

# ENHANCING DURBAN'S BUSINESS TOURISM THROUGH STRATEGIC BRAND ORIENTATION AND STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

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**Abstract.** Durban has faced criticism for its underperformance in global business tourism, largely due to fragmented stakeholder collaboration, weak destination management, and inconsistent brand orientation. This study aims to enhance Durban's business tourism by proposing a strategically aligned, LED-driven branding approach that fosters stakeholder cooperation and shared opportunities. A descriptive research design was adopted, with data collected via a census of all event suppliers registered with the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau (DKCB). A 32-item close-ended questionnaire captured primary data, while secondary data informed the literature review. Findings reveal key themes that require attention in Durban's destination marketing: consistent and quality knowledge building, cooperative stakeholder strategies, supportive government policy, and equitable stakeholder participation. Despite policy awareness, many respondents do not experience tangible benefits, citing poor implementation and lack of inclusivity. Most event suppliers operate independently, prioritising competition over collaboration, and report minimal engagement in the city's marketing strategy. The study recommends that brand orientation must clearly define Durban's brand identity, foster inclusive participation, and empower the DKCB as the brand custodian. Stakeholders must be guided on how to align their operations with the city's brand strategy, ensuring coherence, engagement, and global competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder participation, local economic development, tourism marketing, business tourism, Durban.

**JEL Classification:** M30

## Introduction

Tourism has become one of the significant contributors to global economic development, internationally, there are consented efforts with the United Nation member countries forming United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (Masamba, 2024). Effective rebranding helps tourism institutions stand out by clearly communicating their unique values, strengths and offerings (Labe, 2024). Masimba (2024) opines that the South African Department of Tourism has recognised local authorities as players towards the sector's growth by giving them the mandate to foster the development and promotion of the tourism sector.

Durban, the third-largest city in South Africa, is internationally recognised for its rich cultural heritage, subtropical climate, and strategic location along the

Indian Ocean. These advantages provide a strong foundation for tourism development, particularly in the area of meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), also known as business tourism. However, despite its assets, Durban continues to underperform in the global business tourism rankings. According to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), Durban hosted significantly fewer international meetings compared to top-performing cities like Berlin, with a gap exceeding 600 approved events (ICCA, 2023). This underperformance highlights the city's ongoing struggle to position itself as a premier global MICE destination. Several interrelated challenges contribute to this disparity. Chief among them are fragmented stakeholder engagement, inconsistencies in marketing and branding strategies, and a lack of cohesive

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leadership in destination management (Rogerson, 2020; Hristov and Zehrer, 2016). Durban's tourism governance landscape comprises multiple stakeholders, including public institutions such as the eThekweni Municipality and the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau (DKCB), alongside private actors like event organisers, venue operators, and hospitality service providers. However, the absence of integrated decision-making processes has led to siloed operations, weakening the city's capacity to present a unified and competitive business tourism offering (Balkaran and Maharaj, 2013). Despite these systemic issues, Durban has experienced notable successes. The Durban International Convention Centre (Durban ICC), for example, has consistently received international recognition and was most recently named Africa's Leading Meetings and Conference Centre at the 2023 World Travel Awards (World Travel Awards, 2023). Additionally, the 2024 "Take the Lead" Tourism Roadshow launched by Durban Tourism has aimed to revitalise the city's business tourism sector by fostering greater collaboration among stakeholders and by promoting the city's unique MICE infrastructure and cultural assets (Tourism Update, 2024). These developments reflect a growing awareness of the need for more coordinated and inclusive approaches to destination marketing. Crucially, the alignment of business tourism strategies with Local Economic Development (LED) principles offers an opportunity to address historical inequalities and foster more inclusive growth. In the South African context, LED is not only an economic strategy but also a transformative agenda aimed at redressing past socio-economic injustices through inclusive and participatory governance (South Africa. Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2022). By connecting local enterprises to tourism value chains and encouraging the equitable distribution of tourism-generated income, business tourism can serve as a catalyst for job creation, infrastructure development, and investment attraction (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2019). Stakeholders are recognized as the utmost imperative component in place management and respectively, place brand management. This relationship has been in the interest of many academics and practitioners, especially the ones focusing on using stakeholder's role in ongoing process that places go through while establishing enriching or maintaining an image (Limani *et al*, 2024). According to Sepulcri *et al* (2019) brand orientation can be regarded as a strategic approach in which the brand becomes the centre around which organisation's process are created through interactions of stakeholders. The multifaceted interplay of different stakeholders of different stakeholders significantly shapes the trajectory and outcomes of tourism initiatives (Masimba 2024).

This paper aims to enhance Durban's business tourism by proposing a strategically aligned, LED-driven branding approach that fosters stakeholder cooperation and shared opportunities. In particular, it investigates the interrelations between government bodies, the DKCB, and private event suppliers, in an effort to identify models of cooperation that can strengthen destination competitiveness, improve inclusivity, and ultimately support local economic development. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: a review of relevant literature, followed by the research methodology, then the presentation and discussion of findings, and finally, the conclusion and recommendations.

### Literature Review

Promotion strategies play a crucial role in the tourism industry as they are responsible of informing, persuading and capturing the attention of potential tourists, effective promotion aims to stimulate sales and encourage customers to travel (Myeni and Chili, 2024). This literature review critically examines the interrelated themes of stakeholder collaboration, Local Economic Development (LED), and destination marketing within the context of Durban's business tourism sector.

### Stakeholder Engagement as a Catalyst for Destination Competitiveness

In business tourism, stakeholders include public authorities, private event organisers, venue managers, hospitality providers, and civil society organisations. Their coordination is fundamental to creating a coherent, marketable tourism product. Masimba (2024) states that stakeholders in tourism industry encompass a diverse range of entities, including organisations and individuals who are positively or negatively impacted by tourism development. However, as Rogerson (2010) and Hristov and Zehrer (2015) observe, weak linkages and power asymmetries between these actors can result in brand dissonance and operational inefficiencies. In Durban, this is evident in the dominance of a few central stakeholders – such as the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau (DKCB) and the ICC – while smaller actors, including SMMEs and community-based tourism operators, often lack meaningful involvement in decision-making (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019; Meyer & Meyer, 2020). Recent work highlights the importance of a participatory approach that acknowledges diverse voices across the tourism value chain. Bramwell and Lane (2011) propose collaborative destination governance as a framework that enables inclusive planning, knowledge sharing, and joint responsibility. According to Kennedy and Augustyn

(2014), stakeholder engagement must extend beyond token participation and be embedded in the strategic development and implementation of marketing initiatives. This is particularly pertinent in cities like Durban, where tourism is being positioned as a lever for broader socio-economic transformation. As Jernsand (2022) argues, stakeholder involvement strengthens destination resilience by enhancing transparency, ownership, and adaptive capacity – qualities necessary for managing both market fluctuations and historical inequalities. Effective stakeholders' involvement is vital in reducing potential conflicts between tourists and host communities by empowering the latter to shape the tourism experience (Masimba 2024).

### **Business Tourism and Local Economic Development (LED)**

Tourism development is increasingly being recognized as a vital source of revenue in South Africa as well as a critical instrument in promoting economic development (Phiri, 2016). Business tourism offers strategic opportunities to drive LED through skills development, infrastructure investment, and inclusive economic participation. In South Africa, LED has been promoted as a corrective mechanism to the spatial and economic legacies of apartheid, aiming to decentralise power and generate locally anchored wealth (South Africa. COGTA, 2022). When aligned with tourism, LED can foster micro-enterprise development, job creation, and community beneficiation. Durban's integration of LED into its tourism strategy has been uneven. While flagship infrastructure such as the ICC has generated significant economic returns and international recognition, broader benefits remain unevenly distributed. According to Donaldson and Ferreira (2021), this reflects a misalignment between strategic planning and inclusive policy execution. Research by van Niekerk (2023) further underscores that LED-oriented tourism requires deliberate partnerships with local suppliers, inclusive procurement practices, and capacity building to ensure local actors are not marginalised. Recent studies stress that for business tourism to meaningfully support LED, it must be embedded within a wider policy framework that includes equitable spatial development, youth and gender inclusion, and sustainable resource management (George, 2022; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023). Masimba (2024) opines that the tourism sector players must come up with various packages amongst them the drive to promote domestic tourism by providing affordable packages for the locals to develop the sector. As such, stakeholder collaboration becomes not only a governance issue but a structural requirement for achieving development outcomes.

### **Place Branding and Integrated Destination Marketing**

Effective place branding is essential to position Durban as a competitive MICE destination. A city's brand is more than a marketing slogan; it encapsulates the collective identity, values, and promise of the destination (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). The effectiveness and quality of marketing strategies associated with tourism site directly impacts its levels of attractiveness (Myeni and Chili, 2024). For Durban, whose cultural diversity, coastal allure, and growing events infrastructure present distinct advantages, the key challenge lies in communicating a unified narrative. However, fragmented messaging and disjointed brand alignment continue to hinder Durban's global appeal. As Jiang *et al.* (2016) argue, consistent place branding must be rooted in stakeholder consensus, ensuring that all actors – from government to grassroots – are aligned in their portrayal of the city. Balkaran and Maharaj (2013) stress that Durban's brand must go beyond "sun and surf" tropes and incorporate the city's competitive strengths in conference hosting, innovation, and urban regeneration. The 2023 and 2024 accolades awarded to the Durban ICC (World Travel Awards, 2023; World MICE Awards, 2024) offer a powerful branding opportunity. Destination brand orientation proved to have a strongly positive relationship with brand performance (Garcia *et al.*, 2018. Sepulcri *et al.*, 2019). However, this success needs to be matched by coordinated promotion, digital marketing innovation, and stakeholder-driven content development to attract international buyers, planners, and delegates.

### **Methodology**

This research employed a descriptive, quantitative study design to systematically assess the state of business tourism marketing in Durban, with particular focus on stakeholder collaboration and its alignment with Local Economic Development (LED) objectives. The descriptive approach was chosen to allow the researcher to provide an accurate profile of events and stakeholder practices in a real-world setting, while the quantitative method enabled the collection of measurable data suitable for statistical analysis and generalisation. The study population comprised all event suppliers registered with the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau (DKCB), totalling 91 organisations, as listed in the DKCB's official business tourism directory. Given the relatively small and well-defined population, a full census was conducted, aligning with the recommendations of Waters (2011), who advocates for census sampling when studying manageable populations to minimise sampling errors. Burns *et al.*

(2017) further affirm the value of censuses in business research for their capacity to ensure inclusivity and enhance the accuracy of findings. However, due to practical limitations such as respondent unavailability, invalid contact details, or unwillingness to participate, only 72 of the 91 identified event suppliers took part in the study. Data was gathered using a 32-item, closed-ended questionnaire developed according to established survey design principles, incorporating clear instructions, logical sequencing, and a visually appealing layout to improve response quality and reduce fatigue. A range of Likert-type and multiple-choice formats were used to maintain engagement and minimise response bias. Data collection was carried out over a four-week period using a combination of email, telephone interviews, and face-to-face visits. A trained research assistant supported the process by initiating contact with respondents and administering the questionnaire either in person or via structured telephone interviews, enabling real-time clarification of any questions or uncertainties – an approach recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2013) for improving participation in localised field research. This blended strategy enhanced the response rate and allowed flexibility in reaching participants regardless of location. To ensure rigour, the reliability and validity of the instrument were assessed prior to data analysis. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha to examine internal consistency across multiple constructs, with coefficients exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.7, indicating acceptable reliability. Construct validity was evaluated through exploratory factor analysis, which confirmed that the measurement items loaded appropriately on their intended variables. This dual approach to testing reliability and validity ensured that the instrument accurately captured the perceptions and practices of business tourism stakeholders in relation to LED goals (Trieman, 2009; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

## Findings

### Reliability Statistics

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement instrument when repeated observations are made on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for internal consistency in social science research (Aaker *et al.*, 2013). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated for all questions of the questionnaire was 0.745. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.754 demonstrates an acceptable level of internal consistency, suggesting that the questions effectively measure the same underlying construct. This supports the instrument's reliability, confirming that the responses are stable and consistent across the

measured variables. As noted by Cho and Kim (2015), higher coefficient values are indicative of reliable measurement tools, and thus, the results confirm that the instrument used in this study performs adequately in this regard.

### Validity Statistics

Validity statistics for this study were established through factor analysis, which examines the extent to which a set of observed variables reflects the intended latent constructs. Prior to the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted to determine the appropriateness of the data for this method. According to International Business Machines (IBM, 2012), the KMO value should exceed 0.50 and the significance level for Bartlett's test should be below 0.05 for factor analysis to be considered suitable. In this study, both conditions were met, thereby validating the factor analysis procedure and supporting the construct validity of the questionnaire.

Table 1

**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Measure	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.614
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	Degrees of Freedom (Df)
	Significance (Sig.)

The values presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the responses collected for these questions are suitable and valid for addressing the problem highlighted in the questionnaire. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy is greater than the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that the data is appropriate for factor analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows a significant result ( $p < 0.05$ ), confirming that correlations between variables are sufficiently strong to proceed with factor analysis.

### The Scope of the Event Services Portfolio

For the successful development of a city brand, fostering cooperative relationships among industry stakeholders is crucial, particularly when compared to a more competitive approach. The survey questions were designed to assess the level of cooperation between event suppliers in achieving shared industry-level goals related to city branding and the management of marketing strategies. Respondents were asked to specify the types of event services they specialise in, which is critical in understanding Durban's capacity to meet the demands of international event clients. The results, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, reveal that

the city's event suppliers cater to a broad range of service categories. This indicates that Durban is well-equipped to competitively serve the needs of global event clients, offering a comprehensive array of services to support diverse event requirements.

The findings suggest that Durban's event service providers collectively offer a full spectrum of event solutions, covering all aspects needed for large-scale international events. This diversity in services positions the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau (DKCB) advantageously, as it can draw upon a varied pool of suppliers to meet the unique demands of different events. It is essential that all event suppliers be recognised as strategic co-creators within a balanced, brand-value-based ecosystem that includes the DKCB and other relevant agencies. Such recognition ensures that these stakeholders work together cohesively to enhance the city's global appeal and competitive standing in the business tourism sector.

Moreover, the presence of a wide array of event service providers contributes to the benefits associated with agglomeration economies. Agglomeration economies are particularly valuable as they foster a robust entrepreneurial base, encouraging continual industrial developments and innovations within the sector. Duranton and Kerr (2015) argue that agglomeration not only strengthens existing businesses but also promotes the growth of new ventures, creating a dynamic and self-sustaining industry ecosystem. Therefore, Durban's event services portfolio plays a pivotal role in bolstering the city's competitiveness and long-term success in the global event market. Brown and Rigby (2013) highlight the knowledge benefits that economic clusters can leverage, particularly

when businesses are compelled to collaborate rather than compete for the survival of the entire industry, especially in the face of foreign competition. This is particularly relevant to Durban's business tourism industry, where the need for cooperation among local stakeholders is essential to strengthen the sector's global competitiveness.

### Businesses sizes

Respondents were asked to specify the operational sizes of their businesses, providing valuable insights into the scale and capacity of Durban's event service providers. This data helps to assess how well the industry can collectively meet the demands of international event clients while ensuring sustainable growth within the local economy.

The findings in Figure 2 indicate that the majority of businesses (42.3%) fall within the medium-sized enterprise category, followed by 35.2% classified as small enterprises, and only 22.5% identified as large enterprises. The relatively low number of large event service providers presents structural limitations in terms of the city's capacity to manage and deliver large-scale international events. This imbalance could hinder Durban's ability to fully capitalise on global business tourism opportunities. Moreover, the dominance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the sector necessitates stronger collaboration and support mechanisms to bridge capacity gaps. However, Muchie and Byamukama (2017) observe that larger enterprises may often adopt unsupportive attitudes towards industrial cooperation, perceiving it as a potential threat to their growth trajectory. The concept of

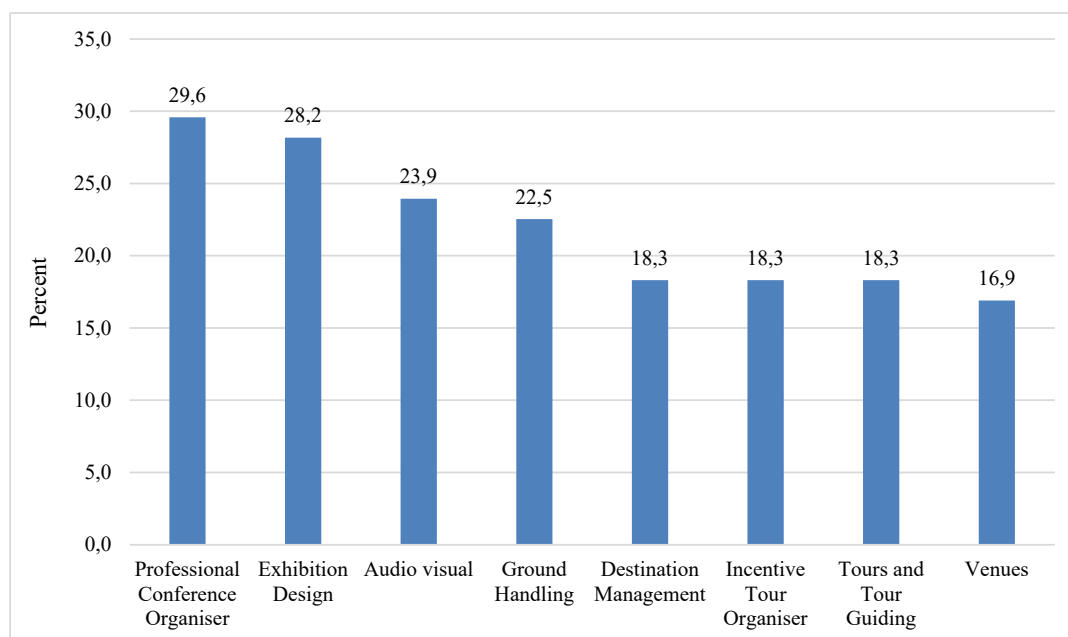


Figure 1. Type of event services offered

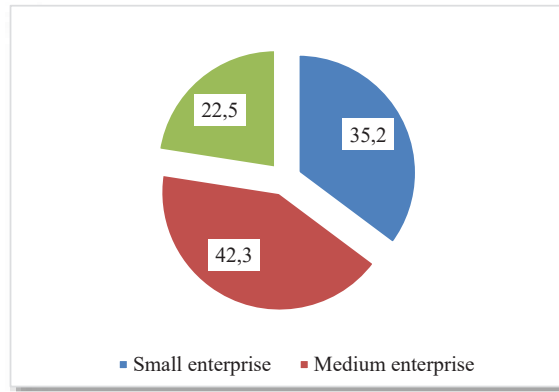


Figure 2. Businesses sizes

mentoring or supporting smaller firms may appear unattractive to these larger players, as they may not see direct financial returns or strategic benefits in doing so. This reluctance to engage in cooperative practices could pose a challenge to building a cohesive and competitive event services cluster capable of positioning Durban as a world-class business tourism destination.

**Co-operation versus Competition Amongst Event Suppliers**

Tourism is defined as the act of individuals travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for a duration of up to one consecutive year (Myeni and Chili, 2024). The responses revealed the extent to which event suppliers tend to co-operate or compete with one another in contributing to the development of a unified city brand. This insight enables

the researcher to assess the relationship orientation of the event suppliers and to determine whether it supports the creation of a consolidated and cohesive business tourism product.

The responses suggest that event suppliers typically operate as independent entities, thriving more on competition than co-operation. This tendency may be a key indicator of deeper issues that could hinder the success of the economic cluster in recognising and leveraging the benefits of collaborative engagement. Respondents also shared their views on the perceived nature of relationships among event suppliers within the industry. Assessing the nature of these relationships was essential to evaluate whether the existing level of collaboration is adequate to support the development of an inclusive marketing and branding strategy for Durban’s business tourism sector.

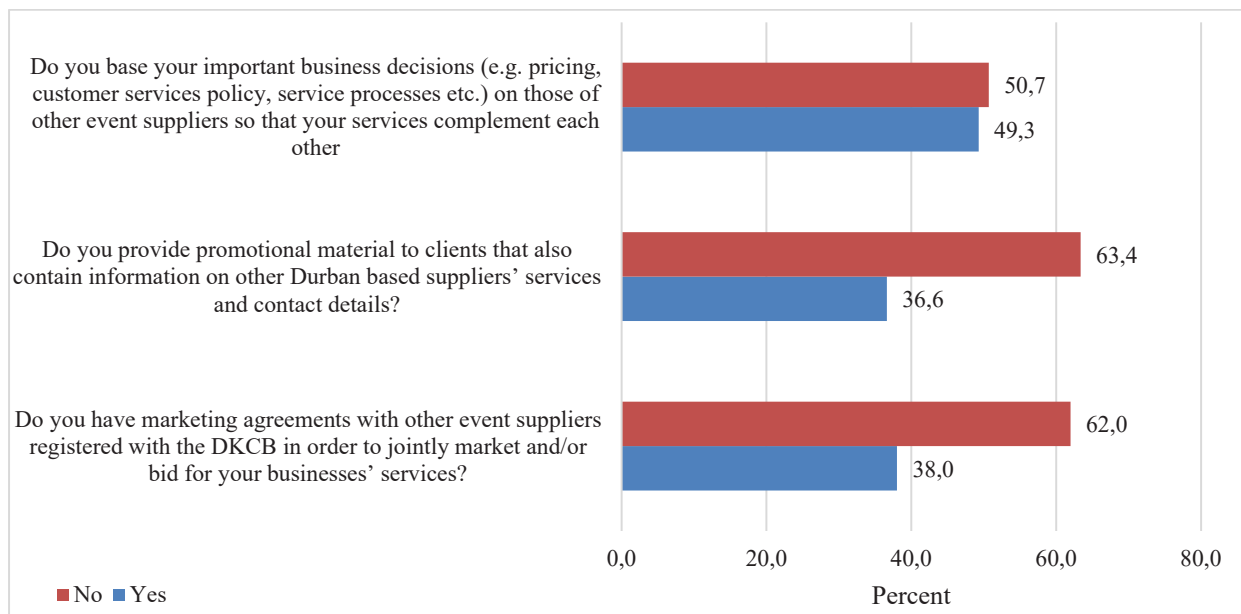


Figure 3. Event supplier co-operation in the industry’s global marketing strategy

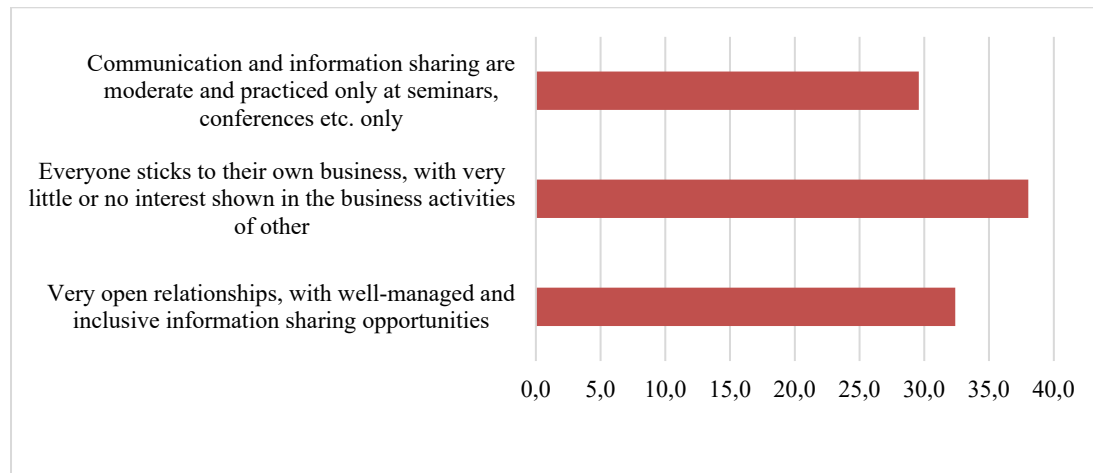


Figure 4. Event suppliers' relationships

Most respondents believe that event suppliers tend to operate introspectively, showing minimal concern for one another's business challenges. Furthermore, the results indicate that communication between event suppliers remains low outside of formal settings such as seminars and networking events. Figures 3 and 4 highlight the urgent need to encourage greater collaboration among event suppliers. Neglecting, mishandling, or failing to address the fragmentation within the sector undermines the effectiveness of the consolidated marketing strategy and dilutes the consistency of brand meanings and values as perceived by various stakeholder groups. The underlying causes of resistance to co-operation are embedded in the industry's prevailing business practices. Some of these issues include:

- A lack of shared commitment to the vision of a globally recognised city brand;
- Failure to manage the existing marketing strategy in an inclusive manner; and
- Generally ineffective leadership and management structures.

### Industrial Guidance on Competition and Co-operation Strategies

Respondents also shared their views on whether the DKCB and other relevant agencies provide adequate training and guidance on how to effectively balance competition and collaboration in pursuit of a unified city brand. Most of the event suppliers do not base their business decisions on cooperative strategies that promote or benefit the wider community of event suppliers. Effective leadership is a major requirement for destination managers to manage cooperation amongst the event suppliers. Limani *et al* (2024) state that collaboration among stakeholders is necessary, even though they often work independently towards the same goal.

### Cooperation in Joint-Marketing Business Services

Community stakeholders including local business and government bodies, help increase visibility and demonstrate the institutions commitment to community development (Labe, 2024). Respondents expressed varied attitudes towards joint marketing of their businesses with one another. Gaining insight into these attitudes enables the researcher to assess the industry's willingness and initiative to pursue a consolidated marketing and branding strategy. The results are illustrated in Figure 5. These varied responses highlight a significant degree of uncertainty among event suppliers regarding the value of co-operation versus competition. This finding echoes the results presented in Figures 3 and 4, which showed that the majority of respondents do not actively engage in collaborative efforts with their peers to support broader industry development. Zhu (2017) argues that outcompeting one another does not necessarily translate to long-term business success within economic clusters. This observation is particularly relevant to the business tourism sector, which relies heavily on brand recognition, robust distribution networks, and production expertise. In this context, high operational and sunk costs are more sustainably managed through collaborative industry growth, rather than isolated competition.

Members of business clusters must feel a sense of ownership and inclusion within the broader industry landscape in order to engage meaningfully in cooperative efforts (Pjerotić *et al.*, 2016). In Durban, a well-recognised challenge is the high level of fragmentation on the supply side of the business tourism sector, with minimal cooperation among stakeholders. This fragmentation continues to hinder progress towards achieving both Local Economic Development (LED) objectives and

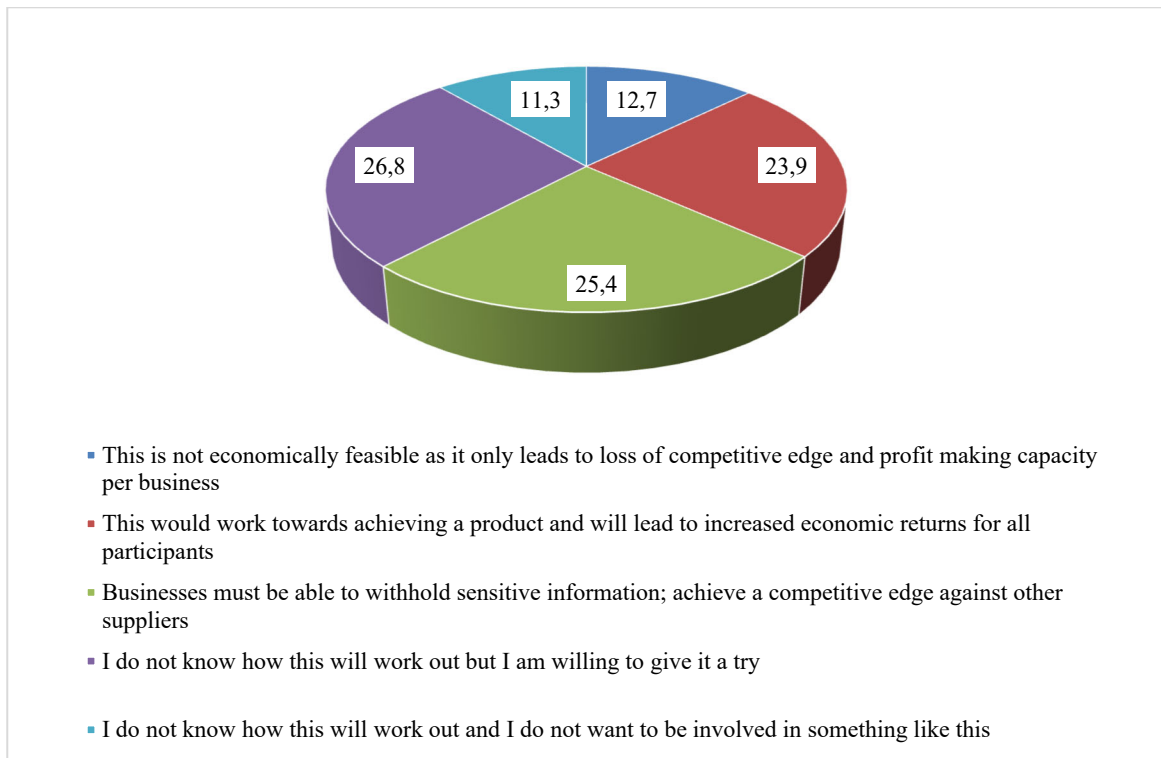


Figure 5. Attitudes on joint marketing event services amongst Durban's event suppliers

global competitiveness. As shown in Figure 5, 51% of respondents indicated that their reluctance to cooperate stems from fears of having their core competencies expropriated. In other words, businesses are hesitant to collaborate due to concerns over losing their unique client bases, intellectual capital, or proprietary products. As a result, they opt to remain in direct competition in order to safeguard their exclusivity. For a cooperation-over-competition strategy to succeed, these concerns must be directly addressed by the destination management authority. Building trust, ensuring fair governance, and implementing safeguards around knowledge sharing and innovation are essential to shifting towards a more collaborative industry model.

**Participation in marketing strategy development**

Marketing strategy is considered a crucial success factor for the growth and survival of a firm (Myeni and Chili, 2024). A significant number of event suppliers have either participated only once or not at all in the development of Durban's marketing strategy. Most continue to focus on managing their individual marketing strategies and day-to-day operations, with little to no alignment with the strategic direction set by the DKCB to position the city globally. Their limited participation in the city's marketing strategy management process can be attributed to several factors, including ineffective cooperation and capacity-

building strategies implemented by the convention bureau, a lack of information and feedback on policies and programmes, insufficient skills, and the absence of a shared vision for MICE tourism within the industry.

Saleem and Iglesias (2016) argue that a brand is an organic social process, where brand value is closely tied to the degree of stakeholder engagement. One of the most critical touchpoints in the marketing strategy is the internalisation of the brand – embedding its values and identity among supply-side stakeholders. This internal alignment must be achieved first to ensure that all stakeholders fully understand and actively contribute to building brand value in the external environment. When event suppliers participate meaningfully in the development of the marketing strategy, they help preserve brand value through consistency. Their collective understanding and agreement on the city brand's objectives and the strategy devised to realise them are essential for long-term success.

**Stakeholder Awareness of the Global Marketing Strategy**

The engagement of stakeholders in tourism, coupled with leadership's ability to influence them can significantly impact the sector's output (Labe, 2024). Respondents were asked to indicate their knowledge of, and level of engagement with, the marketing strategy implemented by the DKCB in international markets. Those who reported that they had either

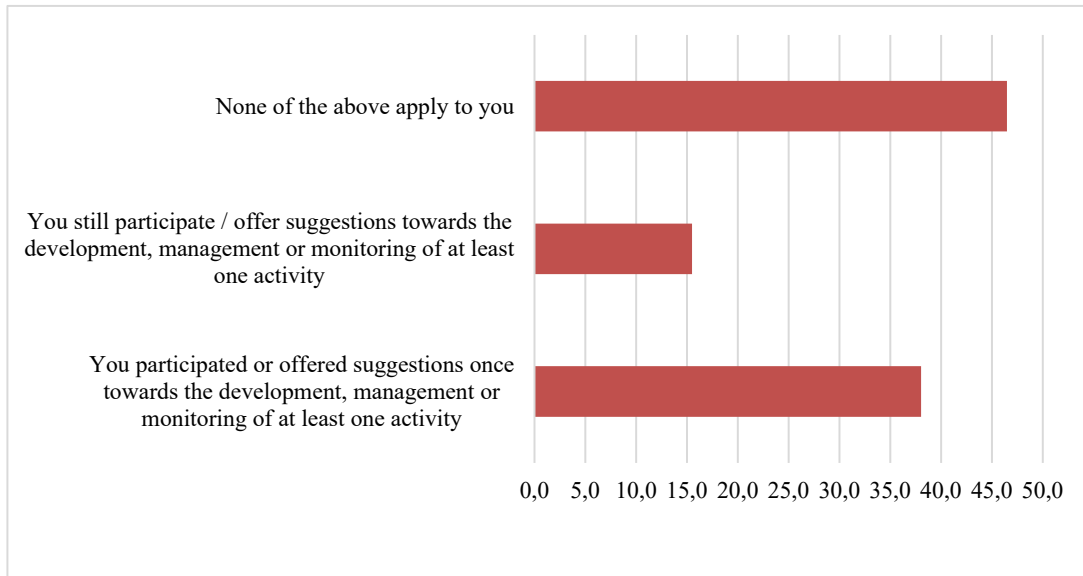


Figure 6. Level of participation in marketing strategy development

heard of or participated in the DKCB’s global marketing strategy also demonstrated some awareness of the key themes outlined in the strategy. This insight enables the researcher to assess the event suppliers’ understanding of the approaches used to promote the city on the global stage. Meaningful participation in the management of the city brand can only occur if stakeholders have a solid grasp of the marketing strategy and its components. The findings are presented in Figures 7.

Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated that they have never participated in the development or management of the DKCB’s global marketing plan. The responsibility therefore lies with the DKCB, as the destination manager, to mobilise and fairly include

all stakeholders in the marketing strategy to realise the intended outcomes for the city brand. Active involvement of event suppliers allows the destination manager to gauge the industry’s overall productive capacity and to effectively showcase this within the strategy. Possessing structural knowledge of what the destination can offer clients is vital for the destination manager when crafting and implementing both marketing and bidding strategies. Saleem and Iglesias (2016) argue that an understanding of brand ideology is key to achieving organisational objectives as laid out in the marketing strategy. Success in executing a consolidated strategy is ultimately driven by the presence of a culture that nurtures such understanding and engagement.

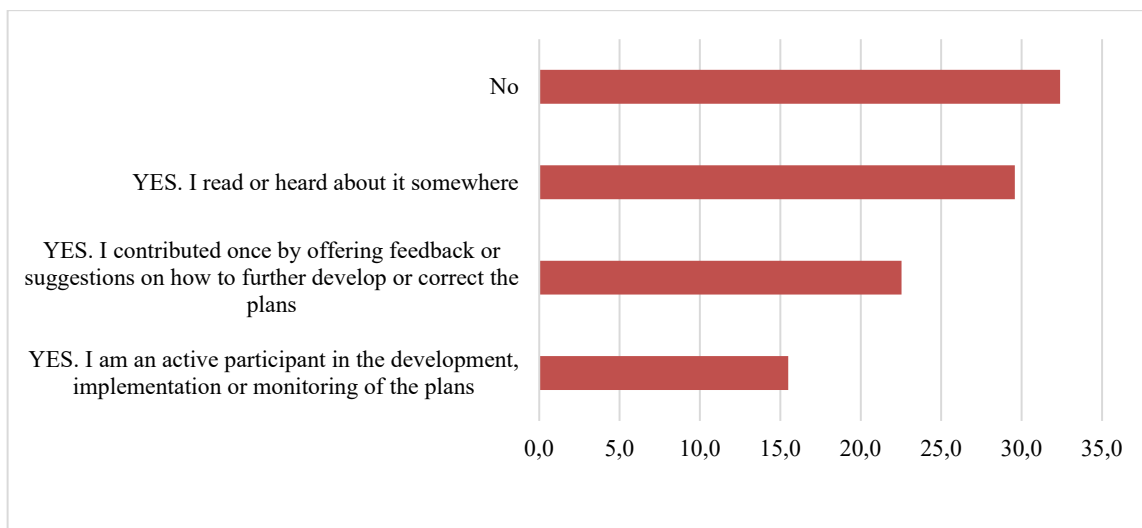


Figure 7. Awareness of DKCB’s global marketing strategy

### Public/Private Sector Business Development Initiatives and Policies

Tourism is an institutional and social force that impacts people’s lives and that is associated with directly or indirectly (Masimba, 2024). Business development initiatives and policies from both the public and private sectors play a critical role in fostering the growth of business tourism. The role of cooperation between the public sector, private entities and civil society is paramount (Limani *et al*, 2024 and Govers, 2018). This section examines data related to event suppliers’ access to, and awareness of, such initiatives. Respondents were specifically asked about their knowledge of the *Rise with Us* Initiative, along with other investment programmes aimed at stimulating growth within the business tourism sector.

Assessing this awareness is essential, as it indicates whether event suppliers are informed about the tools and opportunities available to support their business development and access to broader, often inaccessible, market segments. The findings are presented in Figure 8 below.

A significant number of event suppliers reported being unaware of these initiatives. Among those who are aware, Figure 8 shows that 33% have only encountered the initiatives through media coverage and have expressed no intention to participate. This lack of active engagement presents a major challenge in mobilising an industry-wide effort to advance Durban’s global business tourism strategy. Without the meaningful involvement of key stakeholders, it becomes increasingly difficult to implement initiatives aimed at fostering an enabling environment that enhances the sector’s overall productive capacity. Consequently, meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders is vital for the development of effective business tourism (Labe, 2024).

### Attitudes Towards Business Development Programmes and Investment Initiatives

Among the event suppliers who are aware of the *Rise with Us* initiative, it is crucial to foster active participation rather than mere passive engagement. The *Rise with Us* initiative provides a valuable platform for

guiding event suppliers on how to collaborate effectively with other stakeholders. The initiative’s agenda can be tailored to reflect the specific needs and circumstances of Durban, aligning with the city’s unique context and desired outcomes.

To drive effective collaboration among stakeholders, it is essential to establish measurable outcomes that focus on achieving cooperative engagement, attaining a desired global market position within a specified timeframe, developing a distinguished brand for international marketing, and ensuring equitable sharing of information, decision-making power, risks, benefits, and losses, as delineated by the desired Local Economic Development (LED) position. Tourism has contributed significantly to the economic transformation of most African nations (Masimba, 2024).

### Government Policy on MICE Tourism Development

The role of the public bodies, including the state in strategic orientation of tourism is still valid today (Masimba, 2024). Respondents indicated their awareness of government policies designed to create an enabling environment for business tourism development in Durban. Those who responded affirmatively were asked to express their views on whether these policies have led to growth opportunities in the global business tourism market for their businesses. The majority of respondents are aware of government policies aimed at boosting business tourism growth in South African cities. This positive response suggests that business tourism stakeholders are being informed about policies intended to develop their businesses and facilitate access to global markets. Awareness of such policies empowers event suppliers to understand the political framework that supports their growth and international development. However, nearly 50% of respondents who are aware of government policies reported that they have not benefited from these policies in terms of accessibility to international markets. As noted by Nel *et al.* (2003), while most government policies are theoretically sound, they often lack

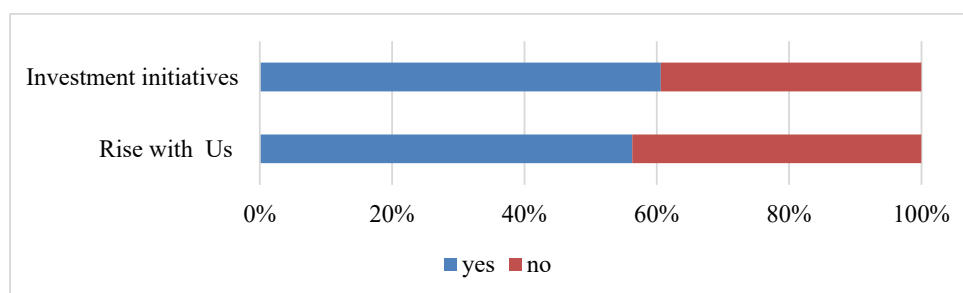


Figure 8. Awareness of Investment and Capacity-Building Initiatives

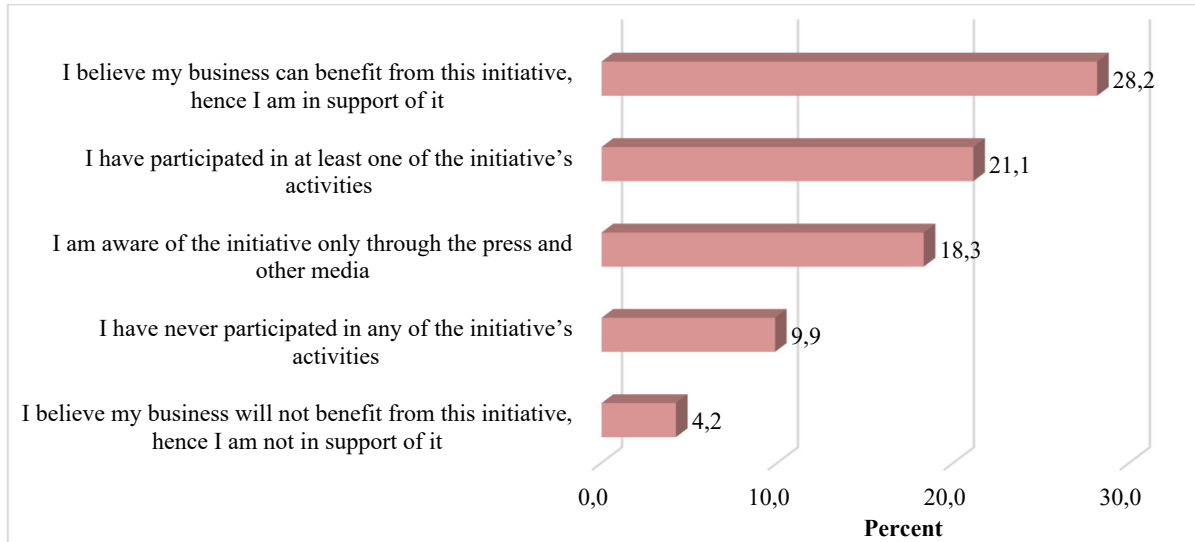


Figure 9. Attitudes towards the Rise with Us Initiative

practicality in terms of successful execution and sustainable adoption by relevant stakeholders. The dyadic collaboration of both public managers and business in the process of developing place market enables positive outcomes on related policies and in making the branding clear (Limani *et al.*, 2024 and Eshuis *et al.*, 2017).

**Cross-Tabulation**

The traditional method for reporting a statistical result involves indicating the level of statistical significance through a *p*-value, which is derived from

a test statistic. A result is considered statistically significant if  $p < 0.05$  (Hair *et al.*, 2017). For instance, the *p*-value between the variables “I have never participated in any of the initiative’s activities” and “Ground Handling” is 0.005. This demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between the two variables, suggesting that individuals operating within ground handling services had a meaningful influence on perceptions of participation in business development initiatives. These findings are summarised in Table 2 below.

Chi-square test: I have never participated in any of these activities \*Ground-handling.

Table 2

**Cross-tabulation and Chi-Square Test**

I have never participated in any of these activities \*Ground-handling.

			Ground Handling		Total
			Yes	No	
I have never participated in any of the initiative's activities	Yes	Count	5	2	7
		% within I have never participated in any of the initiative's activities	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
		% within Ground Handling	31.3%	3.6%	9.9%
		% of Total	7.0%	2.8%	9.9%
	No	Count	11	53	64
		% within I have never participated in any of the initiative's activities	17.2%	82.8%	100.0%
		% within Ground Handling	68.8%	96.4%	90.1%
		% of Total	15.5%	74.6%	90.1%
Total	Count	16	55	71	
	% within I have never participated in any of the initiative's activities	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	
	% within Ground Handling	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	10.634 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.001	0.005	0.005	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	7.754	1	0.005			
Likelihood Ratio	8.663	1	0.003	0.005	0.005	
Fisher's Exact Test				0.005	0.005	
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.485 <sup>c</sup>	1	0.001	0.005	0.005	0.005
N of Valid Cases	71					
a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.58.						
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table						
c. The standardized statistic is 3.238.						

The cross-tabulation analysis between the variables 'Are you aware of any active or proposed government investment initiatives that are meant to develop conference tourism in Durban?' and 'In terms of size, how best can your business be categorised?' reveals a statistically significant relationship. This indicates that the size of a business plays a notable role in determining the level of awareness of public investment initiatives aimed at advancing business tourism in the region. Larger enterprises are often more connected to formal networks, allowing them to access policy updates and government-driven programmes with greater ease than their smaller counterparts. Conversely, smaller enterprises may lack the institutional support or capacity to remain consistently informed, limiting their participation in initiatives designed to foster industry-wide growth.

Another significant association was identified between respondents' level of engagement in the *Rise with Us* initiative and their awareness of broader marketing strategies developed to position Durban as a leading global destination for business tourism. The data suggests that increased involvement in the initiative enhances stakeholders' comprehension of Durban's strategic marketing objectives and city-branding aspirations. This correlation reinforces the foundational goal of *Rise with Us*, which is to nurture the capabilities of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism stakeholders and prepare them to meaningfully contribute to the industry's global positioning (Kotze-Nhlapo, 2014).

A further statistically significant relationship exists between the ability of event suppliers to secure contracts for key events listed on the Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau's (DKCB) official event calendar and their awareness of DKCB's city marketing strategies. Suppliers who actively engage in bidding for or delivering services at these high-profile events tend to be more familiar with Durban's brand vision and the strategic objectives underpinning its promotion on the global stage. Such suppliers are better positioned

to align their operations with the city's brand identity, which in turn contributes to a more cohesive and compelling destination brand.

Additionally, the cross-tabulation analysis revealed a meaningful link between respondents' attitudes toward collaboration within the event supplier network and their willingness to promote fellow service providers within their own marketing materials. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it highlights a critical weakness within the current industry structure; poor coordination and underdeveloped inter-organisational relationships. As identified earlier in the analysis, these fragmented relationships undermine collective branding efforts and impede the realisation of a unified and competitive city brand. To effectively advance Durban's status as a global hub for business tourism, it is imperative that industry stakeholders not only increase their awareness of public and private sector initiatives but also foster a culture of collaboration. Stronger intra-industry relationships, supported by inclusive policy frameworks and strategic marketing engagement, will allow for a more synergistic and sustainable development trajectory.

**Conclusion**

The findings indicate that for the city to successfully enhance its position as a global business tourism destination, it must focus on fostering cooperation among event suppliers, providing effective leadership, and establishing a supportive environment for growth through government policy. Furthermore, the research has shown that consistent and high-quality learning and knowledge management, coupled with clear and strategic brand orientation, are essential for aligning stakeholders with the city's brand vision. A clear and unified approach to destination branding, involving all relevant stakeholders, is critical for ensuring that Durban can meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive global market. The study's results underscore the importance of developing a well-defined city brand

identity, encouraging collective responsibility for brand promotion, and empowering key organisations, such as the Durban KZN Convention Bureau (DKCB), to act as custodians of the brand.

### Recommendations

**Clarify and Communicate Brand Identity:** Develop a clear and concise statement of Durban's brand identity that can be easily understood by all stakeholders. This should be widely accessible, including through an easily readable handbook and the DKCB website.

**Inclusive Stakeholder Responsibility:** Ensure that all event suppliers understand and take responsibility for supporting Durban's brand identity. Offer guidance on how their business operations can align with the city's branding efforts.

**Empower DKCB as the Brand Guardian:** Strengthen the role of the Durban KZN Convention Bureau (DKCB) as the central authority in maintaining the integrity of the city's brand, ensuring consistency across all marketing efforts.

**Encourage Participation in Collaborative Initiatives:** Actively promote and encourage event suppliers to participate in initiatives such as the *Rise with Us* programme, which helps build skills and fosters cooperation among stakeholders.

**Enhance Stakeholder Collaboration and Feedback:** Foster stronger collaboration between event suppliers, government bodies, and other key stakeholders. Create regular feedback channels to ensure that all parties remain engaged and informed about industry developments, policies, and opportunities.

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