

**With or without you:
How place brand can contribute to intangible cultural heritage preservation**

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Abstract

Place branding creates favorable associations with a location, such as a city or region, to distinguish it from competing places. Place brands are multifaceted, encompassing elements like natural resources, history, architecture, demographic characteristics, and intangible attributes. Intangible cultural heritage, which includes traditions, skills, and expressions, is a critical element in differentiating place brands. However, it is fragile and needs ongoing community engagement for its preservation.

Locations with lower brand awareness, such as remote towns often near more touristic destinations, frequently depend on their intangible cultural heritage to attract tourists. Reinforcing place brand associations related to intangible cultural heritage can boost place branding and shift tourist attention from major cities to less frequented areas, benefiting local economies and safeguarding cultural heritage. This on-going study explores communication strategies to enhance place branding in lesser-known destinations by leveraging communication framing to influence tourist intentions to visit them. This project aims to sustain cultural heritage over time and redirect tourist flows to significant yet less visited destinations, thereby enhancing the power of their place brand and their cultural and economic growth via responsible tourism.

Keywords: Place brand; Remote Tourism; Awareness of consequences; Intangible Cultural Heritage

3. Context and aim of the research

Place branding aims at triggering positive associations with a place, like a region or a city, and at differentiating it from other competing places (Swain et al., 2023). Place brands are multidimensional complex constructs (Hanna & Rowley, 2011), embedding several variables such as natural resources, history, architecture, demographic features, and intangible (experiential) attributes (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). Particularly, intangible attributes represent relevant elements that differentiate places such as cities (Qiu, 2023). Literature on place branding and tourism has qualified intangible attributes of place brands as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH; Cai, 2002), defined as traditions, skills, and expressions considered part of the cultural heritage of a community, including knowledge and practices concerning nature (UNESCO, 2003). Although ICH is an important attribute that differentiates place brands, it is fragile as it needs constant practice from the community to be transmitted to future generations, thus its survival can be threatened (Tan et al., 2018). Cultural traditions might disappear in the future if local communities find no interest in them. For example, in the Dolomites (Italy) there

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is an important cultural tradition called the "discesa dagli alpeggi" (descent from the mountain pasture), which is related to the traditional mountain production of cheese. The descent is celebrated with popular festivities in many Dolomitic places. However, generational turnover is becoming challenging for shepherds, thus endangering the viability of traditional cheese production.

Because younger local communities may struggle to preserve their customs, places whose identities are strongly connected to these traditions are at risk. Such traditions are fragile, and if they disappear soon, the brand identity of these places will suffer, as will their economies.

Previous literature has highlighted the attractiveness of ICH for destinations because tourists are interested in a deep understanding of the destination's culture, the traditional lifestyle of the local population, their history and identity (Chen, 2022). ICH is particularly important as a vehicle for sustainable tourism development in remote areas, which are repositories for traditional practices and customs (Katelieva & Muhar, 2022). Understanding how to reinforce the brand associations related to ICH of these place brands is of crucial importance to maximize the benefits of tourism by redirecting touristic flows from main touristic areas towards other relevant places (UNWTO, 2022). This paper addresses this issue focusing on how to foster place branding in less visited destinations to engage tourists to visit them.

We assume that communication framing influences the intention to visit the destination.

2. Methodology

We will adopt an experimental design research developed through two experimental studies to test the effect of communication framing on place brand evaluations and intentions.

3. Preliminary findings and expected results

Study 1 is a single factor between subjects experimental design to assess the main effect of communication framing on the intention to visit the destination. One-hundred and fifty participants participated to the Study recruited on Prolific Academic. A one-way ANOVA was performed, which revealed a positive effect of the gain-framed communication on the intention to visit the destination.

The data collection for Study 2 is still on-going.

4. Conclusions and implications

This research will contribute to previous research on place branding (Swain et al., 2023) through the analysis of mechanisms that increase positive behaviors towards less visited destinations. We will explain the mechanism that improves place brand intentions. This study will provide DMOs with information on how to promote less visited destinations effectively (Sajid et al., 2024).

References available upon request