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How does brand loyalty interact with tourism destination? Exploring the effect of brand loyalty on place attachment

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ABSTRACT

The research examines to what extent emotional place attachment is impacted by people's feelings towards international companies associated with the place, and what mechanism and conditions drive such effects. The research draws on the feelings-as-information perspective and empirically tests the relationships in three international multi-method studies. The results demonstrate that brand loyalty plays a key role in place affective image and emotional place attachment. The study theorizes and empirically shows the importance of affect, authenticity, and cultural distance in such relationships. Critically, it enriches understanding of brand–place relationships and identify key boundary conditions. Tourism marketers need to appropriately manage perceptions of local brands' authenticity and consider cultural distance when designing destination campaigns in their efforts to strengthen place attachment.

Introduction

Tourism marketers face the challenge of increasingly limited financial resources and intensifying rivalry from various destinations across the globe, due to recent technological, demographic, economic, and social changes (Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016; Mariani & Giorgio, 2017; McGehee & Santos, 2005). For example, differentiating destinations according to traditional 'hard' factors (e.g., infrastructure, economy, accessibility, availability of financial incentives) has become more difficult (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011). As a result, destination branding and building an emotional relationship with a place have become vital competitive tools for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (Marzano & Scott, 2009). Given the intensification of destination branding practices (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi, & Mostaghel, 2017), a critical question arises: because it is easier for people to interact with product brands originating from a specific destination (e.g., buying a product from an Italian company) than with the destination directly (e.g., visiting Italy) in their daily life, to what extent are their relationships with the place influenced by those with the brands originating from that destination? For example, when people are passionate about WeChat or BYD, will they have a more favourable image of China? When people think positively about Google or Instagram, do they feel more closely connected with northern California? The answers to these questions can provide valuable insights for tourism marketers and DMOs aiming to understand tourists' relationships with places to design effective destination marketing strategies.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Extant tourism literature offers some insights into how tourists develop place image and attachment (e.g., Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008), but most works focus on the components and situational determinant factors. Therefore, scant research examines how people's relationship with a company brand interacts

with its associated place. The international marketing literature offers some insights into how places and companies may be inter-connected (e.g., country-of-origin works such as Lee, Lockshin, & Greenacre, 2016); however, the focus is typically on company branding rather than the place. Therefore, a lack of clarity remains regarding how and when people's evaluations of and relationships with places are influenced by the places' associated company brands.

Some studies focus on people's cognitive information processing, including destination beliefs (Lee & Lockshin, 2012) and cognitive place image (Gotsi, Lopez, & Andriopoulos, 2011; Magnusson, Krishnan, Westjohn, & Zdravkovic, 2014). However, these studies do not acknowledge the affective perspective. For example, consumers may love Paris simply because they love Chanel; a cognitive evaluation such as 'Paris produces good handbags' may not be necessary. The literature has indeed established the importance of both cognitive (i.e., beliefs and knowledge) and affective (i.e., emotions) components in understanding place image formation (Qu et al., 2011). Yet these studies largely ignore the actual process underlying the brand–place relationship from an affective perspective. Therefore, distinguishing the affective and cognitive effects in practice could provide valuable direction for destination marketers on which promotional elements to emphasize depending on the desired effect.

Moreover, extant research primarily examines the aforementioned relationships at an evaluation level such as attitudes and beliefs (Lee & Lockshin, 2012), though the relational level (e.g., place attachment) is a better indicator of consumer–brand relationships (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010) and people–place relationships (Morgan, 2010). Therefore, this research examines brand–place relationships and the underlying process using relational variables. It contributes to the place attachment literature by identifying company-related factors, rather than the more commonly used place-related factors, as key determinants of place attachment.

Furthermore, the conditions under which company brands might influence place perceptions remain unclear. Kleppe, Iversen, and Stensaker (2002) and Gotsi et al. (2011) provide some initial direction, suggesting the likelihood of a brand to a country image transfer is higher, when a given brand is well-known and closely tied to the country. However, more empirical work is necessary to identify boundary conditions. The current research, therefore, examines whether such effects are moderated by key characteristics of brand–place associations, such as authenticity (Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017). Moreover, we investigate cultural distance as another boundary condition. Given the increasing importance of subcultural differences within nations, scholars have proposed that place should be conceptualized at the regional level rather than exclusively at the larger (political) country level (Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Bergeron, 2003). Therefore, the current research investigates people's relationships with companies and the subsequent effects on companies' relationships with their associated places in general rather than countries per se.

Overall, we aim to examine whether and how company brand loyalty can influence people's attachment to the place with which the brand is associated and to identify the key boundary conditions of that effect. The combined findings from a laboratory study, a field study, and an online review study show that people with an elevated sense of brand loyalty are more likely to use their favourable affect towards the brand to anticipate an affective image of the associated place (Study 1) and develop an emotional attachment to the place (Study 2). Such an effect only occurs when the brand is perceived to be authentic (Study 1) and is stronger for more culturally distant tourists (Study 2). It is also reflected in behavioural data by online reviews, in which reviews mentioning a company brand tend to rate the place more positively (Study 3).

Literature review and hypotheses development

Places as umbrella brands

Destination branding began drawing attention during the late 1990s and, since then, has become a key theme for tourism destinations. Most studies focus on measuring the effectiveness of customer-based destination brand equity (CBDBE) (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Others focus on identifying determinants of CBDBE from three main perspectives: tourists' travel-related factors, such as destination experience (Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2014) and consumption social visibility (Josiassen, Lukas, Whitwell, & Assaf, 2013); DMOs' branding-related factors, such as DMOs' cooperation (Mariani & Giorgio, 2017) or power (Marzano & Scott, 2009); and resident-related factors, such as tourist–resident interaction and congruity between tourists' self-concept and destination image (for a review of representative destination branding works, see Supplementary materials). Tourists' perspectives have received the most attention, but little is known about any potential determinant that is not directly related to the travel itself, such as company brands.

Applying the branding concept from the marketing literature, a place can be viewed as an umbrella brand (Crockett & Wood, 1999; D'Angella & Go, 2009) containing various material (e.g., historical sites) and nonmaterial (e.g., culture, history) elements that represent it (Lee & Lockshin, 2012). Therefore, if a company is strongly associated with a place, the company brand could be included under that place's umbrella brand. Following brand image logic (Keller, 1993), a place, as an umbrella of associations, influences consumers' evaluations of associated companies as part of that umbrella (e.g., the spillover effect from umbrella brands to child brands in the brand extension context). Researchers commonly use an associative model of memory to explain the existence of the spillover effects, in which knowledge of a brand is viewed as a network of nodes (i.e., concepts) connected by links (i.e., associations). When one concept (e.g., a child brand) is activated, other associated concepts (e.g., the umbrella brand) may be retrieved from memory as well by spreading activation. The analogy thus suggests that place as an umbrella brand is activated by spreading activation from a company (e.g., a brand falling under the umbrella) as an associated concept. Along these lines, Magnusson et al. (2014) identify a negative reciprocal spillover effect of brand transgression on country image.

However, most empirical studies focus on the aforementioned cognitive elements in the phenomenon (Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Lopez, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2011; Magnusson et al., 2014), and thus the potential explanation from an affective perspective

remains unexplored. As literature has established the importance of both cognitive and affective evaluations in place branding (Cai, 2002), the current research aims to examine the place umbrella from an affective perspective.

Affect in place branding and feelings-as-information

Places are rich in terms of experiential and affective attributes, and the role of affective response is even greater (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Some studies aim to shed light on the role of affect in the context of tourism, focussing on overall satisfaction (De Rojas & Camarero, 2008), behavioural intentions (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005), decisions to purchase tourism and leisure services (Kwortnik & Ross, 2007), and emotions as a segmentation variable for leisure and tourism services (Bigné & Andreu, 2004). Others examine the affective aspect of variables such as place experience and place image (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Although the tourism literature has examined place image extensively (Beerli & Martin, 2004) and clearly distinguished between its cognitive and affective aspects (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008), the affective component of place image remains at the infant stage in research on the interaction between places and company brands.

The feelings-as-information concept (Schwarz & Clore, 1996), which suggests that feelings convey large amounts of relevant information, can be employed to examine the role of affect. People view pleasant feelings as evidence of liking, satisfaction, and happiness and unpleasant feelings as evidence of disliking, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness (Schwarz & Clore, 1996). When people make decisions, they therefore employ their feelings in addition to cognitive processing as a source of information to form judgements, essentially asking themselves 'how do I feel about this?' and adopt the shortcut of 'what feels good must be good' (Schwarz, 2011).

Feelings are conceptually different from the 'colder' cognitive evaluation processes (e.g., attribute beliefs) and thus could be a better predictor of people's behaviour than cognitive evaluations (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015). They remain independent of content and decay slowly (Zajonc, 1980). Stereotyping research suggests that information from feelings is highly accessible and, thus, more readily available than cognitive beliefs. For example, when behaviour becomes habitual, it is guided less by cognitive appraisal and more by emotions (Dick & Basu, 1994). Park et al. (2010) show that emotional attachment is a stronger predictor of difficult-to-enact pro-brand behaviours than attitude strength.

Feelings can be encoded as nodes and retrieved from memory in the same way as other types of information. For example, two things could be easily linked in memory because they share the same feelings. In the current context, people retrieve positive feelings to construct an image of the associated place (i.e., affective place image) and to assess their anticipatory feelings towards it.

Affective component of brand loyalty

Recent studies have shown a strong effect of brands on places, whereby people with favourable cognitive beliefs on brands report more positive perceptions of and willingness to visit the brand's associated place (Lee et al., 2016). We extend this notion and suggest that emotional aspects such as affective brand loyalty also influence people's relationships with places. First, loyalty reflects a deeply held commitment to respond favourably towards a preferred brand consistently in the future (Oliver, 1999). When people are loyal to a brand, the brand's associations are salient and accessible to them. Second, an important aspect of loyalty is that it is emotionally rooted in and associated with a relatively 'hot' affect (Oliver, 1999). When consumers reach a higher level of loyalty, it is encoded as both cognition and affect, and the associations are integrated and emotionally coloured (Olsen, 2002). The loyalty exhibited is directed at the degree of affect (liking), and thus the affective component is readily available (Oliver, 1999).

Therefore, we expect loyalty to have a greater influence than 'colder' beliefs due to the affective component. Loyalty will result in the formation of a rich set of affect-laden memories linked to a brand. Consumers are motivated to use these emotional memories as categorization cues to allocate their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural resources towards the object and assess their anticipatory feelings of future engagement with it.

Brand loyalty can enhance tourists' feelings towards places. Taking the feeling-as-information perspective, people use existing positive affect embedded in brand loyalty as a source of information to form a positive image of the associated place. The affective aspect of loyalty indicates high accessibility of affection for brands, which in turn generates anticipated emotions. People who have positive affective brand loyalty will anticipate the experience of positive emotions of being involved with the brand and its associations (e.g., the associated place).

People also have strong motivation to use feelings to identify categories as they typically form impressions of others by employing either bottom-up (i.e., attending to their specific behaviours) or top-down (i.e., drawing on stereotypical knowledge about the categories) processing. Research suggests that people in a happy mood are more likely to adopt top-down processing (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994). For example, when making purchase decisions, happy people are more likely to rely on stereotypic brand information than sad people (Adaval, 2001). Therefore, tourists with higher affective product brand loyalty are more likely to draw stereotypic conclusions and form impressions about categories, such as a place as an umbrella brand. For example, when people have an affective loyalty with an Amarone winery, they are more likely to form a positive affective image of the Veneto region in Italy. Thus:

H₁. Affective components of brand loyalty lead to a high affective place image.

Brand authenticity

Brand authenticity refers to heritage, genuineness, sincerity, and originality of a brand (Beverland, 2005) and can be captured by measuring continuity (in terms of its connection with the past), originality (genuineness), reliability (believability and trust-worthiness), and symbolism (self-identification) (Deepak & Kim, 2018). Authenticity can generate positive feelings, such as brand love for tourists (Mody & Hanks, 2019), and can be explained by feeling-as-information reasoning, which suggests that the impact of feelings increases with their perceived relevance to the judgement (Schwarz, 2011). The extent to which people employ affective brand loyalty as information to form place image depends on brand authenticity, an indicator of the nature of the association between the brand and the place.

Accordingly, when people deem a brand as authentic, they perceive it as having a clear and special connection with the associated place and thus associate the brand with that place more easily and strongly. Therefore, people's feelings, acting as information, are more accessible in their minds, and as a result, feelings about a brand influence their affective image of the associated place.

H₂. Brand authenticity positively moderates the positive impact of affective brand loyalty on affective place image, such that the more (less) authentic the brand, the stronger (weaker) is the impact of affective loyalty on affective place image.

Place attachment

The person–place relationship has drawn extensive attention in social science and been interpreted by many concepts, including sense of place (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014), place identity and place dependence (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005), place satisfaction (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010), and place attachment (Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016). This person–place bond advanced the foundations of place attachment theory (Morgan, 2010). Conceptualized as 'an affective bond' initially, place attachment has developed into a complex concept involving 'an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions' (Kyle et al., 2005, p. 155). The current research puts place attachment at the centre of its discussions, as this concept has been widely accepted to denote the person–place relationship and particularly with an effective nature (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013). Place attachment has been examined as a multi-dimensional construct (for an overview, see Supplementary materials). However, given the confusion with regard to the number of dimensions of place attachment and the high level of inter-relationships, recent research has proposed handling place attachment as a unified construct (Ram et al., 2016), reasoning the current study follows.

Two major research streams pertaining to place attachment have developed (for an overview, see Supplementary materials). The first examines the impact of place attachment on tourists' attitudes or behaviours, such as tourists' pro-environmental behaviour (Ramkissoon et al., 2013), festival event perception (Davis, 2016), satisfaction (Brown, Smith, & Assaker, 2016), and perceived authenticity (Ram et al., 2016), and residents' attitudes or behaviours, such as empowerment (Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017), participation in destination brand-building activities (Williams & Vaske, 2003), and support for tourism (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). The second research stream examines the antecedents of place attachment; the most common ones include cognitive place image (Veasna, Wu, & Huang, 2013), involvement (Xu & Zhang, 2016), satisfaction, attractiveness, and motivation (Xu & Zhang, 2016). Work examining the influential factors of place attachment, especially regarding its relationship with company brands, remains scarce.

Place image is one of the most important influential factors in eliciting strong attachment (Bigné, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001). Veasna et al. (2013) suggest that a more favourable place image generates a stronger cognitive attachment to a given destination. We extrapolate this line of argument by expecting the same effect to occur at the affective level as well. When people anticipate (or experience) a favourable feeling, they will develop a positive affective place image, which then makes them more willing to build a strong emotional relationship with the place (Gross & Brown, 2006). Taken together with H₁, we therefore suggest that loyalty influences place attachment through affective place image:

H₃. Affective place image mediates the positive impact of affective brand loyalty on place attachment.

Cultural distance

Given the argument that how a given feeling influences people depends on its perceived informational value (Schwarz, 2011), people may not be influenced by feelings when the perceived informational value is low – for example, when people are aware that the feelings result from an unrelated source. More important, the perceived value of feelings decreases as other relevant information becomes accessible (Schwarz, 2011), such that people with high expertise are less likely to rely on their feelings (Ottati & Isbell, 1996) because familiarity facilitates their assessment of the relevance of their feelings and makes other information easily accessible.

As a result, we expect that cultural distance, a key concept in the tourism literature, plays an important role in the various relationships examined herein. Research suggests that cultural distance, commonly operationalized as perceived differences between a person's home country and a 'foreign' country, is associated with country-based diversities and dissimilarities, including linguistic differences, economic disparities, differences in political and legal systems, and geographic distances (Dow, 2000; Durand, Turkina, & Robson, 2016). Studies show it to be influential in tourists' destination choice and behaviour (Jackman, Lorde, Naitram, & Greenaway, 2020; Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007), such that people from a more different culture will be more affectively influenced than someone who is local and has less cultural distance. People who do not share the local culture may have limited access to other
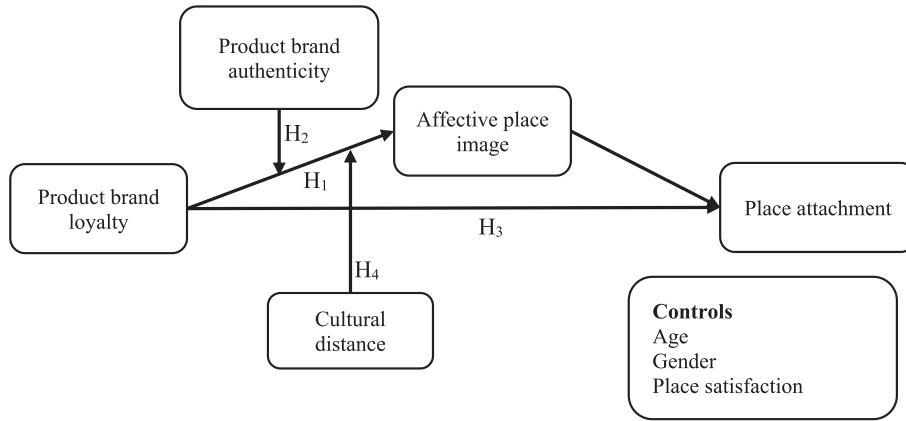
Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.
Note: We test H₁ and H₂ in Study 1 and H₃ and H₄ in Study 2.

relevant information about the place and therefore may be more likely to use feelings as key information. Conversely, people who share the local culture may be disillusioned by the curse of familiarity and knowledge of how things actually are in the place (Fazio, Herr, & Powell, 1992). Thus:

H₄. The mediating effect of affective place image on the affective brand loyalty–place image relationship is strengthened (weakened) when cultural distance is farther (closer).

Fig. 1 illustrates the conceptual framework, which includes three studies that together test the hypotheses. The importance of multi-methods approach has been strssed (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020). Study 1 uses an experimental design to empirically demonstrate the causal relationship between affective brand loyalty and affective place image (H₁) and the moderating effect of brand authenticity (H₂). Study 2 examines the relationships by using field survey data from the wine tourism context. Specifically, it (1) extends the effect of brand loyalty to emotional attachment (H₃); (2) examines the relationships in an international tourism context, thus testing the moderating role of cultural distance (H₄); and (3) uses regions rather than countries to further generalize the findings. Study 3 provides complementary evidence with actual behaviour from TripAdvisor online review data, thus responding to the call for combining big-data analyses from online reviews (a proxy for actual consumers' online behaviours) and small data from traditional surveys that mostly capture consumers' perceptions.

Study 1

Data collection

We enlisted Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) panellists to fill out a computer-based survey for small monetary compensation. Study 1 used a single factor (elevated vs. low brand loyalty) between-subjects experimental design in which respondents were randomly assigned to two groups. Between-subjects design is optimal to tease out the 'demand effect' and operationalization (Charness, Gneezy, & Kuhn, 2012). Affect-related constructs have successfully been manipulated in lab environments by adopting a scenario-based approach (see Fazio et al., 1992; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008).

Following previous studies, we primed respondents' affective component of loyalty by asking them to write down one of their favourite foreign fashion brands and name its country of origin. They then read short paragraphs about loyalty, which they were told were selected from a business magazine. Next, they wrote down an experience with the loyalty program of the brand they initially named. Depending on the priming condition, they read different paragraphs and were asked to recall different experiences. For the elevated-loyalty condition, respondents read about how companies use loyalty programs to reward customers and maintain good customer relationships and then were asked to recall an experience of being rewarded by the company's loyalty program. For the low-loyalty condition, respondents read about how companies use loyalty programs to induce repeat purchasing and then asked to recall an experience of being induced by the brand's loyalty program to make a purchase. When people realize they are induced to do something, they typically develop a negative feeling towards the inducers; this priming was thus intended to generate a weakened sense of loyalty to the company. Pre-test results of the priming task with 61 respondents on MTurk showed it was successful: the data indicated a significant difference between the two groups in the overall loyalty measure in general and the affective loyalty measure in particular (e.g., likability; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006) but no significant difference in general affect measures (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988), including sadness, tiredness, contentedness, and gloominess.

We checked the loyalty manipulation with a four-item loyalty scale (Sung & Kim, 2010). We measured affective place image using a scale from Qu et al. (2011) and authenticity with a scale from Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, and Grohmann (2015). The final effective sample comprised 165 after we removed 15 people who failed the attention check or failed to name the correct country of origin.
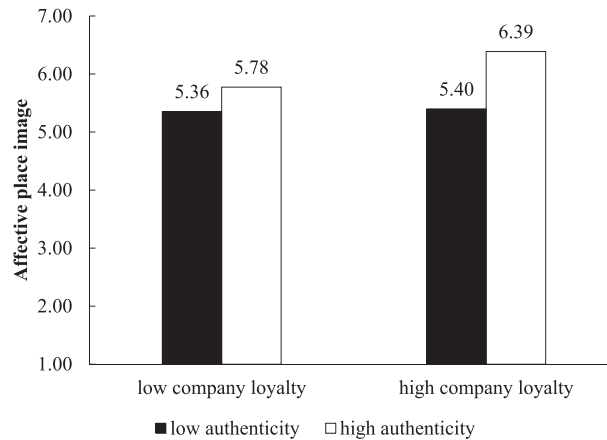
Fig. 2. Study 1: effect of loyalty and authenticity on place image.

Results

The most frequently mentioned brands included Gucci, H&M, Zara, Armani, Prada, Burberry, Uniqlo, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Versace. Manipulation check results indicated that the manipulation was successful: loyalty in the elevated-loyalty condition was significantly higher than that in the low-loyalty condition ($M_{elevated-loyalty}$ = 5.48 vs. $M_{low-loyalty}$ = 4.61; $t(163)$ = 5.10, $p < .001$).

We ran a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with brand loyalty (elevated vs. low) and authenticity (high vs. low) as between-subjects factors and place image as the dependent variable. We set loyalty to 0 (1) for the low- (elevated-) loyalty condition; we subjected authenticity to a median split, set to 0 (1) when authenticity was low (high). The results show a significant main effect of loyalty ($F(1, 165)$ = 4.17, p = .04), authenticity ($F(1, 165)$ = 27.66, p = .000), and their interaction ($F(1, 165)$ = 4.66, p = .03) on the country-of-origin image. These results provide support for H_1 and H_2. Fig. 2 shows the affective place image levels across the four conditions.

A planned comparison at a low level of authenticity between respondents in the low- versus elevated-loyalty conditions was not significant ($t(91)$ = 0.85, n.s.). However, a planned comparison at a high level of authenticity between respondents in the low- versus elevated-loyalty conditions was significant ($t(70)$ = −3.75, $p < .001$). These results further demonstrate the moderation hypothesis that company loyalty positively influences affective place image only when authenticity is high.

Study 2

Having established the causality of the hypothesized relationships between brand loyalty and affective place image, Study 2 aimed to investigate the robustness of these findings by replicating them in a tourism-related context and incorporating the effect of cultural distance. For these reasons, we considered a large-scale field study that involved actual international tourists across multiple wine regions appropriate.

Data collection

We selected wine regions and wine brands as the context for Study 2 for two reasons. First, wine is a hedonically rich product category. Wine brands (e.g., the Bordeaux or Rioja appellations) have strong ties to places, which makes them suitable for examining the relationship between a brand and an associated destination (Jiang & Lu Wang, 2006), especially from an affective perspective. Second, examining wine regions and wine yields larger variations in the dependent variables due to the diversity of destinations, brands, and visitors.

We collected data from visitors to 11 regional wine destinations in six European countries: Austria (Burgenland, Wachau Valley), France (Bordeaux, Burgundy), Hungary (Eger, Tokaj), Italy (Marche, Tuscany), Spain (Ribera del Duero, Rioja), and Switzerland (Geneva). Following instructions from trained interviewers, respondents were given a questionnaire in the language of their choice (English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, or Spanish) and asked to answer all questions to the best of their knowledge. The interviewers provided any assistance necessary to complete the questionnaire. Respondents received regional specialities as incentives for collaboration. After excluding respondents with missing data, our final sample comprised 1603 respondents (50.30% male), with an average age of 38.82 years (SD = 15.40). Such a heterogeneous sampling frame is preferable as theory-testing procedures require diverse respondent groups so that rigorous examinations can be conducted (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1982).

Measures

We adopted Orth, Limon, and Rose's (2010) three-item scale to assess brand loyalty (α = 0.76) and adapted the affective place

image scale from Qu et al. (2011) to measure people's affective component of a place image while there (α = 0.70). The wording was slightly different from that used in Study 1 to best reflect the experiential nature of the wine tourism category. We captured cultural distance as the reported distance travelled to the wine destination. Because the examined wine destinations were all in Europe, we assumed that the farther the respondents travelled, the greater was the cultural distance. Although spatial distance is not an optimal measure for assessing all the richness and nuances of culture as a whole (see Ng et al., 2007), prior research has often used it as a proxy (Shenkar, 2012). Moreover, it also allowed us to account for potential subcultures within countries. We captured the dependent variable, place attachment (i.e., people's emotional attachment to the respective places), with a three-item scale ('I feel strongly attached to [PLACE]', 'I am strongly emotionally connected to [PLACE]', and 'I do NOT feel any emotional bond towards [PLACE]'; α = 0.85). We controlled for respondents' age and gender.

Cross-cultural equivalence and common method bias

Because we collected the data cross-culturally in different languages, we needed to ensure that the measurement exhibits adequate cross-cultural equivalence (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998) to establish the generalizability of the proposed relationships. Bilingual speakers assisted in developing translation-equivalent questionnaires in the various languages (Douglas & Craig, 2007), and we assessed measurement equivalence using procedures Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) recommended.

Specifically, using the elliptical reweighted least squares approach (Sharma, Durvasula, & Dillon, 1989), we conducted a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of all items to determine whether the measures achieved configural, metric, factor, scalar, and error invariances. Apart from full error invariance, our findings reveal that the measures for each construct are invariant across the national samples (see Supplementary materials).

Because Study 2 used the same data source for both predictor and criterion variables, we then assessed the potential for common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Although the investigated model includes rather complex specifications of how variables relate to each other (e.g., mediation and interaction effects), which rules out the chances for CMB, we still controlled for it by estimating a single superordinate construct (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The model fit statistics show poor fit to the data ($\chi^2_{(54)}$ = 2953.26, p < .01; NFI = 0.66; NNFI = 0.59; CFI = 0.67; RMSEA = 0.199), suggesting that CMB did not likely influence the results.

Results

Having established reliable cross-cultural measures, we conducted a CFA to examine the reliability and validity of the multi-item scales. The results in Table 1 suggest that all the constructs possess adequate reliability scores (more than 0.70). Correlation coefficients among all constructs were well below the 0.70 threshold. Variance extracted estimates of all constructs were higher than the square of the correlation coefficient of any pair of constructs, showing good discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We performed a hierarchical regression to test the mediating effect of affective place image on the relationship between brand loyalty and place attachment. Table 2 shows the regression results. Model 1 shows that brand loyalty positively influences affective place image (B = 0.14, t = 8.19, p < .001), replicating the result from Study 1. Model 2 shows that brand loyalty positively influences place attachment (B = 0.28, t = 9.50, p < .001). Model 3 shows that including affective place image in Model 2 improves the model significantly ($\Delta F(1, 1598)$ = 5.25, p < .05). The effect of company loyalty on place attachment decreases but remains significant (B = 0.27, t = 8.86, p < .001), indicating that affective place image partially mediates the effect of brand loyalty on place attachment, in support of H$_3$.

We further tested the moderating effect of cultural distance. Table 3 shows that the effect of the interaction between cultural distance and brand loyalty on affective place image is significant. We then examined the moderated mediation through a bootstrapping procedure using PROCESS 3.4 Model 8 (Hayes, 2018). The results with a bootstrap sample of 5000 indicate that (1) place affective image partially mediates the effect of brand loyalty on place attachment (in support of H$_1$) and (2) cultural distance moderates the mediating effect of affective place image on the relationship between brand loyalty and place attachment. Specifically, when cultural distance is small (one standard deviation below the mean), affective place image mediates the effect of brand loyalty on

Table 1
Study 2: summary statistics for study constructs.

	M	SD	Correlations			
			1	2	3	4
1. Place satisfaction	5.93	0.92	.83			
2. Brand loyalty	4.98	1.32	.54	.78		
3. Place affective image	5.88	0.98	.72	.64	.74	
4. Place attachment	4.72	1.61	.46	.48	.41	.84
Composite reliability (CR)			.86	.83	.78	.88
Average variance extracted (AVE)			.68	.61	.55	.71
Maximum shared variance (MSV)			.52	.41	.52	.23

Notes: Squared root of AVE is shown in the diagonal cell. All correlations are significant at p < .01.

Table 2
Mediating effect of affective place image.

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	DV: affective place image		DV: place attachment		DV: place attachment	
	B (SE)	t	B (SE)	t	B (SE)	t
Constant	2.43 (0.15)	16.43***	0.58 (0.26)	2.21*	0.33 (0.28)	1.18
Gender	−0.12 (0.04)	−2.82**	−0.05 (0.07)	−0.68	−0.04 (0.07)	−0.52
Age	0.06 (0.02)	2.70**	0.06 (0.04)	1.38	0.05 (0.04)	1.23
Place satisfaction	0.46 (0.02)	19.17***	0.45 (0.04)	10.56***	0.40 (0.05)	8.54***
Loyalty	0.14 (0.02)	8.19***	0.28 (0.03)	9.50***	0.27 (0.03)	8.86***
Affective place image	–	–	–	–	0.10 (0.04)	2.29*
R^2	0.281		0.158		0.161	
F	$F_{(4, 1599)} = 156.00$***		$F_{(4, 1599)} = 75.22$***		$F_{(5, 1598)} = 61.38$***	
			$\Delta R^2 = 0.003$, $\Delta F_{(1, 1598)} = 5.25$*			

Notes: DV = dependent variable.
  * $p < .05$.
  ** $p < .01$.
  *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Moderating effect of cultural distance.

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	DV: affective place image		DV: place attachment	
	B (SE)	t	B (SE)	t
Constant	−0.07 (0.06)	−1.17	−0.09 (0.06)	−1.44
Independent variables				
Brand loyalty	0.18 (0.02)	7.22***	0.18 (0.03)	6.50***
Affective place image	–	–	0.07 (0.03)	2.09*
Cultural distance	−0.05 (0.02)	−2.18*	0.04 (0.02)	1.82 ($p = .07$)
Interactions				
Brand loyalty*cultural distance	0.05 (0.02)	3.41***	0.01 (0.02)	0.63
Controls				
Gender	−0.13 (0.05)	−2.92**	−0.07 (0.05)	−1.43
Age	0.07 (0.03)	2.69**	0.04 (0.03)	1.50
Place satisfaction	0.44 (0.03)	16.50***	0.21 (0.03)	6.88***
Place familiarity	−0.03 (0.02)	−1.28	0.31 (0.02)	12.96***
R^2	0.29		0.25	
F	$F_{(7, 1462)} = 86.67$***		$F_{(8, 1461)} = 76.04$***	

Note: N = 1470.
  *** $p < .001$.
  ** $p < .01$.
  * $p < .05$.

place attachment (B = 0.01, confidence interval [CI] = [0.00, 0.02]). When cultural distance is large (one standard deviation above the mean), affective place image still mediates the effect of loyalty on place attachment, but the effect is larger than that when cultural distance is small (B = 0.02, CI = [0.00, 0.04]). These results provide support for H₄.

Study 3

Recently, research (Quaglione, Crociata, Agovino, & Iaia, 2020; Radojevic, Stanisic, & Stanic, 2019; Stamolampros, Korfiatis, Kourouthanassis, & Symitsi, 2019) using Hofstede's cultural dimensions to study actual behaviour expressed by online reviews has expanded to tourism. To further enhance our confidence in the findings from a tourism perspective, we conducted Study 3 using online review data scraped from TripAdvisor that represented a sample of the major wine-producing regions.

Data

We used local wine brand names as keywords to search for reviews for each destination studied in Study 2. The data on TripAdvisor allowed us to collect reviews for five places in which visitors mentioned at least one brand. We removed destinations for which the mention rate (i.e., the number of brand-mention reviews/the number of total reviews) was less than 0.01%. To account for

Table 4

Study 3: ordinal regression of review score on Hofstede cultural difference dimensions.

	Estimate	SD	Wald	df	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Power distance	−0.018	0.017	1.079	1	0.299	−0.051	0.016
Individualism	−0.024	0.013	3.355	1	0.067	−0.049	0.002
Masculinity	**0.019**	0.010	4.198	1	**0.040**	0.001	0.038
Uncertainty avoidance	0.005	0.008	0.366	1	0.545	−0.011	0.022
Long term orientation	**−0.020**	0.009	5.000	1	**0.025**	−0.038	−0.002
Indulgence	0.009	0.018	0.274	1	0.601	−0.026	0.044

Note: Complementary Log-log was selected as the link function due to the high probability of higher category of the review rating. Significant effects are in bold.

cultural differences between the visitor's country and the destination country, we also removed reviews in which visitors did not provide their country-of-origin. This process resulted in 33,172 reviews in total for 189 destinations, 666 of which mentioned at least one local wine brand (see Supplementary materials).

Results

We used mentions of the name of a local wine brand as proxies for brand loyalty (i.e., 1 if a review mentioned wine brand, 0 otherwise). We used the destination rating score (ranging from 1 to 5) given along with the reviews to measure place attachment.

The ANOVA results show that on average, the rating scores of the destination from brand-mentioning reviews are higher than those not mentioning wine brands ($M_{reviews-with-brand-mention} = 4.81$, SD = 0.62; $M_{reviews-without-brand-mention} = 4.75$, SD = 0.67; $F(1, 33,170) = 5.08$, $p = .02$), indicating analogous findings to previous studies.

To gain more insight into the effect of cultural distance, we employed Hofstede's cultural model to capture the cultural differences between the destination country and reviewers' home country (data source: https://www.hofstede-insights.com/). Similar to Stamolampros et al. (2019), we calculated Hofstede's cultural distance between visitor's home country and destination country using Kogut and Singh's (1988) equation as shown in Eq. (1):

$$HofstedeDistance_{vd} = \frac{1}{6} \sum_{n=1}^{6} \frac{(D_{vi} - D_{di})^2}{V_i}, \tag{1}$$

where D_{vi} is the value of the *i*-th Hofstede dimension for the country of the visitor v, D_{di} is the value for the same dimension for the country of the destination d, and V_i is the variance of that dimension.

We ran an ordinal logistic regression model for the reviews with brand mentions to show the effect of cultural distance (Table 4). The model fit is good ($\Sigma^2_{(146)} = 226.60$, $p < .000$) but overall, the second-order score does not show a significant effect on review scores. However, when decomposed there is a positive effect of masculinity (B = 0.02, $p = .04$) and a negative effect of long-term orientation (B = −0.02, $p = .03$) on the review scores.

The findings indicate that tourists who are loyal to a wine brand (indicated by mentioning the brand name when writing reviews) have a more positive tourism experience when visiting the place. The results also show evidence of the role of cultural distance in our proposed relationships, but one needs to be cautious regarding Hofstede dimensions (Shaiq, Khalid, Akram, & Ali, 2011). Importantly, the study demonstrates that the Hofstede model is not perfect when examining the proposed relationship at the individual level, and regional differences are more important than country differences.

Discussion

The combined findings from the laboratory study, the field study, and the online review data study support our hypotheses. Specifically, people with an elevated (vs. weak) sense of affective brand loyalty are more likely to use their favourable affect towards the brand to anticipate an affective image of the associated place (H_1), consistent with prior works taking a cognitive perspective (e.g., Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Magnusson et al., 2014). Importantly, authenticity positively moderates this effect; the positive impact of affective brand loyalty on affective place image only occurs when the brand is perceived to be authentic (H_2). This finding complements Mody and Hanks's (2019) study on how authenticity generates positive feelings such as brand love. Study 2 replicates Study 1's main findings in a field setting. Specifically, brand loyalty positively influences people's emotional place attachment through affective place image. Notably, affective place image partially mediates the effect of loyalty on place attachment, regardless of cultural distance (H_3), but the mediating effect is significantly stronger for more culturally distant tourists (H_4). This finding aligns with prior research showing that distance influences tourists positively (Jackman et al., 2020). Study 3 further replicates the main findings with actual behaviour data (i.e., online review data). Specifically, tourists who are loyal to a wine brand (and mentioned the brand name when writing reviews) have a more positive tourism experience when visiting the place. Furthermore, drawing on Hofstede's framework, it shows that the moderating role of the cultural distance dimensions. Importantly, it indicates that focus on regional differences is as important as cross-national difference in tourism.

Theoretical contributions

This research extends understanding of the relationship between a company and its associated destination and makes several contributions to the literature. First, the findings enrich the breadth of the halo effect in tourism literature (Kim, Stepchenkova, & Yilmaz, 2019) – that is, how consumers use related images as a halo to confer other positive attributes (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). This effect has long been explained from the cognitive evaluation perspective (Lee & Lockshin, 2012); thus, our research provides an important alternative for its theoretical grounding. Specifically, it applies the feelings-as-information theory in tourism and shows that the effect of brands on places occurs not only at the cognitive level but also affectively. Consumers use feelings as information to generate an affective image, after which they use this image to form emotional connections. Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of emotions to travellers and tourism management (e.g., Ma, Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2013; Sirakaya, Petrick, & Choi, 2004) and the feelings-as-information is not new (Pham, 1998), to our knowledge only one study (Shin, Chung, Xiang, & Koo, 2019) has taken this perspective to examine tourism implications. The current study thus contributes to the destination branding literature with a focus on affect, emotions, and experience (Gross & Brown, 2006; Tsai, 2012).

Second, our research enriches knowledge on the effect of brands on destinations by identifying the nature of brand–place associations as a key boundary condition, thus building on and extending prior work in the tourism branding literature. Specifically, we show that only when a brand is perceived as authentic does brand loyalty extend to the place through affective place image. Our research complements extant tourism literature on authenticity (e.g., Cohen-Aharoni, 2017; Taylor, 2001) by offering new insights into the role of brand authenticity as a key boundary condition for the effect of brands on destinations.

Third, the findings extend existing work on cultural (Fan, Zhang, & Jenkins, 2016; Ng et al., 2007) and spatial (Kah, Lee, & Lee, 2016) distance. By employing feelings-as-information and associative network logic, we theorize and demonstrate that the proposed mechanisms connecting brand loyalty with place attachment are more prominent when tourists are from different cultural backgrounds relative to the destination. Moreover, as some studies show that subcultural differences on country have become more significant (e.g., Laroche et al., 2003), and with the increase of nationalist sentiments across the world (Economist, 2017), a regionalization trend has emerged within destination branding (Mariani et al., 2016; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Tourists may differentiate regional destinations and respond differently by using place images (Murphy et al., 2007). Our study furthers this research by obtaining evidence from subnational regions rather than countries per se, providing a more nuanced contribution.

Fourth, the current work takes a relational rather than a traditional evaluation approach, enriching the loyalty and attachment literature streams. Specifically, whereas existing studies examine cognitive concepts, including cognitive country image (Magnusson et al., 2014), company/product beliefs (Lee & Lockshin, 2012), and cognitive place attachment (Veasna et al., 2013), we capture the affective component of place attachment and brand loyalty. Although loyalty has been studied extensively, it may be more important than has previously been thought in destination marketing. Although loyalty has both cognitive and affective facets, tourism research has largely ignored the affective component. By treating affective loyalty as a strong and enduring outcome of relationships between people and brands, we contribute to the literature on loyalty by showing that brand loyalty can have additional powerful influences in a tourism management context.

Practical implications

This research holds several implications for tourism managers. First, the findings suggest an affective focus for the effect of brands on places; that is, strong brands with affective loyal customers can improve perceptions of specific destinations and regions by generating and leveraging positive feelings.

Tourism managers can benefit from a 'feeling transfer effect'; specifically, they can successfully leverage a positive affective place image from people's positive relationship with brands. Given that IKEA is a successful global retailer with millions of loyal customers, Sweden-focused travel agencies and destination marketers could benefit from leveraging the positive affective image of Sweden that IKEA has engendered or targeting specific segments with high loyalty to IKEA. Similarly, if Alibaba does well on the global stage, Chinese travel agents could benefit from the elevated affective image of China.

Using this logic, we encourage DMOs to build public–private partnerships and consider company brands when developing a long-term strategy, such as identifying strong local brands and even officially promoting these brands internationally to take advantage of halo effects. In other words, collectively promoting strong regional brands to international audiences, such as developing partnerships with them for event tourism (Mariani & Giorgio, 2017), may have short-term costs but benefit the entire region in terms of tourism revenue in the long run. Previous research has shown the importance of building partnerships or cooperation among stakeholders or DMOs (Bregoli, 2013; Hankinson, 2004; Mariani & Giorgio, 2017) in destination branding; by developing the brand in such a partnership, stakeholders can not only broaden their focus through a shared strategy but also coordinate all the messages about the destination.

Our finding that the effect occurs at an affective level implies that people do not need to learn over time that certain places will offer better deals; rather, they may develop favourable affective images more intuitively about a place simply due to their loyalty to a brand associated with that place. Thus, a key marketing activity for DMOs is to reinforce the emotional connection between the tourists and the destinations (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005).

Tourism marketers will benefit from strong brands associated with their place and region. Therefore, they should understand the role of brand loyalty, which features in the decision-making processes of tourists and place-related consumption. Furthermore, the current findings have important implications for customer education and business cluster initiatives (Bell, Auh, & Eisingerich, 2017).

When developing a place marketing campaign for Cambridge's business cluster, for example, regional or even national DMOs might proactively share critical information and 'educate' people about not only the research institutions in Cambridge but also innovative local brands and business ventures in their campaigns to trigger people's positive feelings towards the cluster. At the local government level, cultivating and regulating companies to encourage strong and authentic brands will benefit the local area and other brands originating from that same place. China might consider some of its most innovative companies to strengthen the affect people around the world have for Shenzhen as one of the most innovative cities in the world.

Another strategy would be to encourage collaboration between strong local brands so that brand loyalty can be improved and extended to the destination. A word of caution should be raised, though: this strategy is likely to cause coordination challenges in that certain brands may fear being cannibalized under the common umbrella. Indeed, DMOs would need to ensure appropriate destination brand architecture by aligning stakeholder visions, defining segments, and filling supply-demand gaps between brands from the destination (Datzira-Masip & Poluzzi, 2014). Destination-hosted meta-events (Mariani & Giorgio, 2017) may be helpful in this regard, especially in the case of wine tourism, with its multitude of brands within limited geographic regions.

The study results also show that cultural differences are important. Destination brands lack stability and are often consumed by various market (especially geographic) segments simultaneously (Gartner, 2014). Thus, it is important for DMOs to understand cultural differences. People from a distant culture are more likely to be influenced affectively by brand loyalty when developing a relationship with a destination than people from a more similar cultural background. DMOs could, therefore, use company loyalty to improve people's place attachment, especially with people from more distant cultures through targeted marketing. For example, they could employ social media to identify wider distance audiences that actively engage with certain regional brands via social media (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016; Ring, Tkaczynski, & Dolnicar, 2016). By taking cultural distance into consideration and segmenting international customers as such, DMOs can create more effective messaging.

Limitations and future research avenues

Several limitations of this study provide future research opportunities. First, our research proposes that affective components are vital in the inter-relationship between a brand and its associated place. However, considering both cognitive and affective components of place image is important in building a more comprehensive brand–place model (Qu et al., 2011). Additional research comparing cognitive and affective mechanisms could shed more light.

Second, given the nature of loyalty as a consistent commitment to a preferred brand despite situational influences (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), it is impossible to completely change people's loyalty in a lab setting. Thus, our study did not specifically aim to achieve that; rather, we mitigated overall loyalty by using reading and recalling. Future work might use different stimuli to manipulate loyalty. Third, we adopted a between-subjects design to avoid potential confound. As a result, we traded off statistical power and the number of variants we could test in the experimental study. An additional within-subject experiment could complement our work.

Fourth, we treated authenticity as a unidimensional construct in the field study, due to the length of the questionnaire. Fifth, we conceptualized cultural distance using the proxy of spatial distance in Study 2. Although we established that this proxy reflects an overall assessment of cultural distance, further investigation into the complexity of cultural distance is important (Berry, Guillén, & Zhou, 2010), and multiple measures could be adopted in future studies to uncover the roles of various cultural aspects. Finally, using Hofstede's frameworks in Study 3 to reflect the cultural distance, we observed differences in the six dimensions. Future studies could delve further into these differences.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102879.

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