

# The Role of the Brand Image of Muscat Festival in Promoting the National Identity of Oman

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**DOI Link:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i9/26647>

**Published Date:** 30 September 2025

## Abstract

This study investigates the role of the Muscat Festival's brand image in promoting Omani national identity, guided by three main objectives: (1) to explore the associations of the Muscat Festival's brand image, (2) to examine associations with Oman's national identity, and (3) to identify the connection between them. The relationship was studied from the visitors' perspective using concept mapping. A quantitative survey was conducted in two rounds: an initial survey with 34 participants and a main survey with 200 respondents. Brand concept maps were developed to analyze visitor perceptions and identify key associations and recalled messages. Findings reveal a moderate relationship between the festival's brand image and elements like local culture, community engagement, entertainment diversity, and tourism promotion. A stronger connection was observed with Oman's history, heritage, customs, safety, and geography, while weaker links appeared in areas such as language, future outlook, and lifestyle. Six symbolic associations emerged between the festival and national identity: citizenship, forts, traditional crafts, national folk dances, traditional clothing, and food. Overall, the Muscat Festival can serve as a strategic platform to foster patriotism and counter the cultural pressures of globalization. The study further contributes to the application of brand concept mapping in the context of cultural festivals, offering insights into its relevance for national identity research

**Keywords:** Brand Concept Maps, Brand Image, Muscat Festival, Oman National Identity

## Introduction

Globalization has challenged Oman's national identity, leading to "alienation from traditional Omani identity and a weakening of unique cultural traits" (Ergashev & Farxodjonova, 2020), young Omanis are particularly influenced by global trends in "fashion, food, and social behaviors" (Almasar, 2023), causing a decline in pride for Omani heritage and an increase in social issues, such as "substance abuse and family disconnection" (Alroya, 2023). Despite these pressures, Oman remains committed to preserving its identity, as emphasized by Sultan

Haitham bin Tariq's call to uphold historical values while adapting to globalization (Oman Daily, 2023). The Muscat Festival exemplifies this effort, aiming to promote Omani culture by showcasing the nation's natural and historical heritage.

The festival's brand identity is pivotal in fostering a sense of Omani identity, connecting audiences to Oman's cultural values. As distinct from brand identity, brand image encompasses how audiences perceive the festival's message. This study investigates the Muscat Festival's brand image and its role in reinforcing Oman's national identity, contributing insights into how festivals shape cultural identity amid globalization.

Research highlights the value of festivals in representing national identity, with multipurpose events often showcasing Indigenous culture and enhancing global awareness (Jawahar et al., 2020). However, balancing festival attendance with preserving authenticity remains challenging (Lopez & Leenders, 2019). There is limited research on Arab festivals' role in promoting national identity, especially the Muscat Festival. This study examines the festival's brand image in defining Omani identity.

The Muscat Festival incorporates cultural symbols such as "folklore dancing, landscapes, historical structures, and traditional attire" (Al-Yahyai, 2017). As one of Oman's oldest festivals, it benefits from government and private support. While it provides a platform for intangible heritage, tangible cultural elements are sometimes overlooked. This study addresses stakeholder perceptions of the festival's brand image and its relationship to Omani national identity.

#### *Research Aims and Objectives*

Generally, this study aims to explore the Muscat Festival's brand image; and investigate its role in promoting Omani national identity from the visitors' perspectives.

The main objectives of this study are:

- i) To explore the association of the brand image of the Muscat Festival.
- ii) To explore the association of Oman's national identity.
- iii) To identify the connection between the Muscat Festival's brand image and Oman's national identity.

#### **Literature Review**

##### *National Identity*

National identity is a multifaceted concept that encompasses historical traditions, cultural values, beliefs, and national sovereignty, representing individuals' sense of belonging to their nation (Liu & Turner, 2018). It is shaped by elements like culture, customs, attitudes, and perceptions, and can be categorized into physical, cultural, personal, relational, and controlled aspects (He et al., 2021). National identity is fluid, evolving with societal changes. Traditions, language, religion, and cultural heritage are key markers of national identity (Gelisl, 2019).

Historically, national identity emerged in response to a "crisis of belonging," offering a sense of continuity and a political community (Buckner, 2011). However, globalization can challenge and weaken national identities (Kolarikova, 2020). Nations function as brands, meeting

citizens' emotional, symbolic, and functional needs by distinguishing them from other nations through language, customs, and religion (He et al., 2021).

### *Brand Image*

A brand's image encompasses consumers' perceptions and associations held in memory, reflecting how a brand is perceived based on experiences and information (Lin et al., 2021). These associations can be categorized into three types: attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Wäckerlin et al., 2020). Brand image is also expressed through three sub-images: corporate, user, and product/service, with the foundation rooted in consumers' associations with specific brand-related characteristics (Zhang & Luo, 2019).

Historically, from the 1950s to the 1970s, brand image was viewed as the totality of cognitive and emotional perceptions along with the physical attributes of products, often conflating "product image" and "brand image." In the 1980s, the concept evolved to emphasize symbolic meanings, with researchers focusing on messages and associations that shaped customers' perceptions. Since the early 1990s, brand image has been differentiated from product image, encompassing service image as well (Lee et al., 2014).

While many scholars agree that brand image comprises multiple dimensions, there remains no consensus on the most accurate dimensions. Some argue that brand image and contemporary management theories may not align (Zhang & Luo, 2019).

### *National Identity of Oman*

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab country whose primary religion is Islam and whose main language is Arabic, though English is widely used with a population of approximately 4.5 million (61.50% are Omanis). Oman is the east part of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Oman, which borders Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen and overlooks the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Arabian Sea, is expanding as a petroleum exporter and a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Aideed, 2021) See Figure 1.



Figure 1 Map of the Sultanate of Oman

Source. (<https://www.fm.gov.om/about-oman/state/map-of-oman/>)

Oman boasts a rich and prosperous history, taking pride in its preserved cultural heritage and identity despite rapid modernization (Aulia et al., 2015). Historically, Oman was a powerful empire, competing for influence in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean until the late 17th century. Its peak in the 19th century extended its reach into modern-day Iran, Pakistan, and Zanzibar (Al-Abri, 2020). The resilience of its tribes during invasions by various forces, including the Portuguese and Persians, has become integral to Omani national consciousness (Peterson, 2019).

### *Muscat Festival*

Muscat Festival is Oman's most celebrated festival, featuring a wide variety of activities, entertainment, and cultural events for all ages. Held annually between January and February, it attracts millions of visitors from around the world (Aulia et al., 2015). The inaugural festival took place in 1998 at Quorum Natural Park and has since included technical, cultural, and festive events, blending traditional Omani performances with modern entertainment like laser shows and international acts (Al azri, 2015).

The festival aims to engage young people during school holidays, offering a diverse program that includes arts, sports, fashion, and cultural workshops. Activities range from historical exhibitions at the Heritage Village and Oman Craft Industries to poetry readings and discussions on Omani folklore and societal values. The festival also hosts various educational and entertainment events tailored for women and children (Al azri, 2015).

Organized by the Muscat Municipality, the festival has seen improvements in infrastructure and activities over the years, promoting local tourism during the peak season from October to April. Despite the extensive media coverage of the festival, there is a lack of formal studies on its effectiveness in enhancing Oman's image. In 2019, the festival attracted over 700,000 visitors, with significant attendance at locations like Al Amerat Park and Al Naseem Park (Oman Daily). see Figure3.



Figure 2: Various traditional activities offered at the Muscat Festival  
Source: (<https://twitter.com/MuscatFestival>)

### *Brand Concept Mapping*

According to Till et al (2011), brand concept mapping provides valuable insights into the overall health of a brand. Maps for healthy brands exhibit strong, favorable, relevant, and unique associations. This tool helps diagnose areas where a brand's meaning may be weak or failing to resonate with consumers and guides marketing activities to strengthen brand associations. Brand association maps can be generated immediately after a crisis to assess

the impact of the negative event on the brand. They can also be used later as a check to determine any long-term effects on the brand.

Till et al (2011) proposed a five-stage process for creating a brand concept map. In Figure 3, the process involves specific steps to develop the map and systematically understand brand associations.

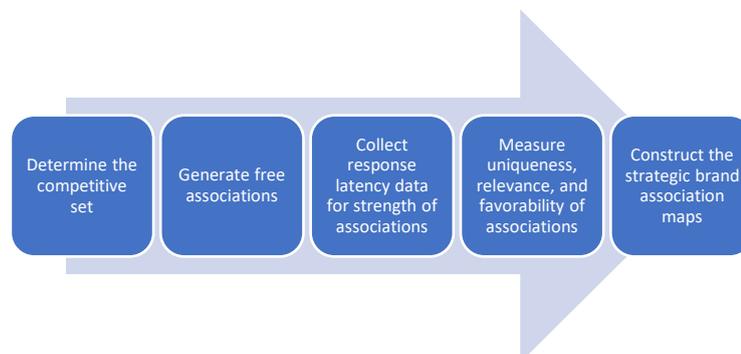


Figure 3 (Till2011) General procedures for brand concept mapping and preparing network analysis

## Methodology

### *The Procedure of Data Collection*

Two surveys were conducted to gather brand associations linked to Oman's national identity and the Muscat Festival brand image: (1) a preliminary survey and (2) a main survey targeting Omani citizen visitors. The preliminary survey used open-ended questions, such as "What comes to mind when you think of Oman's national identity - Muscat Festival brand image?" to allow participants to freely share associations without bias, producing a broad list of relevant associations. Similar terms were then grouped to refine the list. This approach aimed to capture genuine perceptions related to Oman's national identity and the festival's brand image.

In the main survey, respondents rated each association's strength, uniqueness, favorability, and relevance. These ratings helped classify associations as low, medium, or high in these dimensions, revealing the overall perception structure (Till et al., 2011). However, this study did not employ response latency measures due to their experimental and technical requirements, which were not feasible in the field context of a cultural festival. Instead, established scales were adopted, as they provide academically reliable, widely validated, and contextually appropriate measures of brand associations, aligning more closely with the study's objectives. The use of established scales instead of response latency data is consistent with prior research (Keller, 1993; John et al., 2006), which has validated perceptual measures as reliable indicators of brand association strength

The resulting brand maps visualized the knowledge structure and associations tied to Oman's national identity and the Muscat Festival brand image.

1. **Strength:** This refers to the intensity of the connection between an association and the brand node. Stronger associations have more significant and lasting links, which affects how easily they can be activated in consumers' minds.
2. **Favorability:** This dimension reflects whether an association is viewed positively or negatively. Favorable associations enhance consumer perceptions of the brand, making

it essential for marketers to cultivate positive connections to improve brand image and attitudes.

3. **Uniqueness:** This measures how distinct an association is from those of competing brands within the same category. Unique associations can provide a competitive edge, as they set a brand apart from others that may share common attributes.
4. **Relevance:** This gauges how important and valuable an association is to consumers when making purchase decisions. Practitioners should prioritize associations that resonate with their target audience and influence their decision-making processes effectively.

### *Sampling*

The survey targeted a sample of Omani citizens from various age groups, genders, and regions, encompassing a preliminary survey with 34 respondents and a main survey with 200 respondents. This diverse population was chosen to capture a wide range of perspectives regarding the branding of the Muscat Festival and its connection to Oman's national identity. The data analysis utilized the counting method, quantifying different aspects like the total number of associations and categorizing them to examine knowledge structure integration. SPSS software facilitated the analysis, with associations being coded to organize the data systematically. Initial coding labeled associations based on their meanings, followed by grouping related codes into broader categories aligned with the research questions.

Scores for favorability, relevance, uniqueness, and strength were categorized into low, medium, and high based on mean scores, with scores of 5.2 and above classified as high, below 3.0 as low, and between 3.1 and 5.1 as moderate. In the brand association representation, the strength of an association was indicated by the thickness of the line connecting it to the brand node, while its uniqueness was reflected by its distance from the brand. Favorability was shown by the color of the circle, and the size of the circle represented relevance, with larger circles indicating more relevant associations.

Through these robust data analysis techniques, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the associations between the Muscat Festival's brand image and its impact on Oman's national identity.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Preliminary Survey***

#### *Muscat Festival Free Associations*

The respondents provided free associations by each mentioning 10 words related to the Muscat Festival brand, resulting in a total of 241 associations. These associations encompassed a wide range of themes and concepts, including cultural and recreational aspects, event organization, and societal considerations.

Table 1 presents the final stage, which involves creating the final associations after combining words with similar meanings. Since the primary goal is to identify potential correlations to generate the greatest impact, general associations of little strategic value are removed. This process helps identify associations that have greater brand recognition.

Table 1

*Final Muscat Festival Associations*

<b>Original associations</b>	<b>Final associations</b>
Fireworks	Fireworks
Traditional food, Omani sweets	Traditional food
Games, Kids Games	Kids Games
Traditional songs, Folk dances	Folkloric dances and songs
Traditional crafts	Traditional crafts
Crowd, Parking	Crowd
Concerts, Music	Concerts
Winter, Atmosphere, Time	Winter time
Omani clothes	Omani clothes
Media coverage, Hashtag	Media coverage
International folklore, The global circus, Different countries	Global events
Family gatherings, Gulf gathering, Coexistence Friends, Children, Youths	Family gatherings
Fort	Fort
Traditional games	Traditional games
Citizenship	Citizenship
Muscat only	Muscat
Prompt, Omani tourist, Places, Tourism	Tourism

*Oman National Identity Free Associations*

The analysis of responses to the question, "What comes to mind when you think about the Omani national identity?" resulted in 261 associations that reveal a complex representation of Omani identity, rooted in cultural heritage and values.

Table 2 presents the final stage, which involves creating the final associations after combining words that are similar in meaning. Since the primary goal is to identify potential correlations to generate the greatest impact, general associations of little strategic value are removed. This process helps identify associations that have greater brand recognition.

Table 2

*Final Oman National Identity Associations*

<b>Original associations.</b>	<b>Final associations</b>
Head turban in men's Clothing	Traditional Clothing
Traditional foods	Traditional food
Glory, Arab history	Historical Glory
Values and morals, The smile, Kind, Muslims	Islamic values and moral
The two swords and the Dagger	Two swords and a Dagger
The sea, Captains of the seas, Ships	Sea ships
National flag	National flag
Belonging, Citizenship, homeland	Citizenship
Castles, Fort	Castles and forts
Tourism, Culture, Omani culture, Cultural diversity, Arts, Palace of knowledge	Cultural diversity
Security, stability	Security and stability
Traditional crafts	Traditional crafts
Development, Renewal, Industry	Renewable development
Sultan Qaboos	Sultan Qaboos
The society, Harmony, Relations, Solidarity, Coexistence, Tolerance	Harmonious society
Aflaj	Aflaj
Hospitality, Kind	Hospitality
Natural views, geography	Natural Geography
Diversity of dialects	Diversity of dialects
National songs, Folk dances	National Folk Dances
Work hard, Omani people	Hard-working people

**Main Survey***Demographic Analysis*

Firstly, all the questionnaire respondents are Omanis (N=200, 100%). Secondly, regarding gender, there are 112 male participants (55.9%) and 88 female participants (44.1%), indicating a slightly higher proportion of male respondents. Thirdly, regarding age, respondents aged between 28 and 37 constitute the majority (N=80, 45.2%), while the fewest respondents are those aged over 47 years (N=22, 12.4%).

Fourthly, when asked if they knew about the Muscat Festival, all respondents answered "Yes" (N = 200, 100%). Fifthly, when asked if they had visited the Muscat Festival, all respondents answered "Yes" (N=200, 100%). Sixthly, regarding the year of their visit to the Muscat Festival, responses varied. The majority visited between 2014 and 2018 (N=119, 59.3%), while the fewest visited between 2004 and 2008 (N=4, 1.7%).

Seventhly, when asked how much time they spent at the Muscat Festival during their last visit, responses also varied. Most respondents stayed for 2 hours (N=98, 49.2%), while the fewest stayed for 5 hours (N=8, 4%). Eighthly, when asked who accompanied them to the Muscat Festival, most respondents were accompanied by their family (N=108, 53.7%), while the fewest were accompanied by workmates (N=9, 4.5%). Finally, when asked if they thought the Muscat Festival had succeeded in promoting Omani national identity, most respondents disagreed with the statement (N=98, 49.2%), and few strongly agreed (N=8, 4%). Table 4.6 describes the characteristics of respondents in the Main survey.

*Strength, Uniqueness, Relevance, and Favorability Measures*

The scales of these strengths, uniqueness, relevance, and favorability have been used previously in the literature. The highest value (i.e., a strong association link to the brand node directly associated with the brand) is coded as 7, the lowest value is coded as 1 (Schnittka et al., 2012). In other words, the Likert scale of the measures is from 1-7 with one denotes very weak and seven denotes very strong.

The scores on the favorability, relevance, uniqueness, and strength scales were categorized into one of three groups (low, moderate, or high) based on the mean scores for each association. To categorize the average mean into 3 categories, the range of namely 6 (7 - 1 = 6) was divided into 3 = 2. So, the first category is 3 and below as low, the second category is 3.1 and 5 as moderate and the third category is 5.1 and higher as high. Table 3 shows the results and classification of association categories using Muscat Festival. The findings indicate that all identified associations were found to fall within the moderate level.

Table 3

*Classification of association categories for Muscat festival by Strength, Uniqueness, Relevance, and Favorability*

<b>Associations</b>	<b>Mean (Strength)</b>	<b>Mean (Uniqueness)</b>	<b>Mean (Relevance)</b>	<b>Mean (Favourability)</b>
Fireworks	3.730	3.460	4.07	4.21
Traditional food	4.480	4.260	4.42	4.54
Kids Games	3.810	3.620	4.12	4.33
Folkloric dances	4.540	4.400	4.53	4.51
Traditional crafts	4.440	4.350	4.44	4.51
Crowd	4.490	4.250	4.44	4.08
Concerts	3.750	3.590	3.93	3.88
Wintertime	4.430	4.230	4.28	4.38
Omani clothes	4.230	4.140	4.19	4.41
Media coverage	4.110	3.990	4.09	4.3
Global events	3.600	3.650	3.88	4.12
Family gatherings	4.330	4.290	4.3	4.4
Fort	3.610	3.580	3.75	4.05
Traditional games	4.120	4.120	4.21	4.36
Citizenship	3.770	3.770	3.99	4.2
Muscat City	4.540	4.470	4.53	4.6
Oman Tourism	3.770	3.770	3.97	4.12

Table 4 presents the results and classification of association categories by mean for the Omani national identity. Associations related to history, heritage, customs, security, and geographical location demonstrated strong connections, uniqueness, favorability, and relevance. However, the Security and stability association in the uniqueness scale was classified as moderate. In addition, renewable association in the strength and uniqueness scales was classified as moderate as well. Moreover, Folk dance association in the strength, uniqueness, and relevance scales was classified as moderate as well.

Table 4

*Classification of Omani National Identity Associations by Strength, Uniqueness, Relevance, and Favorability*

Associations	Mean (Strength)	Mean (Uniqueness)	Mean (Relevance)	Mean (Favourability)
Traditional Clothing	5.610	5.790	5.750	5.710
Traditional food	5.340	5.330	5.370	5.460
Historical Glory	5.460	5.320	5.490	5.600
Islamic moral	5.510	5.540	5.600	5.620
Two swords and a Dagger	5.620	5.660	5.640	5.680
Sea ships	5.640	5.580	5.560	5.650
National flag	5.800	5.450	5.730	5.770
Citizenship	5.460	5.450	5.550	5.590
Castles and forts	5.510	5.560	5.550	5.640
Cultural diversity	5.370	5.320	5.450	5.510
Security and stability	5.390	<b>4.850</b>	5.460	5.560
Traditional crafts	5.330	5.400	5.490	5.560
Renewable	<b>4.960</b>	<b>4.930</b>	5.180	5.310
Sultan Qaboos	5.750	5.820	5.750	5.800
Harmonious society	5.240	5.370	5.400	5.520
Aflaj	5.100	5.120	5.150	5.360
Hospitality	5.360	5.370	5.400	5.520
natural geography	5.500	5.560	5.560	5.630
Diversity of dialects	5.230	5.240	5.380	5.470
Folk dances	<b>4.860</b>	<b>4.850</b>	<b>4.990</b>	5.080
Hard-working	5.020	5.050	5.210	5.350
Cultural diversity	5.370	5.320	5.450	5.510

*The Similarities in Brand Associations between Muscat Festival's Brand Image and the Sultanate Of Oman National Identity*

Based on the results of this study, six associations between the Muscat Festival and the Sultanate of Oman emerged: citizenship, forts, traditional crafts, national folk dances, traditional clothes, and traditional foods, as illustrated in Figure 4 . The score suggests that these six brand associations align closely with the heritage and citizenship areas of the Sultanate of Oman. However, no similarity was found in other associations related to security, the future, the economy, Islamic morals, and lifestyle.

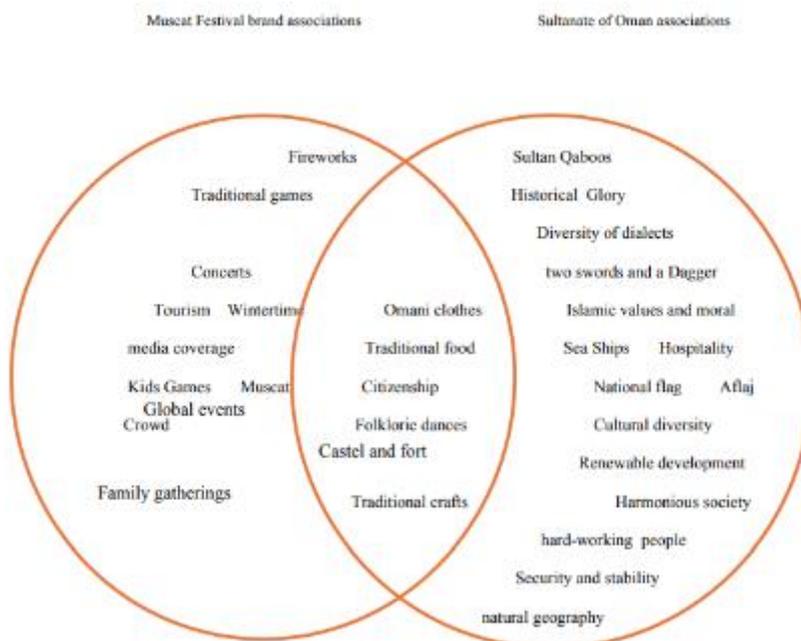


Figure 4 Brand associations similarities between Muscat Festival and the Sultanate of Oman

*Muscat Festival Brand Concept Map*

The analysis of the Muscat Festival reveals a consistent trend across various themes and attractions, where each component gravitates towards an intermediate tier of visitor perception, indicated by average ratings. Metrics such as strength, relevance, and favorability are typically rated within a moderate range (3.1 to 5.1), with scores above 5.2 suggesting high levels and around 3.0 indicating low levels of appreciation.

These scores reflect a balanced visitor perception, neither reaching notable highs nor dropping to discouraging lows, resulting in a harmonized viewpoint across the themes and attractions analyzed. Each brand association is represented with specific visual attributes. The strength of each association is depicted by the thickness of the line between the association and the brand node, while favorable associations are shown by the color of the circle. Associations closer to the brand are unique, those at a medium distance have moderate uniqueness, and those farther away are less unique. The size of each circle indicates the relevance of the association. See Figure 5 for the full conceptual map of the Muscat Festival.

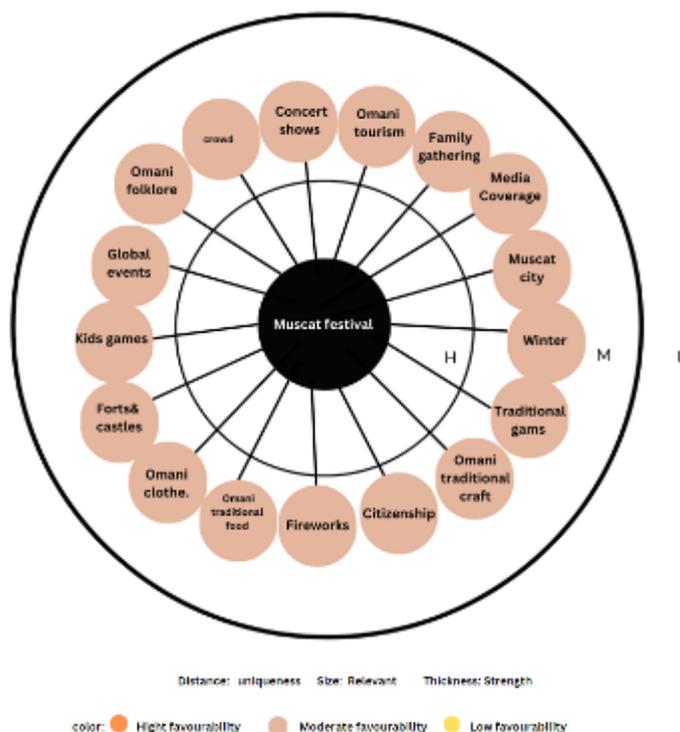


Figure 5 Brand concept map of the Muscat Festival

*Oman National Identity Brand Concept Map*

The analysis of brand associations for the Omani national identity, based on the metrics of strength, uniqueness, relevance, and favorability, reveals several key insights. The "National flag" emerges as the strongest association with a mean strength score of 5.800, while "Folk dances" are the weakest with a score of 4.860. In terms of uniqueness, "Sultan Qaboos" is the most distinctive association, scoring 5.820, whereas both "Folk dances" and "Security and stability" are the least unique, each scoring 4.850. Regarding relevance, "Sultan Qaboos" again leads with a high score of 5.750, whereas "Folk dances" are deemed the least relevant with a score of 4.990. Favorability is highest for "Sultan Qaboos" at 5.800, underscoring his positive association with the national identity, while "Folk dances" score the lowest in favorability at 5.080. These findings suggest that while "Sultan Qaboos" and the "National flag" hold significant and favorable associations with the Omani national identity, "Folk dances" exhibit the weakest connections across all evaluated metrics. This comprehensive evaluation highlights the varied strengths and perceptions of different cultural and national elements within Oman, providing a nuanced understanding of their roles and impacts on the national identity. See figure 6.



Figure 6 Brand concept map of the Omani National Identity

## Discussion

### *Association of the Brand Image of Muscat Festival*

This section delves into Research Objective 1, which explores brand associations linked to Muscat Festival. Overall, the analysis of these associations suggests that the Muscat Festival brand is associated with a celebration of local culture, community engagement, entertainment diversity, and tourism promotion, creating a dynamic and inclusive event that appeals to a wide range of audiences. This reflects visitors' affinity with the festival and constitutes an important factor in enhancing the experience of visiting the festival, consistent with the results of the study conducted by Chang & Hsieh (2017).

Based on the mean scores for each association, the averages of 5.2 and above are classified as high, below 3.0 are classified as low, and 3.1 - 5.1 are classified as moderate., the results of this study revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in evaluating the brand associations of Muscat Festival in terms of strength, uniqueness, favorability, and relevance, as all the associations that were identified fall within the medium level. This is what calls on the organizers of Muscat Festival to rethink the various needs of the festival and to adjust the content and uniqueness of the festival, based on Chang & Hsieh (2017).

### *Association of Oman's National Identity*

This section delves into Research Objective 2, which explores brand associations linked to the Oman national identity. Overall, analysis of the associations suggests Omani national identity, encompasses historical, cultural, social, and environmental dimensions that shape the country's collective identity and pride. This is what (Liu & Turner, 2018) confirm in their study

that national identity includes a broad and multifaceted concept of historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, beliefs, and national sovereignty.

Based on the mean scores for each association, the averages of 5.2 and above are classified as high, below 3.0 are classified as low, and 3.1 - 5.1 are classified as moderate., the results of this study revealed the same difference in statistical significance in evaluating the connections to the Omani national identity in terms of strength, uniqueness, favorability, and relevance, as the connections related to history, heritage, and customs, as well as those related to security and geographical location, were of strong connection, uniqueness, Favorability, and Relevance. This result is similar to the result reached by Inovasi Penelitian et al., (2021), national identity can appear through various symbols such as the national language, the state flag, the national anthem, the national emblem, the state emblem, the basic security, the constitution, the form of the unitary state, or the regional culture that has been adopted as the national culture.

On the other hand, the research results did not find other associations related to national identity, such as the future, language, and lifestyle, which are results found in his research (Holtug & Uslaner, 2021).

#### *The Connection between Muscat Festival's brand Image and Oman's National Identity*

The findings of this study reveal that the Muscat Festival's brand image is closely associated with six key elements of Omani national identity: citizenship, forts, traditional crafts, national folk dances, traditional clothes, and traditional foods. These associations highlight the festival's role in reinforcing cultural heritage and fostering a sense of citizenship among attendees. However, the absence of associations with other critical components of national identity, such as security, the future, the economy, Islamic morals, and modern lifestyle, suggests that the festival may not be fully capitalizing on its potential to represent a more comprehensive vision of Omani identity.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while the Muscat Festival effectively promotes certain aspects of Omani heritage, its limited engagement with modern identity markers represents a significant area for improvement. This study highlights the importance of cultural festivals in not only preserving the past but also in shaping the present and future identity of a nation. The festival's potential to serve as a platform for exploring the impact of globalization on Omani culture is significant, but this requires a broader approach that includes both traditional and modern identity markers. Future research could explore specific strategies that the Muscat Festival could adopt to better integrate these elements, ensuring that it remains a relevant and dynamic expression of Omani.

#### **Theoretical and Contextual Contribution**

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on event branding and national identity by demonstrating how brand concept mapping (BCM) can be applied to cultural festivals to reveal the interplay between public perception and national identity. Theoretically, it advances understanding of the festival branding process by linking cognitive associations with cultural and national values, offering a nuanced perspective on how festivals function as instruments of identity representation. Contextually, the research provides

empirical evidence from Oman—a setting that has been underrepresented in studies of festival branding—thereby highlighting the Muscat Festival’s unique role in promoting Omani national identity. By uncovering the associations that citizens hold between the festival and national identity, the study informs policymakers, cultural managers, and festival organizers about how to strengthen the festival’s cultural resonance and its contribution to nation-building. Furthermore, the findings can guide future research on the use of cultural events as tools for sustaining local heritage, fostering national pride, and navigating the challenges of globalization in the context of small but culturally rich nations like Oman.

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