

Festivals' green shift and destination brand equity

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INTRODUCTION

Festivals are no longer just about celebration and culture; they are now being used as tools to help cities and provinces grow in a sustainable way. Many destinations today are trying to prove they are "green" by promoting environmental habits during their big events. However, there is still a big question that researchers haven't fully answered: does being "green" during a festival make the destination's brand look better to the public?

For a long time, branding was mostly about logos, slogans, and advertisements. If a city had a pretty poster, people thought it was a good brand. At the same time, experts who study festivals usually focus only on how to manage trash or save electricity. These two groups; the branding experts and the environmental experts, don't often talk to each other. This creates a gap in our understanding of how a festival's environmental actions change what people think about the city.

In today's world, travelers care more about the planet than ever before. When they go to a festival and see how the organizers handle waste or plastic, they are testing the city's promises. This study looks at whether the "green shift" in festivals is more than just a way to save the environment. We believe it is a way for a city to prove it is trustworthy and capable, which ultimately builds a stronger and more "legit" brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Building a brand for a destination usually involves creating trust and a positive emotional connection with visitors. In the past, people thought you could build this just by telling stories and using good marketing. But recently, experts have started to realize that a brand is not just what you say; it is what you do. If a destination claims to be eco-friendly but the festival grounds are covered in trash, the brand loses its value.

Table 1. Integrated Theoretical Foundation

Theory	Core Idea	Role in Study
Experiential Branding	Brand meaning comes from lived experience	Explains how visitors judge the festival
Institutional Theory	Respect is built through visible actions	Explains how trust is formed
Signaling Theory	Good practices show quality	Explains how "green" habits add value

This is where the idea of "Experiential Branding" comes in. It suggests that a brand's true meaning comes from what a person experiences in real life. If a visitor sees a festival successfully managing energy and waste, they start to see the destination as a leader in governance. This builds "Institutional Trust," which means the public believes the government and local organizers are honest and effective at their jobs.

To help explain this, we use three main ideas. Experiential Branding helps us understand how visitors form opinions based on what they see at the festival. Institutional Theory explains that a city becomes respected when its governance is visible and organized. Finally, Signaling Theory says that good environmental habits act as a "signal" to the world that the destination is high-quality and reliable.



Table 2. Causal Linkage Framework

Stage	Construct	Description
1	Sustainable Practices	Managing waste, energy, and transport
2	Experiential Signals	What visitors see and think about the actions
3	Institutional Trust	Believing the city is capable and honest
4	Brand Equity Formation	The final boost to the city's reputation

METHOD

For this study, we wanted to understand the "why" and "how" behind people's feelings, so we used a qualitative research design. Instead of just looking at numbers and charts, we listened to the stories of people who attended festivals. We wanted to see how they interpreted the "green" actions of the organizers and what those actions meant to them personally.

We interviewed 15 people who went to different festivals in the Philippines in 2025. These people were chosen because they had direct experience with how these events were run. Each interview lasted about 30 to 60 minutes. We asked them about things like waste management, if they saw any efforts to reduce plastic, and how those efforts made them feel about the destination.

To make sure our work was high-quality, we followed a strict process. We used member checking, which means we went back to the participants to make sure we recorded their stories correctly. We also did peer debriefing, where we let other researchers check our work for any mistakes. This ensured that our findings were not just guesses but were based on real evidence from the festivalgoers.

FINDINGS

Our research found four main ways that being green helps a city's brand. The first is Operational Sustainability. When visitors saw things like proper trash segregation and less plastic, they felt the city was being run by responsible leaders. The second is Environmental Transparency. When organizers were honest and clear about their green goals, it made the visitors trust the destination more.

We also found that Stakeholder Integration which means getting local vendors and the community involved, made the festival feel more authentic. It showed that the whole city was working together, not just the government. Lastly, there is Emotional Attachment. When people felt they were part of a "green" event, they felt proud and happy. This created a strong emotional bond between the visitor and the city.

In the end, our findings show that people use the festival to judge the city. If the "green" efforts are successful, the visitor starts to see the whole destination as a modern, trustworthy, and high-quality place. The festival acts as a "live test" for the city's reputation. If you pass the test, your brand equity goes up.

Table 3. Mechanisms of Green Governance–Brand Formation

Mechanism	Description	Branding Outcome
Operational Sustainability	Visible eco-actions like recycling	Shows the city is responsible
Environmental Transparency	Clear talk about green goals	Builds honesty and trust
Stakeholder Integration	Community and vendors helping	Makes the brand feel "real"
Emotional Attachment	Feeling good about being eco-friendly	Creates a strong connection to the city

IMPLICATIONS OR CONCLUSION

The most important lesson from this study is that sustainability is not just a "nice-to-have" feature; it is a core part of a city's brand. For a destination to be successful today, it cannot just talk about being green, it must show it through its actions at big events. When a festival is run well and respects the environment, it proves to the world that the destination is a leader.

For policymakers and event organizers, this means they should stop seeing "green" habits as a chore or a set of rules. Instead, they should see them as a clever way to market the city. We suggest focusing on better waste systems, being very clear with the public about environmental goals, and making sure everyone in the local community is involved in the process.

Finally, having a "green shift" makes a destination more competitive. In a busy tourism market, the cities that take care of their environment will be the ones that people trust and want to visit again. By making festivals more sustainable, destinations aren't just saving the planet, they are building a powerful and lasting brand that will attract more visitors in the long run.

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