

Introducing bi-directional participatory place branding: a theoretical model with multi-stakeholder perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – A place brand is a culmination of its exclusive history, people and traditions that affect customer and community experiences. Place branding has become increasingly important for collective heritage brand strategy, as stakeholders undertake efforts to create an aura of a distinctive geographic location. Though place branding has received considerable scholarly attention, there is a lacuna: the role of residents as co-creators of a place and its heritage. Accordingly, this paper aims to develop a “bi-directional participatory place branding” model by applying the stimulus–organism–response approach grounded theory.

Design/methodology/approach – A grounded theory approach with multi-sited ethnography, personal interviews (with residents and city leaders) and observational techniques were adopted in a UNESCO world heritage city of India, Ahmedabad.

Findings – The findings indicate that the people (residents) aspect of place branding is associated with their life stories, past experiences, feelings and aspirations. However, the place acts as a nostalgia enabler, disseminating symbolic and heritage metaphors to residents and visitors as place brand ambassadors. When the place and people components are perceived positively, residents participate involve themselves with the place and thus, in turn, become the place ambassadors.

Originality/value – No prior studies have analyzed the association between residents, the place where they reside and the resultant behavior toward the place. The unique contribution is the bi-directional participatory place branding model, especially involving a UNESCO world heritage city rather than solely a site.

Keywords Heritage, Place branding, Life stories, People experience, Place experience, Brand heritage, Place experience

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The democratization of economic development and urbanization aspects among people has led to competition across places, countries, cities and associated government investment in the last few decades (Ma *et al.*, 2019; Han *et al.*, 2019; Ma *et al.*, 2020). These efforts have led to increased visibility of place and development of branding practices that facilitate making a place unique and accessible to people. A consequence has been acute research attention in the domain of place branding (Ma *et al.*, 2019; Rebelo *et al.*, 2019). Place branding has been defined as “the current episode of place marketing development” (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008) and

is focused on effectively creating and launching strategies that help hone the place’s image (Rebelo *et al.*, 2019).

Places often strive for awareness and attention to stay competitive and achieve broader economic, political, and social objectives and become corporate and community brands (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Over the past 40 years, implementation of place branding has become markedly focused, integrated and strategically oriented, thus creating cultural meaning (Pedeliento and Kavaratzis, 2019; Ma *et al.*, 2020). This phenomenon has led to a significant rise in involvement of a place’s stakeholders: residents and visitors

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/1061-0421.htm>



Journal of Product & Brand Management
31/1 (2022) 73–95
© Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 1061-0421]
[DOI 10.1108/JPBM-05-2020-2921]

*The authors thank the editor, associate editors and blind reviewers for their invaluable suggestions and feedback.

* The present study was funded by MICA, Ahmedabad, India. We thank the institute for its generous support for the study.

Received 18 May 2020
Revised 13 October 2020
5 January 2021
12 January 2021
Accepted 20 January 2021

who have become knowledgeable, aware and willing to showcase the place that they visit or in which they reside.

Extant literature in this domain identifies two stakeholders of place branding: residents and visitors (Braun *et al.*, 2013). Though place branding aims at developing a place's image and thus benefits the residents and visitors as stakeholders, current practices often choose the economic interest of the place rather than opting for stakeholders' well-being (Rebelo *et al.*, 2019; Mehmood *et al.*, 2020). These processes overlook the needs of and fail to accept residents as an important stakeholder in co-creating the place image (Rebelo *et al.*, 2019; Horlings *et al.*, 2020). This omission thus leads us to assert that "place branding with people" is imperative and means engaging stakeholders in all approaches related to place branding and co-creating the image of the place by using their novel insights. Extant literature has limited the role of residents in the co-creation of a place brand (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Boisen *et al.*, 2018; Molinillo *et al.*, 2019). Scholars have averred, though, that residents are not passive but active partners in co-creating a place, public goods and services (Freire, 2009; Hospers, 2010; García *et al.*, 2012; Zenker and Rütter, 2014; Mišič and Podnar, 2019; Zenker *et al.*, 2019). Scholars have further called for stakeholder-based studies that acknowledges the foregoing gap and cast place branding as a participatory and inclusive process that redefines the meaning of a place (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Eugenio-Vela *et al.*, 2020; Rebelo *et al.*, 2019).

The aforementioned milieu motivated the current investigation. Specifically, we examined place branding from a UNESCO World Heritage city's perspective. This focus was important, as the heritage city chosen for the present study has a unique presence of residents living in the site, thus allowing us a macro understanding of the phenomenon through a microsite.

Our undertaking had three objectives. First, it sought enhanced understanding of how residents living in a heritage site involve themselves in the place-branding process. Thus, we explored what heritage means to site residents, how they live and experience (consume) the place and how they become representatives of the place in which they reside. This is an important dimension, as place branding efforts often fail to involve the most important stakeholder, residents, in future planning of the place in which they reside (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Rebelo *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the narrative around place branding has used a top-down approach, thus excluding the essence of the living experiences of denizens (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). Second, we essayed to comprehend the interactions across the experiential and functional aspects of place branding, thus paving the way for residents to communicate about the place and their associations. Third, this investigation centered on developing a comprehensive framework that recognizes residents as a stakeholder central to establishing the place brand. Thus, we partially address the call for undertaking stakeholder-oriented work (Zenker and Rütter, 2014; Pedeliento and Kavaratzis, 2019). The objectives guided us to make use of local individuals' experiential knowledge and determine how to engage them effectively to build sustainable and relevant place branding approaches.

Our endeavors explored factors that aid managers in attending to challenges and exploring opportunities for successful place branding. Also, extant germane work has chiefly considered developed nations, such as the UK, the USA and other European countries, as well as China (an emerging nation) (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015). Interestingly, India has not yet been the context of interest in that research, despite its being an important global power, having a burgeoning economy, and possessing abundant cultural sites and physical heritage (Gertner, 2007). Moreover, its sites have led to increased tourist awareness and footprints. The present study site – the historic city of Ahmedabad – is a UNESCO world heritage city built in the 1,500s. As then, this heritage city has had residents living in its sites; this is unique to most heritage places. Also, minimal efforts have explored the relationship between residents across communities and their involvement or role in branding a place. Furthermore, there remains an absence of an overarching framework integrating residents and the place reflecting a dynamic interactive space (Rebelo *et al.*, 2019).

The conceptual framework presented here offers a bi-directional, participatory place-branding approach that starts with a place's *people* (*residents*) – both its original and newly-arrived (*migrants*) residents. Including a place's residents early in the analysis implies that residents and their city continue to influence each other (Hudak, 2019). Our initial emphasis on a place's people has merit for two key reasons. First, during their daily lives, residents are connected with a place's intangible and tangible heritage; as such, they experience (*à la consume*), define and become representatives of the place (Kalandides *et al.*, 2013). Second, they act as critical and relevant brand ambassadors through ongoing communication about the place's branding (Kalandides, 2011), thus embedding them as a part of the place and related branding efforts. They therefore contribute to the heritage branding of the place through their living patterns – including food, cultural practices, religious harmony, decade's long rituals, their inter-generational bond with the place and emotion. Their living patterns are redolent of their being dual stakeholders.

This study makes three contributions. First, using a discovery-oriented grounded theoretical approach, we develop a model using social identity theory as its foundation. Using a grounded theory approach as the context orientation is required to develop theories from the data (Cavicchi, 2016) and the place branding research (Chan and Marafa, 2013). We embedded the data gathered from the grounded theory into a stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework to provide a cogent structure and derive study propositions.

Our conceptual framework is comprehensive, as it includes dimensions associated with the people, their place, and their relationships with others. We offer 14 sub-propositions subsumed within three main propositions concerning solely the distinct and unique dimensions specific to bi-directional participatory place branding. Second, we propose a new concept from the integrated model – "bi-directional participatory place branding." Third, we assist brand managers in developing comprehensive and bi-directional participatory place branding strategies.

2. Literature review

The literature reviewed pertained to the area and the role of residents, as well as elements of place branding and place branding *vis-à-vis* brand heritage. That work is discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

2.1 Place branding and the role of residents

Place branding can be understood as a process of developing a place's image and implementing ways to brand that place; its core intention is to enhance economic, cultural and social development (Donner and Fort, 2018). However, in light of globalization, place branding focuses on public agendas and public goods (Pasquinelli, 2010; Giovanardi *et al.*, 2013; Cleave *et al.*, 2016; Grenni *et al.*, 2020). Thus, there is not much difference in implementing place branding practices and public policies, as both of them apply to such elements as the people, their culture and heritage, and travel issues (Richards, 2017; Donner and Fort, 2018). Further, place brands are symbolic constructs that add meaning and hedonic value to the place, specifically with its cultural associations (Eshuis *et al.*, 2014). Peoples' mind-sets enhance these associations (Keller, 1993) and reflect the image of the place (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). The unique factor of a place's branding is reflected in people's stories and lives.

The role of residents as stakeholders in the place branding process has received minimal attention in the place branding literature (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Insch and Walters, 2018) *vis-à-vis* acknowledgment of their crucial role (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Insch and Stuart, 2015). Prior research subjoins different roles of residents in the entire process – as an antecedent of a place brand, as a place ambassador and representative and as voters – thus demonstrating their legitimacy in the place (Braun *et al.*, 2013). Freire (2009) established that local people are a critical part of the place branding process. Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) emphasized that resident participation and inclusion helps formation of the place brand. Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2017) found that there was a significant difference between residents' perception of place and their participation in supporting tourism activities. The present narrative in extant literature has focused on physical aspects of a place brand, primarily on logo and taglines (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). This seems parochial because the essence of a place brand cannot be solely in its logos; rather, it is co-created and has holistic meaning. Inclusivity is a requisite that encompasses the evolution of a place's brand through multiple generations, thus engendering transformations in perceptions and involvement of people and their diverse experiences.

The foregoing academic orientation has led scholars to raise a critical concern about the domain of place branding. First, most place branding literature has focused on a place as a way to spawn economic prosperity and has associated commercial meaning to it (Lichrou and Lisa, 2008; Johansson, 2012; Vanolo, 2015; Rebelo *et al.*, 2019). In so doing, it has essentially relegated the culture, traditional knowledge and history of the people and place to spectator status without possessing any active involvement in the process. Second, omitting the local fabric from the place branding process creates miscommunication and ignoring of residents from the

place brand itself (Insch and Stuart, 2015; Insch and Walters, 2018). Finally, the literature suggests that only a co-created, inclusive place brands will have potential to develop a success story (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015). These limitations have induced scholars to promulgate that, rather than centering on a commercial viewpoint, place branding should be a collective exercise with involvement from all stakeholders (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). Hence, the present study centered on a co-created place brand, encompassing all its stakeholders, especially the residents.

2.2 Elements of place branding

Place branding ensures an effective correspondence between the past, present and future for multi-generational connections (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). This alignment, in turn, translates into brand awareness and strong associations with the place. This outcome occurs primarily through individuals becoming brand ambassadors (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). Our work advances social identity theory (Turner and Tajfel, 1986). That theory is integral to understanding identity formation (including experiences and aspirations) and identity modification *vis-à-vis* the formation of a city and place's identity. This simultaneity culminates in symbolic self-completion (Gollwitzer *et al.*, 1982), which fosters comprehension of heritage place branding with people.

We note from above that place branding has to be understood in terms of history, culture, traditions and communication. Therefore, incorporating materiality, practice, institutions and representation expands the number of elements of place branding (Kalandides, 2012). *Materiality* refers to the physical artifacts necessary to place branding. *Practice* reflects the social interaction of stakeholders' *vis-à-vis* the physical artifacts. *Institutions* pertain to societal and aesthetic norms that moderate the interaction between the physical artifacts and social space of the stakeholders. *Representation* embodies depictions, symbols and signs that signify a place's physical artifacts. The preceding contextualization is integral to place branding approaches that facilitate reaching the audience. This wider spectrum fosters developing differentiation tactics in a place's brand. Such efforts enable participation of multiple stakeholders – such as residents, communities and other relevant groups – to promote place branding. In the absence of this enhanced perspective, the narrative of place branding is constricted.

This increased perspective to place branding is an inclusive, bottom-up approach. It creates a seamless process involving place branding's stakeholders (Medway and Warnaby, 2014), thus necessitating alternative kinds of clear communication – primary, secondary and tertiary. *Primary communication* comprises action-oriented messages that represent the place. *Secondary communication* refers to formal channels (e.g. advertising). *Tertiary communication* is the word of mouth a place generates (Zenker and Petersen, 2014). These three are central to maximizing stakeholders' involvement, as they facilitate the creation of effective place branding approaches (Zenker and Rütter, 2014). Our work seeks to enhance understanding of the effective form of communication that will be accepted by residents and, thereby, help brand managers in designing inclusive and relevant communication strategies. To facilitate understanding of place branding, examination of prior

research on place branding and brand heritage is requisite and therefore discussed below.

2.3 Place branding and brand heritage

Brand heritage offers a place branding advantage in terms of a distilled essence (Urde and Greysier, 2016) and multiple identities. Brand heritage is influenced by nostalgia-based communication and hence enhanced attachment to the focal brand (Merchant and Rose, 2013; Rose *et al.*, 2016). However, caution about consumers should be exercised, as there is no monolithic representation of heritage (Medway and Warnaby, 2014). Sans such caution, place branding will likely reach only a restricted audience rather than having a wider and deeper reach. The formation of a common vision that emerges from stakeholders' needs can deepen the association of the place with people (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). Nostalgia's increasing with age (Kusumi *et al.*, 2010) is one of the primary reasons to connect a place with its people (Merchant and Rose, 2013; Jain *et al.*, 2019).

The place dimensions also relate to historical references, such as text, visuals and oral communication; to historical associations with cognition; and to affective aspects and historical manifestations. Because people define the changing world, they are important for a site's heritage and places. This leads to interaction of people, places and communities which, in turn, evokes nostalgia, vicarious memories and experiences (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015). Heritage thus refers to shared meanings and shared collective memory (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015) that connect with cognition, behavior and experiences of people (Balmer, 2013), especially while studying a place.

Scholars are not consentient about the influencers of place perceptions (Mikulić *et al.*, 2016; Richards, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). The distinctive strategies thereby face a problem concerning specific and actionable commercial tactics; this phenomenon culminates in ineffective place branding (Julier, 2005). Specificity and action need to address central dilemmas inherent in place branding: lack of control of the entity (place), multiplicity of stakeholders with divergent views (Braun, 2012) and development of a positive attitude toward place branding (Aitken and Campelo, 2011).

To date, there is no consensus pertaining to the development of place brands (Richards, 2011; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2015; Pedeliento and Kavaratzis, 2019). This phenomenon is due to the complexity of the brands, as people are derived from various suggestions regarding what they are and what they do. This notion can be extended to the positive associations that people have about the place as a brand (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). These associations do not function in isolation, as they are mutually dependent and mutually activated. These brands focus on subjective, internal responses (feelings, emotions and senses) and behavior that are evoked by brand-related stimuli – specifically, branding and communication approaches (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). These influencers also create associative networks that help develop the brand; which does happen in place branding if it is connected with individuals' life stories, feelings, experiences and aspirations. Hence, to develop an enhanced and increasingly relevant picture around the concept of place branding, comprehending the elements (lived experience,

associations with the place) arising out of experiences of people, subjective standpoints and functional foundations of place branding and their exchanges is crucial. The current research effort connects these elements through an overarching framework of bi-directional participatory place branding.

Place branding efforts are an interactive approach, dependent on the interactions between various stakeholders of the place who provide the place its meaning and essence (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) posited the need to rethink the role of stakeholders and how to make them participate – and thus co-create and co-develop a place brand. Examining their associations with a heritage place brand is requisite as well. The paucity of such work demands exploration of how residents play a role and participate within their communities to develop collectively their idea of a place brand.

3. Methodology

To augment understanding and explore residents' association with a heritage place brand and their association toward the branding process, we conducted two studies and followed an inductive approach toward qualitative inquiry. The interpretive paradigm guided our investigation. An interpretative paradigm considers the lived experiences of respondents in question and describes a phenomenon – confuting the “experimentalist surge” that's debated in the literature as a lack of rigor in qualitative studies (Picciotto, 2014). We also undertook in-depth interviews with stakeholders and multi-sited ethnography. These efforts are explained in subsequent sections. We additionally adopted Straussian grounded theory approach, which facilitates analyzing social processes, with constant comparison of the data and methods (Kenny and Fourie, 2015). This method starts with open coding and axial coding and concludes with selective coding or a conditional matrix – depending on the data and study purpose.

3.1 Study 1: in-depth interviews

We used in-depth interviews to gather data and develop insights. These data aided our understanding of the phenomena from respondents' perspectives. The creation of local vantage points is possible when interviews are conducted in a naturally comfortable, relaxed manner (Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020). In-depth interviews are a means of situating the phenomenon of interest in the context of respondents' everyday lives and experiences. The interviews contained both open-ended and non-direct questions. Therefore, researcher biases should have been minimized and thus not affected respondents. Furthermore, interviewees had sufficient latitude to guide the direction of the interview to allow for maximum disclosure (Qu and Dumay, 2011). The perceptions of internal stakeholders (people residing within the same location or place) were crucial; they could be collated using in-depth interviews (O' Cass, 2001).

3.1.1 Interview process

We conducted interviews using semi-structured questions developed from germane literature. The preliminary questions enabled us to answer respondents' queries and understand their perspectives about the place. When an interviewee qualified for the study, he/she was selected as an interviewee.

The interview protocol consisted of four stages. These included key theoretical constructs derived from the review of existing literature. The first stage dealt with preliminary discussions about participants and their backgrounds, including their childhood and the former thoughts of the city. The second phase explored their associations with the city and the frequency of sharing their ideas in public domains in the city. The third phase pertained to their experiences and ideas about heritage. The last phase focused on interviewees' expectations of and grievances with the place (if any). These four stages helped foster understanding the association of people with the place.

Life stories, experiences, feelings and aspirations related to the place helped us develop the framework for bi-directional participatory place branding. To supplement interviewee insights, the researchers probed participants with questions to engender enhanced perspectives. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 min and were audio-recorded with respondents' consent. The dominant language used for the interview was English, with a little use of Hindi language, which was coded in English and re-coded to Hindi. This two-way process ensured that we had not lost the context and essence of participants' insights. The translation was done by an expert having abundant speaking and writing skill in both languages. Interviews were transcribed and coded for further analysis.

Insights from the in-depth interviews were validated after maintaining detailed descriptions, engaging in prolonged interaction with respondents, and undertaking the triangulation method, per (Dann, 1996). Because the interviews dealt solely with stakeholders of the place and the associated heritage, understanding and observing the dynamics of the heritage places were critical. We thereby conducted multi-sited ethnography to observe how people functioned and interacted in co-creating a heritage place. The places and users of the place (stakeholders or residents) served as an opportunity where both sides were part of the study.

3.1.2 The sample

We interviewed participants to obtain their associations, memories and expectations of Ahmedabad. The city of Ahmedabad is a UNESCO World Heritage site for its aspects of living heritage. Its "pol" area (housing cluster) is the only place in the world to have residents still living on the heritage site. This city also has prominent and leading corporate brands rooted in Gandhian Heritage values. Given its Gandhian values of self-reliance, sustainability and organic lifestyle, it is becoming a leader in sustainable design, food traditions, management and technology education and cultural and creative festivals attracting multinationals and tourists. Thus, its sites related to the place helped achieve the core objective of the study: developing a bi-directional participatory place branding model that includes all stakeholders with their stories, associations and experiences.

Interviewees were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling, thus satisfying the basic selection criterion that interviewees had to have resided in Ahmedabad for between 3 and 15 years. This criterion was invoked for two major reasons. First, that degree of experience likely provided interviewees with in-depth understanding of their thoughts about heritage. Even short-term residents were able to reveal whether the place

met their expectations. Second, many interviewees held a sense of pride about Ahmedabad, thus assuring us that they could become its advocates. Their strong opinions were reflected when they discussed places and regions in domestic and international areas with their friends, families, colleagues and other reference groups. These individuals also were active digital natives, frequently sharing their perceptions about Ahmedabad via digital platforms.

Study 1 had 34 respondents. The sample consisted of short-term (3 to 5 years) residents and long-term (5 to 15 years or more) residents. Shown in Appendix 1 (Table A1) are the details about the sample. These include demographics and their lived experiences at the place. This information helped strengthen the results.

3.2 Study 2: multi-sited ethnography

According to Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography enables researchers to comprehend the views and thoughts broadly to enhance understanding of the local subjects. We thus conducted multi-sited ethnography on heritage sites with their residents. Akdeniz (2019) has averred that a multi-sited study helps reconsider the "relationship between places, projects, and sources of knowledge." Moreover, Akdeniz (2019) has argued that multi-sited ethnography "opens up spaces that may otherwise be invisible from the single site."

When undertaking ethnographic research, the objective is initially defined. For this study, the mode selected was to "follow the metaphor." This mode entails focusing on signs, symbols or symbolic meaning of the specific topic at hand. Finally, this metaphor helps trace the process through multiple spaces, thus revealing layers of meaning that are not readily detectable (Lauring and Klitmøller, 2015). Because place brand, along with a heritage element, is nuanced, the metaphor approach helped us examine the data for not so obvious findings. Metaphors here ranged from symbolic representations on the monuments (such as the tree of life) to housing style (houses in the pool area). Interestingly, the metaphor also served as the materiality aspect of the elements of place branding.

This study thus provided links between the people and their orientation toward symbolic and hedonic meanings associated with the place. The objective of the second study was to understand the linkages and associations of the people with the place (Ahmedabad here). How heritage and the place were consumed each day requires understanding the signs, symbols, and rituals. Interviews enhanced understanding of individuals' orientation about the place but did not afford discernment about people's symbolic and hedonic associations with the place. Multi-sited ethnography, however, reveals these linkages. For instance, to comprehend the heritage dynamics of the sites, different social interconnections under the heritage sites were studied by taking photographs of such symbols, interviewing the people at the site and using structured observation (an observation which is conducted with predetermined objectives and protocols). The place, people, metaphors and objects collectively enabled us to uncover the "dynamics that affect the social interactions within and across the social entities" (Hannerz, 2003, pp. 201–216). Insights from the multi-sited ethnography were compared to those derived from the interviews – which embodied triangulation

(Dann, 1996) – thereby augmenting the depth in individuals’ insights, as well as their orientation toward the place.

3.2.1 Study sites

The sites for the study were identified after recording the major attractions of the city, per the city municipal corporation (AMC, 2016). Nevertheless, the nature of the study enabled us to keep adding sites using respondents’ insights. The locations also included the religious and cultural confluence of multiple sects. In addition, the sites possessed architectural significance and connections to the Indian independence movement. Outlined in Appendix 2 (Table A2) is the significance of each site.

Two criteria were imposed when selecting a site. One was the recognition that was bestowed on the site by either the municipal corporation or any other local authority. The second was the site’s association with history. We ultimately were engaged in 18 heritage sites. All sites had two antipodal distinctive features: the site was either a famous or an unheard-of place and a place with either a higher or lower number of visitors. We visited each site three times for between three and five hours in the early morning or late evening when the number of visitors was high (primarily over weekends and festivals). We interviewed caretakers and their family members living at the sites. They narrated the stories about the sites across different generations. Generational stories arose because the caretaker and his family were in different generations. Such lived experiences enhanced our understanding individuals’ associations with a place across generations.

Moreover, the researchers engaged in participatory observation (i.e. participants actively engaged with the researcher). We interacted with these individuals at the sites to generate enhanced insights. While conducting such observations, the researchers maintained a balance between the insider-outsider roles (understanding the research from the core area and managing outsiders’ views; (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

By engaging in observations, we were able to remain objective by maintaining sufficient involvement with participants (Kawulich, 2005). Finally, we undertook heritage walks along with the site’s heritage jurisdiction and among its unique architectural works. We recorded the observations through photographs, field notes and reflexive journals (i.e. recording the critical and analytical thinking of the researcher about progress made during the fieldwork) for each site (Kawulich, 2005).

3.2.2 Coding

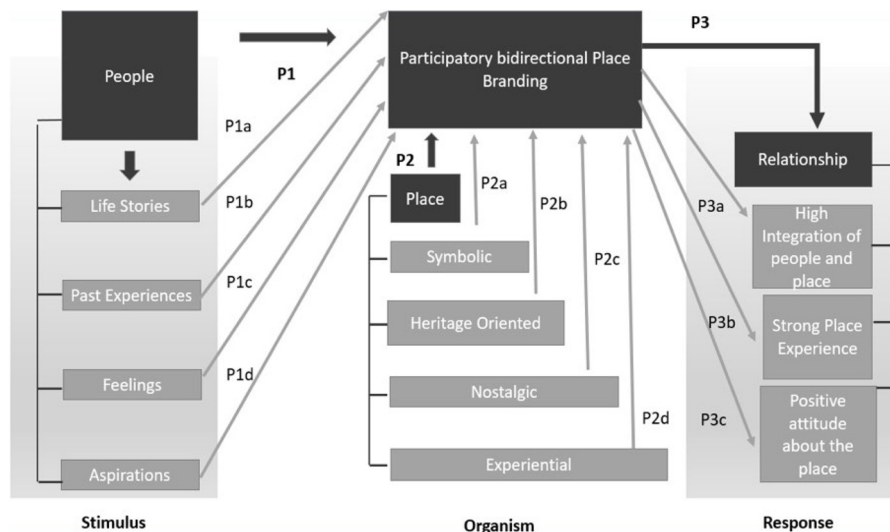
Two independent researchers coded the data manually to analyze the data at three levels: open, axial and selective (Moghaddam, 2006). Open coding provided an analysis of text and concepts. Axial coding was done by integrating the initial results of the coders. Subsequently, detailed discussions led to development of a codebook and an initial framework to help with the coding process. These discussions assisted in identifying the relations between the concepts and categories. The categories were driven by the earlier theories mentioned in the literature. Selective coding helped unravel the themes and identify the basic storyline. The themes were compared with extant literature and refined further to provide unique insights from the present study. Finally, two independent judges verified the reliability of the coding process. The process was conducted with the random transcripts comprising the sample. The judgments of the experts were discussed and ensured that the coding process had been engaged in with circumspection and rigor. Based on the research objectives, the coding and framework were developed.

4. Theoretical model

4.1 Stimulus–organism–response framework

The qualitative analysis led to development of the dimensions of the bi-directional participatory place branding (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Proposed model



Source: Authors’ developed model

Using SOR as the overarching framework, we examined the dimensions related to people, place and their relationships. The SOR framework is a neo-behavioristic approach that reveals how an individual's internal cognitions (O) are affected by the environmental stimuli (S), which, in turn, lead to his/her behavioral response (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The framework has been widely used in social science disciplines, chiefly due to its consideration of emotional, affective and cognitive aspects of a specific behavior.

The organism considers the emotional and cognitive elements that come into play in between the linkage of the stimulus and the response. Responses can be actions or decisions by individuals. Adopting the S-O-R paradigm led to our uncovering the innate nature of people and their relationships with the places they experience (consume). Moreover, inclusion of cognitive as well affective states in the S-O-R model ensured that the current work met its objective of capturing and depicting the different influencers on an individual and subsequent relationships, with the place addressing a range of attributes – including attitudes, dispositions, emotional states, experiences and senses. From the concatenation generated from the data and resultant insights gleaned by using the SOR framework, the key categories of people, place and their relationship were derived (Figure 1). SOR has been used in place the branding domain as well, primarily to understand the human aspect (Isa *et al.*, 2020; Su *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Teller and Elms, 2012).

The present study used SOR to understand how residents (O), after being exposed to the stimuli (the heritage of the place-S), respond to and develop their association with the place (R). We considered the heritage place as the stimulus, an important predictor of residents' response to a place, and the associated branding approach. The response, however, expressed the base of their intended and expected associations with the place, which are possible contributions of residents in co-developing the place.

5. Analysis and results

The transcriptions from the in-depth interviews and the notes from the multi-sited ethnographic investigations underwent thematic analysis. This was done to ensure that the coding schemes answered the study's research questions. That analysis also enabled development of an integrated framework from the two research methods. An additive approach was also adopted, per (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2014). It focused on garnering a comprehensive understanding of beliefs and perceptions of respondents from their own lived experiences and entailed three stages – initial design, in-course extension and full-frame development (Singh, 2015). The *initial design* smooths the recurrent flow of deductive and abductive logic. Deductive logic develops from earlier knowledge and abductive logic is the combination of new insights along with the earlier theoretical understandings. Then, *in-course extension* extends the use of them by integrating the study's theoretical frameworks based on logic. The logic is developed based on the insights drawn from the data. *Full-frame development* occurs when the analyzed data reach saturation, thus indicating the maturity of the data (Singh, 2015).

Thus, the framework was developed by using novel insights from the present research and earlier theoretical knowledge. In the present study, the researchers worked independently on the transcripts to identify the codes that resulted in the emerging themes. To reach a consensus, insights from all the researchers were compared. Moreover, in qualitative research, reliability and validity are examined to establish the trustworthiness of the data (Decrop, 1999). On-site observations, detailed descriptions, memos in the form of photographs and videos, judgment sampling and constant data comparison helped achieve the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data (Leung, 2015; Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). Also, use of triangulation of the two methods and the SOR framework enhanced the repeatability and transferability of the results (Decrop, 1999). According to Decrop (1999), who first established specific criteria for qualitative (naturalistic) research, suggested that unlike rational (quantitative) research, the qualitative paradigm requires different parameters to determine the authenticity of the data. Similar to external validity in quantitative research, they noted that “transferability” and “dependability” of qualitative data is requisite to discern that the data are credible. Transferability of a study indicates whether study findings are applicable to any other context. Dependability requires study findings to be consistent. Considering this paradigmatic stance, we argue that our results are transferable, which in itself is unique. This feature of transferability was maintained by composing in-depth descriptions – as (Decrop, 1999) have suggested to achieve external validity for qualitative studies. Because any World Heritage City still has residents living in its sites, the present work's findings can be adapted to mitigate and navigate through residents' cooperation and the place. Further, dependability was achieved by an inquiry audit (Decrop, 1999). Authors not part of our field data collection process actively checked for accuracy and synchronicity of interpretation of the data and to ascertain whether the same data received support. Hence, we trust that the present study is transferable and dependable under the interpretative paradigm.

The major themes that emerged from the above analysis pertained to how people defined heritage, the perceptions of the place as a facilitator, and the relationship residents explored with the place. Summarized in Table A2 are the sample codes and categories that further led to development of the themes. In the subsequent sections, the results are described in detail.

5.1 People and their meaning of “heritage”

The initial questions and field notes from the heritage sites provided an enhanced understanding of what heritage meant to people. Although heritage can be of a physical, natural and intangible or cultural in form, there is not one all-inclusive approach manifested in the literature. Therefore, we sought to uncover enhanced meaning of heritage from the interviewees and sites of a World Heritage city. From the in-depth interviews, heritage comprised physical, cultural and intangible dimensions that connect individuals to the place dimensions. Both short- and long-term residents had a similar understanding of heritage. They perceived heritage as a blessing and lesson from the past – from their ancestors – which reveals to them the future course of life. Although short-term residents conceived heritage more as a place's people and

possessed associations with kings from previous centuries, long-term denizens visualized heritage as a culturally lived experience. Heritage was considered a fluid bond subjoining different people from highly diversified backgrounds. India is a highly diverse country, therefore, every state in India evinces a prime example revealing marked variation in terms of people, culture, religion and the associated heritage.

Ahmedabad offers a special case where numerous kinds of trade and business migration exist, a large influx of migrating people from other states is extant, and indigenous people of Ahmedabad have remained in the city for centuries. Individuals residing in the city revealed that their idea of heritage was integrated and inclusive, especially in terms of rules and religious practices. Indeed, one interviewee said the following:

“India has a heritage in every place, but our place is different. You will see that we live together, Hindu people going to Muslim Badshah-made monuments. One Muslim person from generations has been lighting candles for the prosperity of the city to Lakshmi Mata (the Hindu Goddess for wealth, prosperity, and fortune). Where will you see this? This is what we are” (long-term resident, age 42).

Religious harmony was another aspect of heritage mentioned, which was a recurrent theme. The religious sites are used as a place to go for an extended visit during the weekend or for a brief stay after a busy day at work. Also, irrespective of religion, people meet and discuss their lives at such venues. Heritage is part of individuals’ daily life, not just memories from the past. Interviewees noted hearing stories about their history and their roots from older generations; that knowledge led to creating their ideas about the place. Stories thus passing from the older to the younger generations played a major role in people’s perceptions of heritage. Interviewees’ stories covered an array of topics, which included rituals. In short, residents’ life stories about daily experiences were regarded as their heritage. As one interviewee asserted:

“My Nani (maternal grandmother) made Undhiyu (a special winter dish made of seasonal vegetables cooked in earthen pots) very tasty. Today my mother cooks the same Undhiyu with the identical dish, still cooking it over a wood fire. I have not tasted anything like this elsewhere, not even in hotels. I think how my mother understood and remembered things from her mother is a heritage for me” (long-term resident, age 26).

Such stories of transition led individuals to regard heritage as being their life story, along with those of their ancestors. We also found that residents’ experience was with those from different generations, which was essential in forming their conception of the place. The idea of people and the heritage place associated with it is a bi-directional concept – both operate simultaneously. Residents participate in the process of branding a place from their own experiences and aspirations that become their own life stories. Both the place and people, thereby, function concurrently. To summarize, heritage is a fluid, comprehensive concept and is understood in terms of people’s life stories and experiences; it is not merely reflective of tangible and intangible dimensions (e.g. including structural and cultural aspects). The feelings, emotions and associations of those related to a place are important; they emerge from their life stories, past experiences and aspirations. Given the preceding discussion, we posit the following proposition and its attendant sub-propositions:

PI. People’s dimensions, namely, life stories, past experiences, feelings and aspirations – develop bi-directional participatory place branding.

PIa. People’s life stories develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

PIb. People’s past experiences develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

PIc. People’s feelings develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

PId. People’s aspirations develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

5.2 Place and people association

After arriving at an understanding of what heritage meant for our respondents, we focused more keenly on comprehending their life stories and people’s association with the place along with heritage. The insights revealed that the place shapes how residents and newer residents understand their heritage. Respondents differentiated their city from other places in the world in the context of culture and heritage. As one interviewee stated:

“This city is different because of its living heritage. People are still staying in heritage places; it is not dead. Nowhere in India will one find the generations of royal ages staying in the same properties that kings had built or in their capitals” (long-term resident, age 50).

While long-term denizens held an association with the place from the perspective of place image, short-term individuals regarded the image of the place. When people were new to a city, they developed ideas about the place based on suggestions from their family and friends. Moving to a city possessing a favorable positive identity helps newcomers settle into the city more easily. One interviewee noted the following:

“My father had worked in Ahmedabad already, though I am from Kolkata. My family is still in Kolkata, but I moved here and got married. Now I feel as if I know this place already; I have no issues staying here, every street is known [...] I have good local friends, and I am working at a heritage hotel now. I feel as if I am an Ahmedabadi” (short-term resident, age 26).

The constructed meaning and association with the place is also shaped over social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram). The youth of the city actively discussed their place online, displaying its exclusivity to a wide audience. The place image and its identity worked together to carve a niche for the city. In particular, the heritage city tag added the much-needed traction digitally for residents. They took pride in sharing with their social circle the activities occurring in the city. The reflective notes suggested that people mostly relied on the history of the place as a prerequisite for heritage. They expected the place to have a rich historical significance, along with the grandeur of the past.

Another factor that was repeatedly observed in the data was a focus on symbolic cues of heritage. Symbolic cues refer to aspects of material heritage that people carry in their memories or physical belongings that have been passed along through generations. The city and the community still practice centuries-old rituals, irrespective of religion. As one interviewee stated:

“Do you notice the Laxmi Mata’s (Hindu Goddess Laxmi) hands on the fort door of Bhadra? A Muslim soldier, while on duty, chased away a lady out of the fort. It was Laxmi Mata in disguise. When he realized it was the goddess of prosperity, he immediately begged her to stay back and bless the city. Laxmi Mata agreed to bless the city only if her handprints on the fort door would be worshipped by him and his lineage in the future. He gladly

accepted, and since that date, you can see his family people coming to worship the handprints. This is why nothing bad will ever happen to our city” (long-term resident, age 62)

The importance of symbolic cues was evident even in the data gathered from multi-sited ethnography. The material association and identification of heritage were revealed through specific details short-term residents received from others’ word of mouth or over social media. Whether it was the “tree of life” or the Goddess Laxmi’s hands, people identified a place from such cues and reflected a deep association of people with the place.

Another component that enhanced a place’s brand was the inclusion of stakeholders. These individuals enlivened the place, making it both distinguished and human. The newcomers to the city identified the city with its people, not with its physical spaces. Individuals and their value systems reinforced the idea of heritage. The multi-sited ethnographic study suggested that residents connected to a place after observing other residents. They would visit a place, meet other friends in heritage places, and discuss life. They expressed a sense of social categorization and social identification, consistent with social identity theory. Places were categorized based on access, irrespective of religion or the social environment. Once places were grouped, we developed sets of individuals among similar age cohorts, again irrespective of religion. However, such clusters were closely knit; any newcomer would not gain easy access to coteries. This did not prevent residents from helping or sharing their city with new residents. In short, people related to the place through their life stories. Even short-term residents, who came from different places with their cultural baggage, related to the new place based on the experiences of other people. One of the respondent’s commented as follows:

“When I had come here, I had a different expectation about the city, but then I made friends across social classes; now I feel as if this and my birth city have no differences. Specifically, these friends are like family; I have been to their home, and I feel good” (short-term resident, age 31).

“I came here for studies and had limited interaction with the locals. When I started exploring the city, through heritage walks or local meets, locals introduced me to the famous food dishes and known landmarks. I was shown the famous Lucky Tea Stall and the Husain painting there. They are helpful and open to showcase their pride associated with the heritage sites” (short-term resident, age 24).

To summarize, a place is a dominant dimension of heritage along with its symbolism that associates deeply with the people. People act as facilitators in this process by enhancing the place along with their nostalgia, heritage orientation and experiences. These elements are strengthened by the symbolic and hedonic cues of the people with the place. Thus, we formulate the following second proposition and its attendant sub-propositions:

- P2. Place dimensions, such as symbolism, heritage orientation, nostalgia and experiences, together develop the bidirectional participatory place.
- P2a. Place’s symbolic elements develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.
- P2b. Place’s heritage-oriented elements develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

- P2c. Place’s nostalgic elements develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.
- P2d. Place’s experiential elements develop strong bi-directional participatory place branding.

5.3 Peoples’ relationship with the place

We noticed residents experienced (consumed) the heritage place in different ways, as discussed above. Nevertheless, they involved themselves in the city’s events, irrespective of the duration of their tenure. They had similar enthusiasm to explore and be updated about the city events.

However, short-term residents assessed the place based on their perceptions and prior experiences. Residents connected with other individuals based on heritage. New residents had high anxiety about other people before coming to this heritage city. This anxiety decreased, though, as they developed healthy relationships with the city’s residents. This amalgamation of people and ideas created new stories about the place. These stories were engaging and the binding thread for diverse people within a city. The storytellers were long-term residents sharing the gift of ancestral history. One person proposed how these stories related to their relationship with the place, further shape newcomers’ perceptions:

“My house is 600 years old and comes under the status of a protected heritage house. I have never moved out of my house, and my next generations also should not, because they have a legacy of 600 years and more. I know about what happened at my house and who stayed in this house from my stories that my father told me, and this is what makes me. Each day I go and meet new people; I invite them home for a cup of tea. When they leave, they think this is their story. This is what stories do: they connect people. They are told to new people so that they know where they have come from” (long-term resident, age 55).

During the heritage walks, we saw glimpses of heritage stories. Stories came from history, lived experiences and continuity of cultural practices. We also noted that people and places create heritage. This idea reinforces how the place must be branded to the people in a meaningful and relevant fashion. Thus, we realized that the greater the connection residents felt with the place, the higher their level of participation.

Residents, whether short or long term, would explore the city with their close social circles and discuss the history of the place. They depended on reliable sources of information, such as caretakers of old heritage properties and the older generation who had witnessed the grandeur the city had. Ahmedabad hosts many active heritage walks, thus making the stories easily accessible to newcomers and short-term residents. Starting from food to old heritage homes, information sharing focused on seemingly every aspect of history. While conducting in-depth interviews, we observed how such walks affected individuals’ social mind-set. One respondent made the following comment:

“Every Sunday, I will go out and roam around the city [...] no specific place; I will just talk to random people and discover places that I had never heard of before. Other days of the week, I have a regular job, but I will google about the place and find and gather more information. I want to be fully aware because then I do a (heritage) walk about the recent places I find and why they deserve attention[...] I connect to so many people who are new and old but share the same level of interest as I do” (long-term resident, age 26).

In short, we determined that heritage walks help in information exchange across people. Such activities also assisted people to

develop their sense of belongingness and place experience. The walks aided people to engage physically with a place and experience it. Moreover, residents revealed that they wanted uniform and consistent brand communication. Witness the following observation:

“Ahmedabad is mainly a city known for trading activities. But Ahmedabad has a lot of cultural and historical knowledge with the offer also, but people outside still know this place as a business place. We have to let people know that we have other things than just business” (long-term resident, age 25).

We also found that residents preferred non-celebrity figures in brand communications and advertisements. Residents felt more connected with a non-celebrity, as such personalities are part of the living heritage. To conclude, people have a strong relationship with the place, which leads to strong integration, pleasurable experiences, and favorable attitudes. Thus, we formulate the following proposition and sub-propositions:

- P3.* Relationships of people and place dimensions lead to the high integration of people and place, impelling place experiences and favorable attitudes of people toward the place.
- P3a.* Bi-directional participatory place branding develops high integration of people and places.
- P3b.* Bi-directional participatory place branding develops strong place experiences.
- P3c.* Bi-directional participatory place branding develops favorable attitudes toward the place.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Our study builds on the existing S-O-R literature and provides a new theoretical framework that extends knowledge about place branding. The perspectives observed were provided through interviews and a multi-sited ethnographic study that facilitated the development of a new concept and approach bi-directional participatory place branding which integrates people, a place and their relationships very closely. (Table A3). This new concept was developed through an inductive approach: people brand the place and even the place is be branded based on people.

Predicated on our qualitative research, we arrived at unique insights encompassing people, a place and their relationships in a single framework. Accordingly, we have enriched the existing literature on place branding. Continuing the earlier research on the role of stakeholders in a place brand, the present undertaking uncovered key elements such as life stories, past experiences, feelings and aspirations that play a key role in the process of bidirectional place branding. These elements further function as stimuli within the S-O-R model.

We observed two stages of social identity theory at a place: social categorization (of people and place) and social identification, where we witnessed residents sharing a common identity that of an Amdavadi (local name for the city), who knew what their city meant and how to retain its quiddity in the future. Moreover, we did not witness a hint of any social comparison behavior in the interviews. The resident groups did not feel inferior in comparison to any other groups from a different heritage city. Instead, we found residents had pride in

their place. This was an important observation, as the focal city has been known for religious harmony and tranquility for centuries. Despite this study’s mixed generational respondents, our findings were compelling regarding residents being a stimulus.

The current research effort positions place as a vital facilitator in creating the image and perceptions of heritage among a place’s residents. Thus, we were able to portray how the place drives its branding through individuals with symbolic reminders of people manifested by tradition and practices, a heritage orientation, nostalgia and experiences as illustrated in Table A3.

The media also play a vital role in creating and popularizing a brand image and identity. As such, place is an organism with cognitive and affective components within the S-O-R model. Our in-depth discussions with city residents and ethnographic investigation addressing heritage sites of historical importance led us to uncover the dynamics of relationships between people and place – thus resulting in bi-directional participatory branding of a place. The current empiricism addresses gaps within existing theoretical literature by creating a bi-directional, participatory place-branding strategy. Furthermore, effective place “ambassadors” (people) who feel inclusive in the process of branding and with the place lead to effective branding of the place through a bi-directional participatory place branding approach.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the theory of place branding in four ways. First, the theoretical model with multiple stakeholders’ perspectives extends extant work on S-O-R and develops novel insights. This theoretical model centered on people, places and relationships. Our findings extend knowledge about place branding, where integration and collective functioning with stakeholders are imperative. Prior research has only examined the influences of heritage, longevity, values, symbols, nostalgia-based communications and similar themes and done so primality in silos (Merchant and Rose, 2013; Rose *et al.*, 2016; Pecot *et al.*, 2018). The role of individuals’ life stories garnered through their experiences has been largely ignored. This study incorporates key constructs chiefly for interactive and collective place branding. Also, brand heritage is added as a vital component featuring people and their life stories. This integration led to our comprehensive model based on life stories and experiences, which is formulated with the novel concept of bi-directional participatory place branding.

Second, our framework provides new elements and factors related to people, places and relationships. Based on our qualitative research, the key elements are place and people collectively developing the place as a brand leading to bi-directional participatory place branding, with people being the enabler of heritage and place, thus further enhancing people’s perceptions of heritage. The findings indicated that, for strong association and high acceptance, place branding should start with the people and their orientations about a place. The layers of symbolic, nostalgic, heritage and experiential place branding are associated and interconnected with people. Extant

literature to date has merely centered on functional elements of place branding such as infrastructural and visual appeal (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009) but has not related people, place and brand heritage seamlessly which this study did.

Third, the existing research focused on the place and subsequent branding while associating with people. Our qualitative research suggested that bi-directional participatory place branding is inclusive and provides increased connections of people with the place. Memorable life stories and lived and affirmative experiences about the place create voluntary brand ambassadors who can influence perceptions of other people. These new and novel ideas were ignored in earlier work.

Fourth, we identified a unique and distinct element to the brand heritage of a place. Although we found that the exchange of information across individuals with lived experiences of a place and information seekers is vital, an ideal platform to facilitate such exchange also is crucial. In the digital era where individuals claim that seemingly everything is available at the click of a button, our undertaking disclosed that, with regard to places, people prefer to know a place physically and engage in creating lasting and memorable experiences. Hence, we contribute two elements to strengthen the heritage place brand – heritage walks and brand communication, thereby developing the “bi-directional participatory model” by manifesting that geographical knowledge is most requisite for heritage place branding. Thus, place branding with people was established in this study, thus providing a unique concept and approach, which was overlooked in existing literature.

7.2 Managerial implications

The current undertaking is relevant to managers. First, the model provides a unique understanding to help managers brand a place by beginning with the people and their orientation. This perspective is a bottom-up approach. Brand, product and service marketing managers can position the place with distinctive branding strategies using this approach, especially for the tourism map. Individuals’ lived experiences with their memorable life stories with heritage walks and celebrations at each site could conceivably create a favorable attitude toward the place.

Second, the model provides different dimensions associated with the people and the place; these could help managers develop branding strategies. For instance, people and their experiences and daily-life stories could be highlighted in advertisements through online and offline media. Brand ambassadors could be individuals from the locality who will expend energy communicating about the place. Influencer marketing strategies can be used with these people via online and offline channels. Narratives and storyboards might reflect the feelings and aspirations of the people, the usage of which could increase the sense of belongingness and attachment. These real stories can effectively reflect the place via communication channels, thus making the primary and secondary modes of communication stronger and relatable to others.

Third, managers can make decisions about the content and source in advertising and communication campaigns while developing branding strategies for the place. They might invite people to describe their life stories connected to the place to reflect authenticity. Individuals would be brand advocates for the place. This process could enhance communication credibility, as such persons living in the place are considered to be especially reliable and trustworthy because the experiences are lived, and their stories are real. Finally, our framework and

propositions provide actionable approaches and strategies for branding a place effectively. For example, co-created experiences with people could help in heritage marketing of the place; additionally, there could be primary heritage communication, which would include all stakeholders.

To make the foregoing occur, managers must collaborate and associate with the appropriate people and work on effective co-created branding strategies for the place. Thus, management should consistently innovate and co-create approaches to brand the place with the people. However, socio-political factors may affect associations of individuals with the place and subsequently impact branding approaches. Moreover, there might be individual differences that affect the relationship with the place and branding approaches. Furthermore, the cultural and sub-cultural dimensions should be considered when developing the place as a “global brand.”

8. Limitations and future research directions

The present study created a framework with multiple stakeholder perspectives based on qualitative research. Future efforts could seek to validate this study’s framework. We developed propositions that could be tested empirically by conducting field experiments in the place of interest. Scales might be developed as well; doing so would help researchers and managers quantify results. Various methods might be used and bi-directional participatory place branding investigated further.

Our efforts were undertaken in the context of India. Future studies might include other nations, as well as countries having a focus on bi-directional participatory place branding approaches. We examined residents of a place. Other stakeholders – such as city leaders, policymakers and business representatives could be included to create a more comprehensive model. Using social media platforms, the elements of branding might be integrated with advertising campaigns to discern their impact on the place at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Moreover, foundational and conceptual work is required in this area. Cross-disciplinary work, such as marketing communication and culture, could be performed to enhance understanding. Cross-brand stakeholders in the context of heritage across generations would be relevant for the context of the place or heritage site. Furthermore, heritage and culture should be examined to increase understanding of the dual or composite identities of a place, as well as individuals’ sense-making and sense giving *vis-à-vis* the place.

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Appendix 1. Sample details

Table A1 Demographic information of in-depth interview participants

Age group	Age		Level	Education		Work experience		No. of years of living experience at the place	
	No: of participants			No: of participants		No: of years	No: of participants		
	M	F		M	F	M	F		
20–25	—	4	Doctorate	1	1	1 to 5	11	7	0–5
25–30	7	3	Post Graduate	10	3	5 to 10	6	2	5–15
30–35	9	2	Graduate	12	5	10 to 20	2	—	15–20
35–40	3	1	Secondary School	1	1	Above 20	5	1	20 years and above

Appendix 2

Table A2 Details about the sites

Sl. No.	Places visited	Significance
1	House of MG	Heritage Hotel
2	Sarkhej Roza	A unique architectural merger of elements from Mughal, Jain and Hindu traditions
3	Sidi Saiyyed Jali	Renowned for the intricate latticework architecture
4	Jama Masjid	Historically relevant complex with the influence of multiple architectural traditions
5	Sabarmati Ashram	Associated with Dandi march, one of the biggest civil disobedient movements in India
6	Bhadra Fort	Cultural monument of Ahmedabad, which has stood the test of time through the regimes of the Sultans, Mughals, Marathas and the British
7	Sultan Ahmed Shah's mosque	One of the oldest mosques in Ahmedabad known for architectural excellence
8	Teen Darwaza	Architectural designs and legends associated with the Hindu and Muslim community
9	Lal Darwaza	One of the gateways of Ahmedabad build after 1400 by sultan Ahmed Shah
10	Lucky Tea Stall	One of the oldest tea stalls of Ahmedabad stands amidst an almost 500-year-old graveyard with 26 tombs
11	Ahmed Shah's tomb	Resting place for Ahmed Shah, known as the father of Ahmedabad, is a location with historic and nostalgic associations
12	Rani ni hajira	The courtyard that houses the tombs of the queens of the Sultans of Ahmedabad
13	Swami Narayan temple	One of the first temple of the Swaminarayan tradition, erected according to the procedures advised in ancient scriptures
14	Hutheesing Jain Temple	Constructed in the 1800 s dedicated to the Jain community
15	Rani Sipri's Mosque	Rani Sipri, the Hindu queen, has built a sign of religious confluence, as is
16	Manek Chowk	Named after the saint Maniknath functions as a vegetable market in the morning, a jewel market late morning and transforms into food joint late at night
17	Manek Burj	Foundation toward efforts to build the great city of Ahmedabad
18	Dada Harir Vav	The famous Ahmedabad stepwell was built with extravagant artistry to ensure lasting access to water for the people, especially during the dry Ahmedabad summers

Appendix 3

Table A3 Data analysis: codes, categories and themes emerging from analysis

Theme	Category	Sample codes
People and Meaning of Heritage	Life stories	Everyday rituals, chores, stories from generations, part of life, view about past and kingdoms, storytellers, uniqueness
	Past experience	Past, generational, the way people lived, not re-doable, pride, lessons from ancestors, religious harmony
	Feelings	Part of life, feels like a Badshah (King), member of society, resonance, enables to feel proud
	Aspirations	View about other cities vs. own, self-congruence with the place, cultural backdrops, sense of fulfilment
Place	Symbolic	Monumental, social space, hangout place, weekend plans, exclusive
	Heritage oriented	Intrinsic values, perception of closer circles and family, relatability with the place, view toward geography and history
	Nostalgia Experience	History, stories, generational lessons, visiting a place a part of memory, material memory Perception of social circles, perception of the image digitally, peoples' behavior, attractiveness, narrative of the place and people
Relationships with the place	High integrity	Attending public events, welcoming new city initiatives, staying updated about what's happening in the city
	String place experience	Perceptions about promotion, advertisements, views about celebrities, views about portrayal of a place, interest in brand (place)
	Positive attitude toward the place	Roaming around the city, exclusive attractiveness, information, first point of contact, reliable sources

Appendix 4. Metaphors, symbols arising from the multi-sited ethnography

4.1 an everyday glimpse into the ‘pol’ life

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A resident enjoying his morning in 'Pol'



A traditional pol house



Resident houses with the ancestors' burials



Resident houses with the ancestors' burials

(continued)



A day to day scene outside residents' houses



A representation of pol houses



A weekend photo walk about understanding the heritage of the pol area

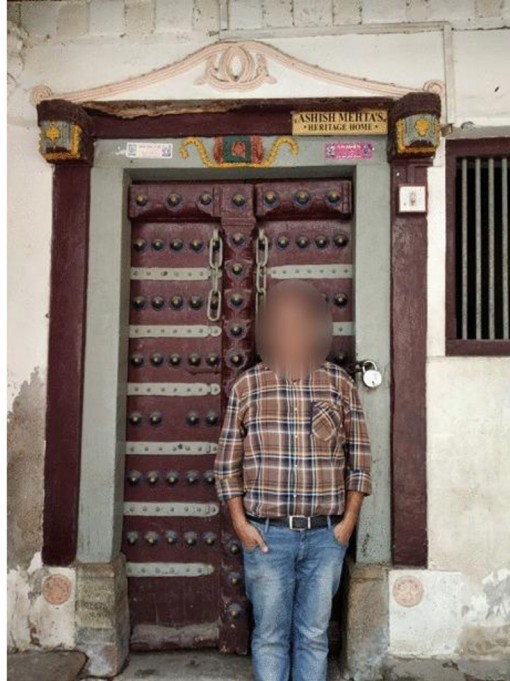


Traditional pol houses

(continued)



Old heritage properties within the pol area



One of our respondent in front of his 600 years old heritage home.



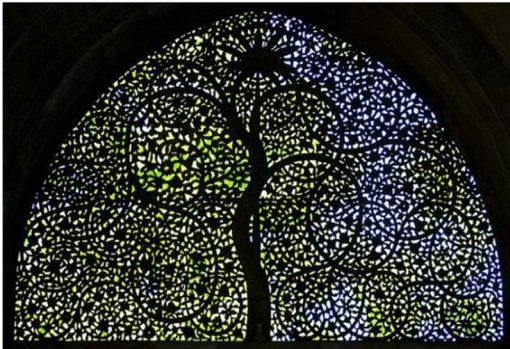
The noticeboard behind the old man is where weekly announcements are made in the pol



(continued)

4.2 Symbolic presentations

Another photo walk to understand pol culture



The famous 'tree of life' which is an artistic representation of a tree believed to grow in paradise, offering enlightenment, calmness and knowledge - according to Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism scripts. Constructed in 1572-73 by Sidi Saeed or Sidi Saiyyed; is an unofficial symbol in the city that has been adapted by educational institutes and general public as a representative of Ahmedabad. It is latticework (locally known as *Jali*) on yellow sandstone, carved out of one single piece of sandstone.



Different versions of 'tree of life' on different monuments of importance.

(continued)



British and Islam style architecture on a door top, still bearing witness



An idol representing the religion of the household, a system that has been going on since the late 1500s.



British- Islam inspired wooden works on different door-tops in the pol area

(continued)



Exquisitely carved brackets in pol area houses, as well as in temples-bearing the past glory.



British-Indo-Islamic inspired wooden work, having an influence of Maratha and Persian patterns

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