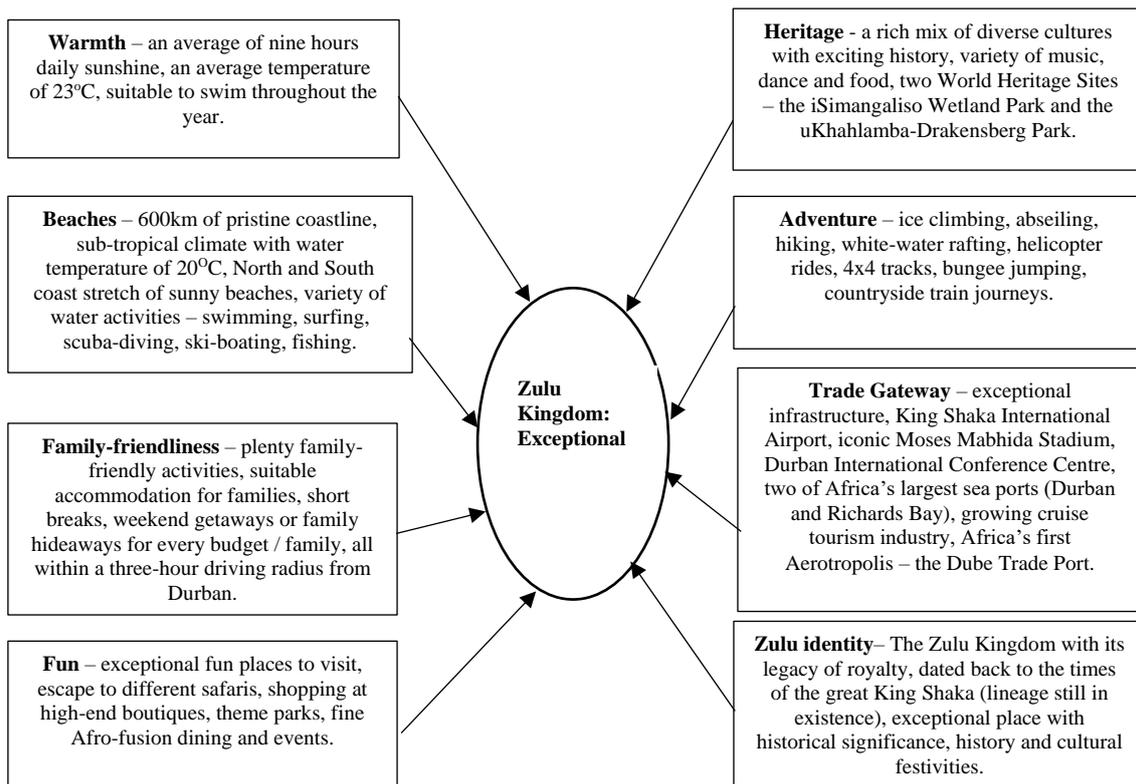
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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing this paper, 1 US\$ is about R14.



most especially of the controversial personality of the King Shaka Zulu. Up till today, the Zulu Kingdom retains its monarchical system, with a functional king (King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu) traditionally installed as the reigning King of the Zulu nation, whose source of power emanates from the Traditional Leadership clause of the Republic of South Africa's constitution. This differentiates the Zulu nation from other tribes in South Africa. Much important parts of the Zulu history and culture are showcased in the Zulu museums and battlefields, such as the Zulu Battlefield sites of *Isandlwana* and Rorke's Drift.

The isiZulu language is quite popular in the world, for example the Zulu songs: such as *Hambani kahle* (song full of hope and blessing) and *Shosholozza* (the popular South African Rugby Fan Song) are constantly heard all over the world, especially from the language and cultural tourists to South Africa. Examples of cultural events highlights showcased to the tourists include tasting Zulu cuisines and traditional beer affectionately known as '*umqombothi*', and stick fighting (*ukungcweka*). The uShaka Marine World (a theme park), situated in Durban, South Africa, offering much entertainment, excitement, and fun, has positioned itself as a key attraction on Durban's Golden Mile (uShaka Marine World, 2016). As mentioned earlier, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal crafted a strategic plan, identifying attributes for growing its tourism industry (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2012). The Zulu Kingdom tourism attributes can be summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The Zulu Kingdom tourism attributes (adapted from Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2012)**

Hayward (2007) posited that after the apartheid era in South Africa, tourism has become very important as an income generator and also as a platform for repackaging the national images and concepts that typify South African society and its history. Cultural



villages have grown in numbers (also within the Zulu Kingdom), but hold uncertain potential as avenues for South African cultural heritage preservation and as drivers of socio-economic empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa.

Marschall (2008), whose study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, declared that the rural Zulu Kingdom is home to a very complex and fragmented Zulu society trapped between two trajectories of a global trend of modernization and Westernization on the one hand, and African traditionalist knowledge, values and practices, on the other hand. However, same author (Marschall, 2008) asserted that in as much as some memorials and monuments found in rural Zulu nation may not be claimed to have authentically emerged from within Zulu culture, they are however cultural products which through the fusion process of African and Western ideas and iconography are designed to be relevant to the Western tourists and the Zulu communities.

### **Brand essence of the Zulu Kingdom's tourism and their implications to regional tourism**

Ezeudji (2015a) posited that destination brands do simplify buying process for tourists. Knowledge of brands, especially the ones with which tourists have had a previous experience can help reduce the search costs and perceived risk (functional, financial, social, etc.) for the tourists (Berry, 2000). de Chernatony and Harris (2010) posited that to move from a commodity to a brand, the core offering of a service needs to be augmented with added values which are extra functional and emotional benefits offered (brand essence), differentiating the service from other competitors' brands. This brand essence can then become communication anchors between the destination management organisations and the tourists, emphasizing the functional and emotional benefits of visiting the destination. This will lead into developing a distinct relationship between staff and stakeholders of a tourist destination to enact not only the functional benefits, but more importantly the emotional rewards to tourists. Customers (tourists) do not just pay for services, they do pay for the service brands (de Chernatony & Harris, 2010; Ezeudji, Lete, Correia & Taylor, 2014). Kapferer (1997) therefore pointed out that brand value originates from consumers' awareness of it, how they trust it, and the image it has for them. Destinations with strong brand will likely perform better and have more value than destinations with unbranded offerings. de Chernatony and McDonald (1998: 20) therefore defined a successful brand as "an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the customer or consumer perceives relevant, unique, added values which match their needs most closely".

The Zulu Kingdom in South Africa can effectively conceive and manage its tourism brand, building a favourable image and reputation which will enhance the confidence of tourists related to its brand. Zulu Kingdom can highlight its tourism functional benefits to include the attributes mentioned in Figure 1, however what indeed makes it exceptional from the other provinces in South Africa lies deeper in its 'Zulu identity' and 'heritage' attributes, when combined, according to this paper, yields the concept - 'zuluness'. The 'zuluness' factor reveals the most important emotional benefit of visiting the Zulu Kingdom in South Africa, which relates to (a) the appreciation and respect for humanity among the Zulu people (emanating from the *Ubuntu* spirit, and resulting to 'intense feeling of hope for humanity'), (b) deeper meaning of life found in the Zulu 'spirit of sharing' (*ukuphana*) - where people who do not have much are willing to share the little



they have, and (c) inner harmony - a practical example of 'human and nature living in harmony'. These can elevate the human spirit to a higher spiritual dimension. More so, tourists have to expect a great deal of friendliness and respect from the Zulu population. This concept of 'zuluness' will be more effective in showcasing the regional identity in terms of unique brand essence. This paper further argues that there is more human element in the streets and businesses found in the Zulu Kingdom (KwaZulu-Natal) than in any other province in South Africa. Personal relationships are well nurtured in the Zulu Kingdom, however heed must be paid to the call by Mathers and Landau (2007) concerning the sporadic and schizophrenic attacks of few South Africans on Africans from elsewhere on the continent who make up a significant component of South Africa's Africanness, to stop these attacks. This remains a risk in South Africa, because when foreign nationals are attacked by South Africans in South Africa, the tourists will much evidently not feel safe, impacting on the tourist numbers in South Africa.

Having identified the basis for tourists' value position in sub-Saharan Africa built around knowledge seeking, historical and nature experience, rural idyll, new activities, nostalgia, novelty, escape, and relaxation (Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Rid et al., 2014; Slabbert & Viviers, 2014); the Zulu Kingdom can then position itself, by designing and continuously aligning its business operational processes to suit tourists' wants and values. Emphasizing the 'zuluness' attribute of the Zulu Kingdom to tourists will not only differentiate this destination from the rest of South Africa, but will also support the upholding of 'rural idyll' concept discussed by Ezeuduji and Rid (2011) as the major perception that motivates many Western tourists to visit rural Africa, where they can find 'perfect rurality'. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual brand essence model for the Zulu Kingdom, based on previous literature and this paper's analysis.



Map 1: The Zulu Kingdom. Source: [http://www.queensburghbedandbreakfast.co.za/index\\_files/image7811.jpg](http://www.queensburghbedandbreakfast.co.za/index_files/image7811.jpg)

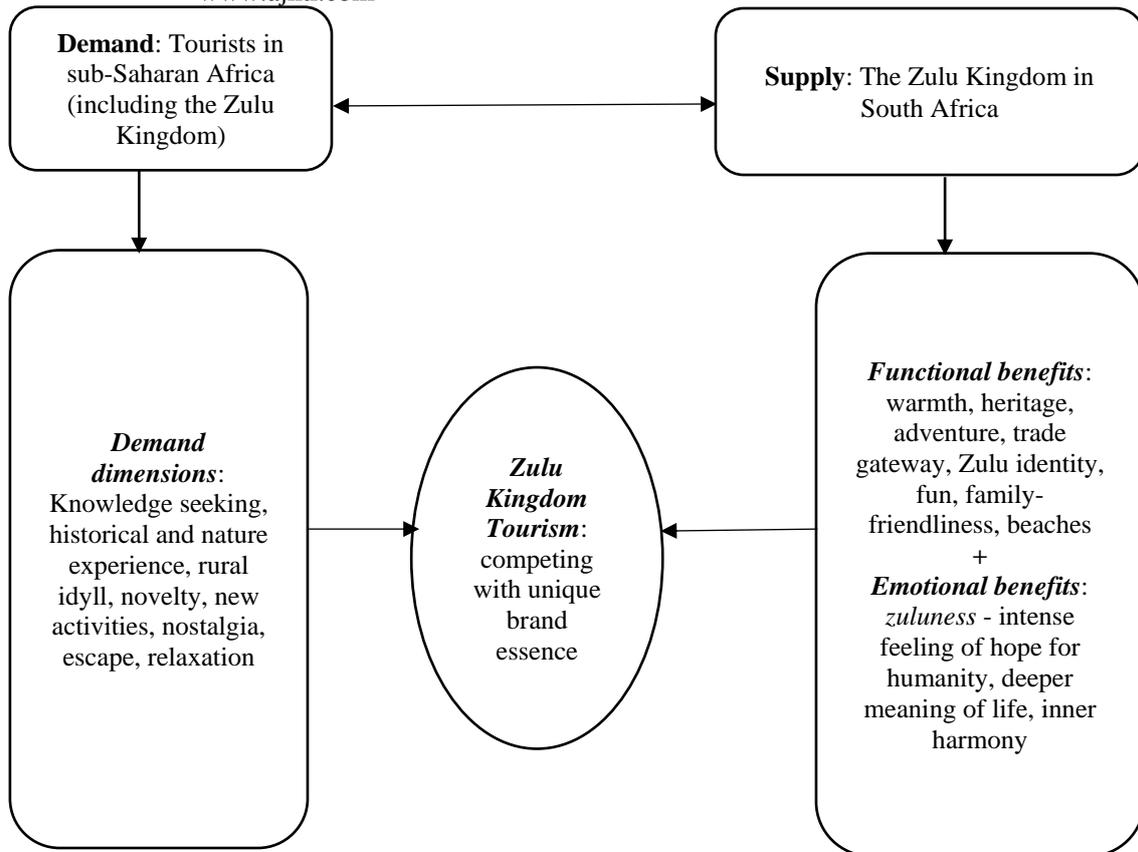


Figure 2: Conceptual brand essence model for the Zulu Kingdom Tourism

## Conclusion

This paper explored how a tourism region (Zulu Kingdom) can compete within a country (South Africa), and also globally, using its unique brand essence. Tourism brand essence, viewed as the functional and emotional benefits that tourists derive from visiting a destination, when crafted to reveal a clear value position, can offer a strategic competitive advantage to a tourism destination. Ezeuduji and Rid's (2011) call for a clear legal framework formulation and effective policy implementation at the political or state level, and institutionalizing tourism with improved capacity building at the local level, can indeed create a conducive environment for the Zulu Kingdom's public-private collaboration to achieve tourism service excellence expectations.

The *zuluness* factor, identified by this paper, can be used by the Zulu Kingdom to foster its clear value position or unique brand essence in the global tourism marketplace. As this study is exploratory in nature and not conclusive, further research is needed to validate these dimensions of functional and emotional benefits of visiting the Zulu Kingdom by the tourists, to proffer a more conclusive brand position statement to the Zulu Kingdom Tourism.



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