

Articles

Brand symbiosis: emotional development

Simbiose entre marcas: desenvolvimento emocional

Simbiosis entre marcas: desarrollo emocional

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ABSTRACT

The symbiosis between local brands and the cities involved drives a strong emotional connection between visitors and the city. This article aims to evaluate this claim. It also highlights that local brand symbiosis drives visitor's attraction. It is concluded that symbiosis of local brands is a powerful emotion-creating factor, essential for building loyalty and creating a welcoming and cohesive atmosphere which has a profound impact on visitors.

Keywords: Brand symbiosis; Emotions; Place branding; Local identification

RESUMO

A simbiose entre marcas locais e as localidades envolvidas impulsiona uma forte ligação emocional entre os visitantes e a localidade. Este artigo visa avaliar essa afirmação. Além de realçar que a simbiose das marcas locais impulsiona atração de visitantes. Conclui-se que a simbiose das marcas locais é um poderoso fator de criação de emoções, essencial para fidelizar e criam um ambiente acolhedor e coeso que se repercute profundamente nos visitantes.

Palavras-chave: Simbiose de marcas; Emoções; Marca local; Identificação local

RESUMEN

La simbiosis entre las marcas locales y las ciudades implicadas impulsa una fuerte conexión emocional entre los visitantes y la ciudad. Este artículo pretende evaluar esta afirmación. También subraya que la simbiosis de las marcas locales impulsa la atracción de visitantes. Concluye que la simbiosis de las

marcas locais es un poderoso factor de creación de emociones, esencial para fidelizar y crear una atmósfera acogedora y cohesionada que tiene un profundo impacto en los visitantes.

Palabras clave: Simbiosis de marca; Emociones; Marca de lugar; Identificación local

1 INTRODUCTION

On the slope of the majestic Gerês mountain range, in the picturesque municipality of Terras de Bouro, lies a true treasure composed of three internationally renowned brands: Serra do Gerês, São Bento da Porta Aberta, and the Caniçada/Valdosende dam. Each of these brands has its own audience, defined by its unique and distinct characteristics. However, instead of competing with each other, these brands come together in a harmonious symphony of complementarity and mutual collaboration.

These three iconic brands play a vital role in the development and prosperity of the region, serving as powerful catalysts to attract tourists and visitors from around the world. The interaction between them not only strengthens attraction bonds but also establishes deep and lasting connections, sometimes even giving rise to friendships and emotional ties between visitors and the location.

However, an intriguing question arises: to what extent does the symbiosis of these three brands and the local environment have the potential to evoke emotions? This is a question worthy of investigation, as the interaction between brands and the natural scenery can create an emotionally rich and meaningful experience for visitors. Understanding how this interaction influences individuals' emotions can not only enrich our understanding of the dynamics between brands and locations but also provide valuable insights to further enhance the visitor experience and promote sustainable development in the region.

2 SYMBIOSIS OF BRANDS

Brands play a crucial role in today's and tomorrow's society. Especially since competition between cities and regions began, resulting in an increase in marketing

strategies to attract people and investment. Not only do they distinguish the products and services available in each region, but they also make it possible to differentiate regions and create a connection with people. Therefore, successful brands are those that manage to connect on an emotional level, providing a feeling of happiness, well-being and a complete experience.

In addition, brands are also important for differentiation in commoditized markets (Panwar; Khan, 2020). In a market where products and services are similar, the brand is the deciding factor for the consumer (Cakranegara; Kurniadi; Sampe; Pangemanan *et al.*, 2022). A strong brand can create a perception of value and quality, even when the products or services are technically similar. The same is true of local brands, which allow a clear distinction to be made between regions.

In the future, as the marketing of markets continues, the importance of brands will increase. Companies and government administrations will have to invest even more in their brands to stand out and attract people. This can include everything from creating a unique brand identity to investing in advertising and marketing to increase brand visibility.

Brands also play an important role in society. They can influence cultural trends, shape consumer behavior and even have a significant impact on social and environmental issues (Lim; Kumar; Pandey; Verma *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, brand management is a complex task that requires an in-depth understanding of the market, consumers, and society.

In this context, place branding, or place brand, refers to the strategic process of creating a unique identity and perception for a specific location, such as a city, region, or even a nation (Chan; Suryadipura; Kostini, 2021; Eugenio-Vela; Ginesta; Kavaratzis, 2020). It involves the deliberate effort to shape the image and reputation of a place, differentiating it from others by highlighting its unique characteristics, culture, history, and experiences. This is crucial in a world where places compete not only for tourists, but also for residents, businesses, and investment.

The importance of place branding lies in its ability to influence how a location is perceived both by its inhabitants and external stakeholders (Van Assche; Beunen; Oliveira, 2020). A well-crafted place brand can create a strong emotional connection, similar to commercial brands, fostering loyalty, pride, and attachment among residents, while also appealing to visitors and investors (Ahmad; Ahmad; Siddique, 2023). Successful place branding aligns the values, culture, and vision of the region, creating a coherent narrative that resonates with diverse audiences.

In the context of symbiotic brand relationships, place branding can amplify the synergy between commercial brands and their location. For example, local products and services can gain authenticity and appeal by being associated with a place known for quality, culture, or innovation. This symbiosis benefits both the commercial brand and the location, as the identity of the place enhances the brand, and the success of the brand, in turn, reinforces the positive image of the place.

Furthermore, place brands contribute to the overall competitive advantage of a location. They create a distinct identity that can attract talent, investment, and tourism, fostering economic growth. In commoditized markets, where many places may offer similar resources or infrastructure, place branding becomes the critical differentiator. It enables regions to stand out by emphasizing their unique story, cultural heritage, or innovative potential, thereby becoming the preferred choice for stakeholders.

Thus, the integration of place branding in the study of brand symbiosis highlights how a location's identity can interact with and enhance the power of commercial brands, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that strengthens both the region and the businesses within it.

The place brands of São Bento da Porta Aberta, Serra do Gerês, and Caniçada/Valdosende dam, despite having distinct characteristics, complement each other and collectively enhance the region's attractiveness to tourists. The presence of these place brands in the same delimited geographical space offers visitors a diverse range of experiences and contributes to positioning the Gerês region, particularly the parish of Rio Caldo on the Terras de Bouro side, as one of the most visited destinations in Portugal.

However, it's important to note that each place brand has its own marketing strategies and independent actions, despite working in a complementary way to develop the region. The São Bento da Porta Aberta brand is focused on attracting religious pilgrims and people interested in religious tourism. The Serra do Gerês brand is focused on attracting tourists seeking contact with nature, outdoor activities, health and well-being through the existing thermal spas. The Caniçada/Valdosende dam brand is focused on attracting tourists interested in water sports, water recreation and sunbathing on the banks of the dam.

The three place brands coexist in a kind of brand ecology through a "biological community" which should be understood as a specific market, with a delimited area, and between them there are "interspecific ecological relationships" which allow them to act in an associated manner and aware that there may be benefits and risks. The success of this strategy is anchored in the fact that they are strong and authoritative brands in their categories (Pérez Valera; Sánchez Gómez; Pérez Valera; Pérez López, 2010).

The main advantage of co-branding is the positioning of the brands (Keller; Machado, 2006) with the aim of creating more attractive points of difference or points of parity, so that there is a logical fit between the brands that combined marketing activities maximize the advantages of the individual brands and, at the same time, minimize the disadvantages (Keller; Machado, 2006; Pérez Valera; Sánchez Gómez; Pérez Valera; Pérez López, 2010). It should be emphasized that the brands under study, individually, manage to survive and exist normally, while together they acquire gains in a reciprocal manner (Keller; Machado, 2006; Rembulan; Kusumowidagdo; Rahadiyanti, 2023).

Since the three place brands cohabit peacefully and create synergies, it is worth drawing a small parallel between the three brands and the world of biology. Where the association of two or more living beings creates a symbiosis that can be classified into different types (El-Metwally; Mekawey; El-Halmouch; Naga, 2023), namely:

- mutualism - all organisms benefit;
- commensalism - one organism benefits without harming the other;

- parasitism - one organism benefits at the expense of the other;
- amensalism - two organisms of different species, where one species is inhibited or killed and the other is unaffected.

In the case under study, living beings should be understood as brands, because they are strong and thriving brands that have their own identity, their own means of operation and survival. Thus, the symbiosis of consumer brands can be seen as a strategy involving the association of brands with an unquestionable reputation and recognized excellence in their markets (Bennett, 2017). In this case, the three place brands operate side by side with their products and services of differentiated design, focusing on their respective target audiences and nurturing a mutualistic symbiotic relationship. This is because they do not adopt strategies:

- co-branding to create exclusive products and services with a differentiated vision in order to promote and strengthen the brands together;
- define value and personality to create a certain identity that will add value to the final product and that would influence people's perception of a particular brand and influence their choices.

On the other hand, the symbiosis of brands can and should have an impact on the experience people have while using services and products or exploring the places they visit in order to increase trust and satisfaction (Dandis; Al Haj Eid; Griffin; Robin *et al.*, 2023). This means being aware of technological developments and changes in consumer habits and travel preferences, especially new market trends that drive the application of new marketing strategies to increase interaction with regions, increase satisfaction and loyalty (Hoffman; Moreau; Stremersch; Wedel, 2021). Because adaptation is essential to avoid negative consequences, such as loss of market relevance, loss of competitive innovation, but also to maintain strategic agility, relevance, sustainability and loyalty (Dandis; Al Haj Eid; Griffin; Robin *et al.*, 2023; Hoffman; Moreau; Stremersch; Wedel, 2021).

In the symbiosis of the brands under study, we also have two types of development that occur simultaneously:

- Individual - each brand is focused on building and promoting its image, values and unique skills in order to stand out in a saturated market, but has the side effect of benefiting the other brands that operate in the same geographical region;
- collective - the brands together promote their products and services, not in a co-branding logic, with a view to creating a unique service or product, but in a logic of developing positive, non-competitive synergies in which each will leverage the best it can do for its target audience within the spectrum of operation, which creates benefits for everyone involved.

On closer examination, it can be seen that the success of this symbiosis of the three brands is very much in line with Andrade (2020), Zhao; Sun and Kakuda (2017) and Sohn (2022) who refer to good practices for the sustainable development of Place Branding for localities and regions:

- they are dealing properly with their strengths and even better with the elements that most distinguish them at national and international level, so they are increasingly competitive in various markets and tourist segments;
- outdated and inaccurate ideas and images of places have been strongly combated with marketing strategies, which has resulted in greater tourist attraction and settlement of people;
- the local administration, as far as possible, has developed a strategy to improve infrastructures and revitalize important events with the aim of making them a local reference;
- the consistency of the communications made by the entities managing the brands and their partners has been relevant to attracting investment and tourists;
- the promises made in the brands' advertising have corresponded to what is actually found in the places;

- the strategies for applying resources have been efficient and coordinated, which has meant that there has been an adequate response to demand.

This symbiosis applies very well the functions of place brands that Rebelo (2013) identifies as vital for the place brand of localities and regions, namely:

- identification - each brand has a very well-defined and unmistakable identity;
- differentiation of locations - each brand clearly identifies the territory of influence and delimits its territorial space, despite the proximity of the other brands;
- attracting investment - the positioning of each brand does not create confusion when it comes to choosing where to invest, as each one targets a specific area;
- identifying, protecting and disseminating cultures and traditions - in this area the brands have done a unique job in preserving the values and traditions of each place, as well as making a huge effort to disseminate the traditions and typical knowledge of each locality;
- disseminating the locality - each of the brands is strong at national and international level, each one locating the locality that identifies it without any difficulty and in an unmistakable way.

However, in symbiosis, the promotion of the locations has an even greater reach and much greater leverage, which has opened markets that until now they had not been able to penetrate on their own, as well as spontaneously creating synergies.

3 ATTRACTIONS TO THE PLACE AND THE BRANDS IN SYMBIOSIS

The symbiosis between the brands under analysis plays a crucial role in their continued success over the years. This symbiosis not only consistently attracts people to the locations and region they represent, but also ensures a constant presence in the target audience's consciousness. Over time, this interconnection between the three brands has cultivated a sense of trust and positivity.

The strategic positioning adopted by these brands emphasizes shared values as the core of the relationship established with the public. Within this communion of values, the distinctions and advantages offered by each brand become crucial elements in captivating the attention and interest of the target audience Sunarso and Mustafa (2023).

The symbiosis between the brands has a profound impact on attracting and retaining visitors to the spaces they represent, transcending the mere physical visit to create immersive and meaningful experiences. This symbiosis not only transforms the venues into environments that echo the values and identity of each brand, but also builds an association of shared values. By experiencing these spaces, visitors are exposed to similar beliefs and principles, reinforcing their emotional connection and increasing their propensity to return and relive the experience.

This familiarity with the values and identity of each brand within the sites creates a sense of trust and predictability for visitors (Chen, 2006), ensuring a constant presence. This consistency of quality not only reinforces public confidence, but also conveys a sense of security, eliminating the psychological barriers that could prevent further visits (Fournier, 1998; Kamakura; Srivastava, 1984).

Furthermore, this constant quality acts as a seal of guarantee, providing visitors with the assurance of a positive experience on every occasion. This guarantee of excellence not only encourages repeat visits, but also strengthens the emotional ties between visitors and the spaces, consolidating them as beloved and trusted destinations in their lives.

A deeper analysis of the reflective effect of these brands reveals an intricate dynamic between individual perception and collective projection (Grace; Ross; King, 2020; Muehling; Sprott; Sprott, 2004). This complex phenomenon unfolds in three fundamental dimensions: brand recognition, positive brand image and brand quality.

Brand recognition is crucial to understanding how brands stand out in the minds of visitors. Awareness of brands is not only limited to their visibility, but also to their distinctiveness (Puzakova; Aggarwal, 2018). The ability to easily visualize a brand and

distinguish it from others is key. This connection between brands not only reinforces familiarity with them (Fournier, 1998; Kamakura; Srivastava, 1984), but also positions them prominently in visitors' consciousness, influencing their choices of destinations to visit. The synergy between brands strengthens this connection and contributes to a more meaningful experience.

Building a positive brand image also plays a crucial role. The association between brands and visitors' personal values is essential to creating a lasting emotional connection (Malär; Krohmer; Hoyer; Nyffenegger, 2011). When the brand identity resonates with the consumer's self-image, this amplifies the emotional impact of the connection (Gaustad; Samuelsen; Warlop; Fitzsimons, 2018). In addition, the perception that association with the brand reflects positively on individual identity increases brand preference and loyalty. This emotional connection strengthens the bonds between visitors and brands, turning them into enthusiastic advocates.

Brand quality is a determining factor in the formation of the reflective effect (Selnes, 1993; Wilson; Henseler, 2007). The consistent delivery of highquality experiences not only increases visitor confidence, but also solidifies the reputation of brands as leaders in the sector (Taheri; Gannon; Kesgin, 2020). This reputation for excellence not only attracts new visitors to the region, but also strengthens emotional ties with existing consumers. The perception of quality guarantees a positive and memorable experience, thus reinforcing the emotional connection with brands (Jin; Lee; Lee, 2015).

It is important to recognize that these dimensions interact with each other and create a continuous cycle of mutual influence. Brand recognition leads to the construction of a positive image, which in turn reinforces the perception of quality (Arora; Raisinghani; Arora; Kothari, 2009; Iglesias; Markovic; Singh; Sierra, 2019). These elements work together to shape the visitor experience and their emotional connection with brands (Pullman; Gross, 2004). Thus, it is the harmonious interaction between recognition, positive image and quality that forms the foundation of the reflective effect of brands.

In addition, when exploring the effect of places and regions in more depth, it becomes clear that the experiences provided by this environment play a fundamental role in the formation of lasting emotional connections. These connections unfold in three essential dimensions: long-term relationship, place attachment and frequent positive interaction.

Firstly, establishing a long-term relationship with the place goes beyond simple occasional visits; it is a meaningful connection that strengthens over time (Barnes, 1997; Bowen; Shoemaker, 2003). Visitors not only choose to visit the site regularly, but also place enough trust in it to maintain this relationship over time (Kumar, 1996). This trust is built on the feeling of being valued as a visitor, where every interaction is an opportunity to feel welcome and appreciated (Khairi; Darmawan, 2021). In addition, the quality of the services and experiences offered plays a crucial role in this decision, as it is the consistency in delivering memorable experiences that sustains the emotional bond. The willingness to recommend the place to others not only reflects personal satisfaction, but also a genuine desire to share this special connection with others, thus transforming the place into a community and socially significant space (Erfani, 2022; Khairi; Darmawan, 2021).

Secondly, emotional attachment to the place goes beyond a simple superficial appreciation; it is a deep and personal bond that develops over time. Visitors not only feel emotionally attached to the place, but also give it a special meaning in their lives (Kastenholz; Marques; Carneiro, 2020). This emotional attachment is fueled by the association with positive feelings, where each visit evokes a mixture of nostalgia, comfort and belonging (Akgün; Senturk; Keskin; Onal, 2020; Kastenholz; Marques; Carneiro, 2020). The feeling of being an integral part of the site, where every detail has a story and every corner triggers memories, reinforces this emotional connection, transforming the site into an emotional refuge where visitors feel truly at home.

Thirdly, frequent and positive interaction with the place is fundamental to sustaining the reflective effect. Experiences marked by frequent and positive

interactions not only contribute to visitors' well-being (Knobloch; Robertson; Aitken, 2017), but also to consolidating their emotional connection with the place. Every moment spent on site, whether participating in activities, interacting with other visitors or simply enjoying the atmosphere, is an opportunity to strengthen emotional bonds (Scannell; Gifford, 2017). Participation in enjoyable activities and the general perception that frequent interactions have a positive impact on their well-being (Pettersson, 2018) further reinforce this reciprocal relationship between visitors and the place, making it not just a destination, but an emotional reference point in their lives.

It is also important to note that both the brand and the location can be influential factors in the emotional effect, and this influence can derive from a complex interaction between individual perceptions and past experiences (Cope; Watts, 2000). This phenomenon can be understood as an interconnection of three fundamental dimensions: memories, attitudinal loyalty and well-being with the brand.

Firstly, the relationship between the brand and the evocation of memories and nostalgia plays a crucial role in the reflected emotional effect. The awakening of nostalgic feelings and pleasant memories highlights how the brand has the power to recall past memories associated with significant experiences (Holbrook; Schindler, 2003). These memories, often linked to special moments experienced in certain places, not only reinforce the emotional connection between the brand and the consumer, but also create lasting bonds of affection and loyalty (Cardinale; Nguyen; Melewar, 2016). It is as if each interaction with the brand is an invitation to relive special moments from the past, thus strengthening the emotional bond between the consumer and the brand over time.

Secondly, attitudinal brand loyalty reflects the influence of past experiences in building a lasting emotional connection. Previous positive experiences strengthen consumer loyalty, while negative experiences can undermine this relationship (Cardinale; Nguyen; Melewar, 2016). This highlights the importance of past interactions in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards the brand. Each positive

interaction contributes to reinforcing consumer trust and preference for the brand, while negative experiences can undermine this trust and damage loyalty.

Thirdly, by observing the context of the place, the emotional connection with the experiences lived becomes evident. Emotional attachment to the place and the recurrence of special memories drive physical spaces to become powerful catalysts for emotions (Borghini; Sherry; Joy, 2021). The sense of belonging, shared memories and emotional intimacy with the place contribute to the formation of deep emotional bonds that transcend the simple physical environment (Bow; Buys, 2003). Each visit to a specific site is not only a physical experience, but also an emotional journey, where visitors can reconnect with their emotions and past experiences (Pearce, 2012).

Finally, the perception of emotional well-being provided by both the brand and the place are crucial. The influence of the brand in promoting positive feelings and optimism, as well as contributing to emotional well-being, highlight how interactions with the brand and the place can positively affect the emotional state of individuals (Malinowski; Lim, 2015). However, it is important to recognize that negative experiences can undermine this perception of well-being, weakening emotional connection and loyalty. Thus, the quest to promote emotional well-being becomes a priority for both brands and venues, as this not only strengthens the emotional connection with consumers, but also contributes to building more lasting and meaningful relationships (Veloutsou; Moutinho, 2009).

4 RESEARCH

The influence of the locality and region on visitor emotion is a complex phenomenon that plays a crucial role in forming and maintaining the emotional bond with the locality (Lin; Zhang; Gursoy; Fu, 2019). This effect is fueled by visitors' interactions, perceptions and experiences with the space in question (Akgün; Senturk; Keskin; Onal, 2020).

Establishing a lasting relationship with the place is a key indicator of this positive impact on emotion. When visitors choose to return repeatedly to a place and trust it enough to maintain that relationship over time, it suggests that their previous experiences have been rewarding (Trauer; Ryan, 2005). This trust and familiarity lay a solid foundation for a deeper emotional connection, where visitors feel welcomed and valued.

In addition, emotional attachment to the place plays a crucial role in this process. When visitors develop a significant emotional attachment to the place, assigning it a special value in their lives and associating it with positive feelings, this further strengthens their emotional connection (Hummon, 1992; Trauer; Ryan, 2005). The sense of belonging and the feeling of being an integral part of the environment contribute to a more enriching and satisfying experience (Hummon, 1992).

Frequent and positive interactions with the site are essential for sustaining and strengthening the emotional effect. When visitors enjoy positive experiences, take part in pleasant activities and feel welcome, this has a positive impact on their emotional well-being. These interactions not only reinforce the emotional connection with the place, but also promote a sense of happiness and satisfaction.

H1: The place is positively related to emotion.

The influence of the brand on consumers' emotions plays a fundamental role in establishing and maintaining an emotional connection with the brand. This dynamic phenomenon is the result of the interaction between the individual perception of the brand and the collective projection of its image, exerting a direct impact on consumers' emotions and attitudes (Marzocchi; Morandin; Bergami, 2013).

Brand awareness is an essential element. When people can easily conjure up the brand in their minds and recognize it as a provider of rewarding and positive emotional experiences, this indicates a marked and distinctive presence of the brand in their cognitive universe (Granitz; Forman, 2015). This awareness not only

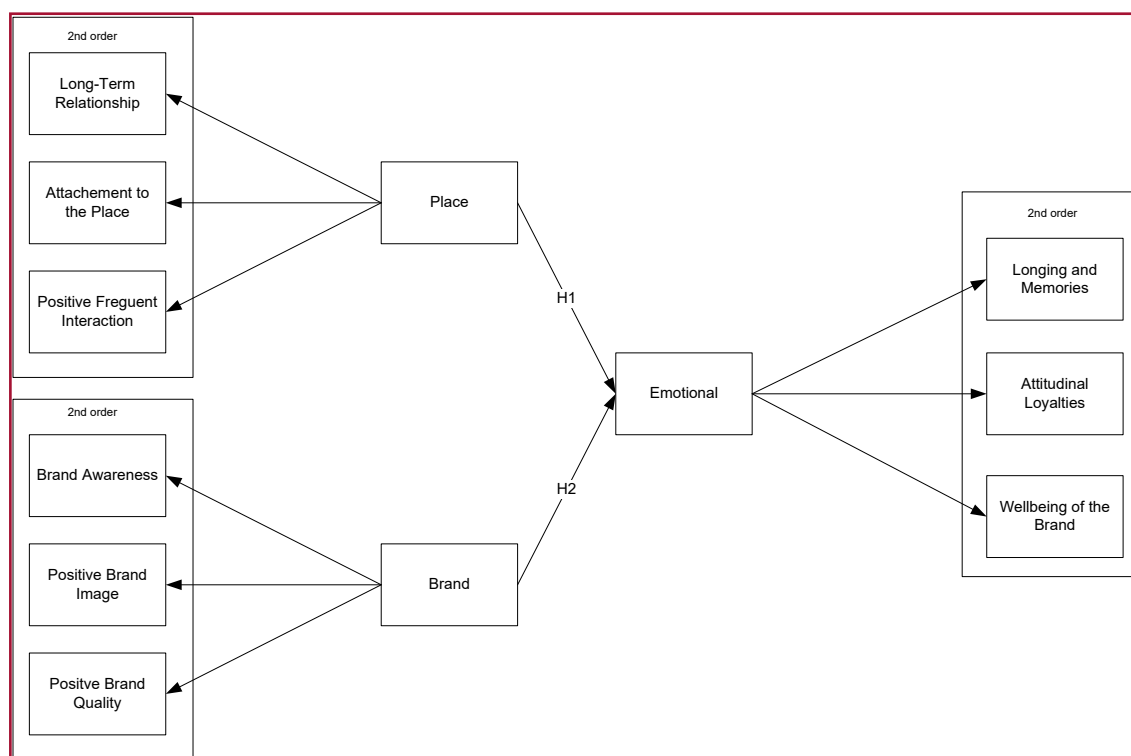
increases familiarity with the brand, but also consolidates its prominent position in consumers' minds, influencing their decisions and behaviors.

Brand image plays a crucial role in emotions. When people perceive that the brand is aligned with their own personality, reflecting an image consistent with their self-image, this reinforces the emotional connection with the brand (Granitz; Forman, 2015). In addition, the perception that associating with the brand contributes positively to its identity contributes to a deeper and more lasting emotional connection (Granitz; Forman, 2015; Marzocchi; Morandin; Bergami, 2013).

In a complementary way, brand quality is also a determining factor in the formation of emotions. When consumers recognize that the brand consistently offers high-quality experiences and exceeds expectations in terms of performance, this strengthens their trust in the brand and solidifies its reputation as an industry leader (MILES; MANGOLD, 2017). This reputation for excellence not only attracts new visitors, but also strengthens emotional bonds with existing people who are already emotionally involved and turns them into enthusiastic brand advocates.

H2: The brand is positively related to emotion.

To gain a more detailed understanding of the object of investigation, a model was developed that synthesizes and structures the research. This model serves as a guide for the study, helping to clearly delineate the main components and their interrelationships, which makes it easier to visualize the objectives and hypotheses to be tested. This model is presented in figure 1.

Figure 1 – Model of investigation

Source: own elaboration

5 METHOD

5.1 Sample

The target population for this study was visitors over the age of 18 to the area covered by the three brands under study, namely São Bento da Porta Aberta, Gerês and the Caniçada/Valdosende dam, between June 23, 2023 and March 15, 2024. A confidence approach was used to determine the minimum sample size. For this purpose, the method given by Larossi (2011) was used, with 50% of the estimated variability in the population, so the minimum sample size was set at 379.

Assuming a response rate of 15% and a non-use rate of 5%, a total of 1895 ($379/(15\%+5\%)$) people to be contacted to take part in the survey was established. It was possible to contact the established number of people, of whom 1684 responded

to the survey, resulting in a participation rate of 88.9% (1684/1895). The size of the subsample for each recruitment site was stratified proportionally.

This study used two stages of sampling: proportional stratified sampling and systematic random sampling.

5.2 Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section included questions related to the respondent's profile. The other sections are three second-order factors. Thus, the second section is related to Place, and is made up of three constructs, namely, Long-Term Relationship, Attachment to the Place, Positive Frequent Interaction. Constructs based on Harmon; Zinn and Gleason (2005) and Wu; Huang; Liu and Law (2015) and adapted to the context of the study.

The third section is related to Brand, and is made up of three constructs, namely Brand Awareness, Positive Brand Image and Positive Brand Quality. Constructs based on Bose; Roy and Tiwari (2016) and adapted to the context of the study.

The fourth section is related to Emotional, and is made up of three constructs, namely, Longing and Memories, Attitudinal Loyalties, Wellbeing of the Brand. Constructs based on Mostafa and Kasamani (2020).

In the questions related to the constructs, from section two to four, a 7-point Likert scale was used, where 1 represented disagreement and 7 represented total agreement.

A pilot test was carried out to assess whether the survey captured the constructs it was supposed to measure, and to test the internal consistency and reliability of the items in the questionnaire. In the first phase, 75 visitors to the sites under study were surveyed. They were selected at random, but always considering the age criterion, which could never be less than 18 years old, and the other criterion was that they were not residents of the towns and region under study. After analyzing the results of the test, there was no evidence to justify changing any items or making linguistic adjustments.

5.3 Data Analysis

The data was processed using the IBM SPSS 23 and IBM SPSS AMOS 23 statistical packages.

5.4 Result

5.4.1 Respondent profile

Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the profile of the questionnaire respondents. This table was created with the aim of providing a clear and concise view of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the research participants:

- gender - the representation of gender is fundamental to ensure that the collected responses reflect the diversity of perspectives from men and women;
- age - the age distribution of respondents is represented in various ranges, allowing for the identification of trends and patterns specific to different age groups;
- number of previous visits - this variable indicates the number of times respondents have visited the destination;
- nationality - the nationality of the respondents is an important variable to know where they come from;
- education level - the education level of participants, from primary education to postgraduate studies, is included to assess the impact of education on respondents' perceptions and responses;
- number of days of travel - this variable quantifies the duration of respondents' trips;
- professional occupation - the table includes respondents' occupations, classifying them into different professional areas;
- visit purpose - this variable describes the main reason for the trip or visit.

Table 1 – Respondent profile

Variable	Details	Variable	Details
Gender	Female – 49.1% Male – 50.9%	Education	Elementar – 21.2% Junior high school – 20.1% Senior high school – 19.2% University – 18.9% Graduate school – 20.5%
Age	18-20 – 4.9% 21-30 – 15.7% 31-40 – 15.0% 41-50 – 16.1% 51-60 – 15.4% 61-70 – 15.9% >70 – 16.9%	Number Days Travel	1-3 – 5.9% 4-6 – 21.0% 7-9 – 19.3% 10-12 – 18.6% 13-15 – 17.6% 16-18 – 17.5%
Number Previous Visit	0 – 7.7% 1-3 – 27.4% 4-6 – 26.8% 7-9 – 29.0% >9 – 9.0%	Professional Occupation	Business people – 9.8% Technical workers – 8.7% Educations workers – 8.3% Governamental – 8.9% Officers – 8.1% Factory Workers – 10.5% Housekeepers – 8.9% Retired servants – 9.7% Students – 8.3% Others – 18.8%
Nationality	Portugal – 7.1% Spain – 7.4% France – 6.8% Italy – 7.4% UK – 5.5% Luxembourg – 6.7% Belgium – 7.3% Germany – 7.1% Netherland – 6.5% Brasil – 6.7% USA – 5.2% Angola – 6.1% Canada – 6.5% Suisse – 7.3% Ireland – 6.5%	Visit Purpose	Food and cuisine – 9.3% Religion – 9.4% Visit friends – 10.0% Family – 8.1% Shopping – 8.8% Sightseeing – 8.0% Adventure – 8.7% Heath reasons – 8.8% Relax – 9.8% Cultural experience – 9.4% Other – 9.6%

Source: own elaboration

5.4.2 Pre-test

Firstly, the existence of common method bias was tested using two different methods. The Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff; Organ, 1986) showed that a single general factor did not account for most of the variance in an exploratory factor analysis (only 30.26%), suggesting that common method variance was not likely to be a significant problem.

The second method, the Podsakoff; Mackenzie; Lee and Podsakoff (2003) approach, involved re-evaluating a model with all the observed variables loading onto one factor. The results of this model were unacceptable (Chi-squared=23.663.738; df=903; RMSEA=0.122), further suggesting that common method bias was not a problem.

5.4.3 Confirmatory factorial analysis

The table presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis concerning model fit, validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2 – CFA - summary measurement result, validity and reliability

	(Continued)
	Standardized Loading
1. Long-term relationship (CR=0.930; AVE=0.726; CA=0.930)	
1.1 - I am willing to continue visiting this site regularly over the long term.	0.841
1.2 - I trust this place enough to maintain a long-term relationship.	0.854
1.3 - I feel valued as a visitor to this venue and this encourages me to maintain a long-term relationship with it.	0.861
1.4 - The quality of the services and experiences offered by this venue are reasons for me to consider a long-term relationship with it.	0.856
1.5 - I would recommend this place to other people who would like to establish a long-term relationship with a place.	0.846

Table 2 – CFA - summary measurement result, validity and reliability

(Continued)

	Standardized Loading
2. Attachment to the place (CR=0.945; AVE=0.774; CA=0.945)	
2.1 - I feel emotionally attached to this place.	0.878
2.2 - I have a strong emotional connection with this place.	0.890
2.3 - This place has a special meaning for me.	0.874
2.4 - I have positive feelings when I think about this place.	0.879
2.5 - I feel an integral part of this place.	0.877
3. Positive frequent interaction (0.932; AVE=0.733; CA=0.932)	
3.1 - I enjoy frequent and positive interactions with this place.	0.848
3.2 - I often get involved in pleasant activities in this place.	0.862
3.3 - My overall experience of this place is marked by frequent, positive interactions.	0.866
3.4 - My frequent interactions with this place have a positive impact on my wellbeing.	0.854
3.5 - I avoid interacting with this place frequently due to past negative experiences. (R)	0.850
4. Brand awareness (CR=0.893; AVE=0.626; 0.951)	
4.1 - Can you easily visualize the brand in your mind.	0.787

Table 2 – CFA - summary measurement result, validity and reliability

(Continued)

	Standardized Loading
4.2 - Are you aware of this brand as a provider of travel experiences.	0.786
4.3 - Can you distinguish this brand from others in the travel industry.	0.783
4.4 - Do the unique attributes of this brand readily come to mind.	0.791
4.5 - When considering travel options, does this brand immediately come to mind.	0.809
5. Positive brand image (CR=0.9640; AVE= 0.795; CA=0.940)	
5.1 - Does this brand align with my personality.	0.886
5.2 - Would my friends perceive me positively if I associated with this brand.	0.889
5.3 - Is the image projected by this brand consistent with my self-image.	0.898
5.4 - Does affiliating with this brand reflect positively on my identity.	0.894
6. Positive brand quality (CR=0.938; AVE=0.791; CA=0.938)	
6.1 - Does this brand consistently deliver high-quality tourism offerings.	0.893
6.2 - Are the experiences provided by this brand of high quality.	0.884
6.3 - Can I expect superior performance from this brand's offerings.	0.887
6.4 - Does this brand outperform others in delivering quality experiences.	0.893

Table 2 – CFA - summary measurement result, validity and reliability

(Continued)

	Standardized Loading
7. Longing and memories (CR=0.962; AVE=0.835; CA=0.962)	
7.1 - This brand arouses feelings of nostalgia and pleasant memories in me.	0.915
7.2 - I have a strong emotional connection with this brand because of past experiences.	0.915
7.3 - I often find myself recalling special moments related to this brand.	0.919
7.4 - This brand evokes in me a feeling of nostalgia for experiences or places associated with it.	0.913
7.5 - I avoid thinking about or recalling memories related to this brand because of past negative experiences. (R)	0.908
8. Attitudinal loyalties (CR=0.963; AVE=0.840; CA=0.964)	
8.1 - I maintain a strong and positive loyalty towards this brand.	0.916
8.2 - My attitude towards this brand is marked by strong loyalty.	0.917
8.3 - I am willing to consistently recommend this brand to others.	0.918
8.4 - My loyalty to this brand is negatively influenced by past experiences. (R)	0.915
8.5 - I do not demonstrate a loyal attitude towards this brand due to previous concerns or disappointments. (R)	0.917
9. Wellbeing of the brand (CR=0.970; AVE=0.843; CA=0.970)	
9.1 - This brand has the power to make me feel positive and optimistic.	0.916

Table 2 – CFA - summary measurement result, validity and reliability

	(Conclusion)
	Standardized Loading
9.2 - My interactions with this brand generally leave me with a sense of well-being.	0.919
9.3 - This brand consistently contributes to my emotional well-being.	0.924
9.4 - My perception of the well-being provided by this brand is negatively affected by unpleasant experiences or messages. (R)	0.917
9.5 - This brand has faced challenges that may affect its ability to promote positive feelings in people. (R)	0.919
9.6 - I don't feel an improvement in my emotional well-being when interacting with this brand, despite recent concerns or disappointments. (R)	0.913

Model Fit Summary

Chi-Square=857.185; df=866; CMIN/DF=0.990; CFI=0.998; IFI=0.997; TLI=0.996;
NFI=0.989; RMSEA=0.001

Notation:

CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CA: Cronbach Alpha;
(R) - Reverse sense.

Source: own elaboration

Discriminant validity, convergent validity, and scale reliability were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis, following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (see table 2) show that the overall chi-square for this model was 857.185 with 866 degrees of freedom, being the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF=0.990) less than the cutoff value of 3 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Four measures of fit were examined: Comparative Fit Index (CFI=0.998), Incremental Fit Index (IFI=0.997), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI=0.996), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA=0.001). These values are within conventional cutoff values (Vandenberg; Lance, 2000), so the model was deemed acceptable.

To assess convergent validity, individual loadings were observed. The results show that all items load on their specified latent variables and that each loading is large and significant, thus indicating convergent validity (Anderson; Gerbing, 1988). Finally, regarding reliability, all constructs presented acceptable levels of composite reliability, considerably exceeding the level of 0.60 recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), signifying a high degree of internal consistency within the measurement model. This robust reliability underscores the dependability and stability of the constructs, further validating the accuracy and integrity of the research model.

To assess discriminant validity, construct intercorrelations were observed. The results showed that they were significantly different from 1, and that the shared variance between any two constructs (the square of their intercorrelations) was less than the average variance explained in the items by the construct (Fornell; Larcker, 1981).

Table 3 – Correlations between constructs and AVE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	AVE
1. Long-term relationship	0.964									0.930
2. Attachment to the place	0.361	0.972								0.945
3. Positive frequent interaction	0.575	0.372	0.965							0.932
4. Brand awareness	0.495	0.209	0.382	0.975						0.951
5. Positive brand image	0.475	0.283	0.679	0.336	0.970					0.940
6. Positive brand quality	0.385	0.384	0.391	0.234	0.388	0.969				0.938
7. Longing and memories	0.393	0.207	0.345	0.350	0.280	0.243	0.981			0.962
8. Attitudinal loyalties	0.277	0.171	0.256	0.218	0.220	0.199	0.210	0.982		0.964
9. Wellbeing of the brand	0.247	0.107	0.163	0.204	0.159	0.126	0.178	0.191	0.985	0.970

Note: diagonal is the square root of the AVE

Source: own elaboration

5.4.4 Structural equation modeling

In consideration of the intricate nature of the model and the necessity to concurrently examine the interconnections among various constructs, the researcher employed SEM utilizing the maximum likelihood method. This statistical approach enables them to assess and analyze the relationships among multiple variables simultaneously, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interplay within the model. Considering the results obtained from the CFA, to develop the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), some consideration described in Hanafiah (2020), and Sarstedt; Hair; Cheah; Becker *et al.* (2019) was adopted.

The specific model under analysis was estimated using the SEM framework. The results indicate that the total chi-square for this model was 2312.842 with 891 degrees of freedom, with the ratio between chi-square and degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF=2.596) lower than the cut-off value of 3 (Bagozzi; Yi, 1988). Four measures of fit were examined: Comparative Fit Index (CFI=0.981), Incremental Fit Index (IFI=0.981), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI=0.980) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA=0.001). These values are within conventional limits (Vandenberg; Lance, 2000), indicating that the model was considered acceptable.

The results obtained from the hypotheses were meticulously tabulated for clarity and are presented in the following table.

Table 4 – Result of the SEM

HYP.	RELATIONSHIP	STAND. PAR. ESTIMATE	P	TEST
H1	Place → Emotion	0.677	***	Supported
H2	Brand → Emotion	0.466	***	Supported

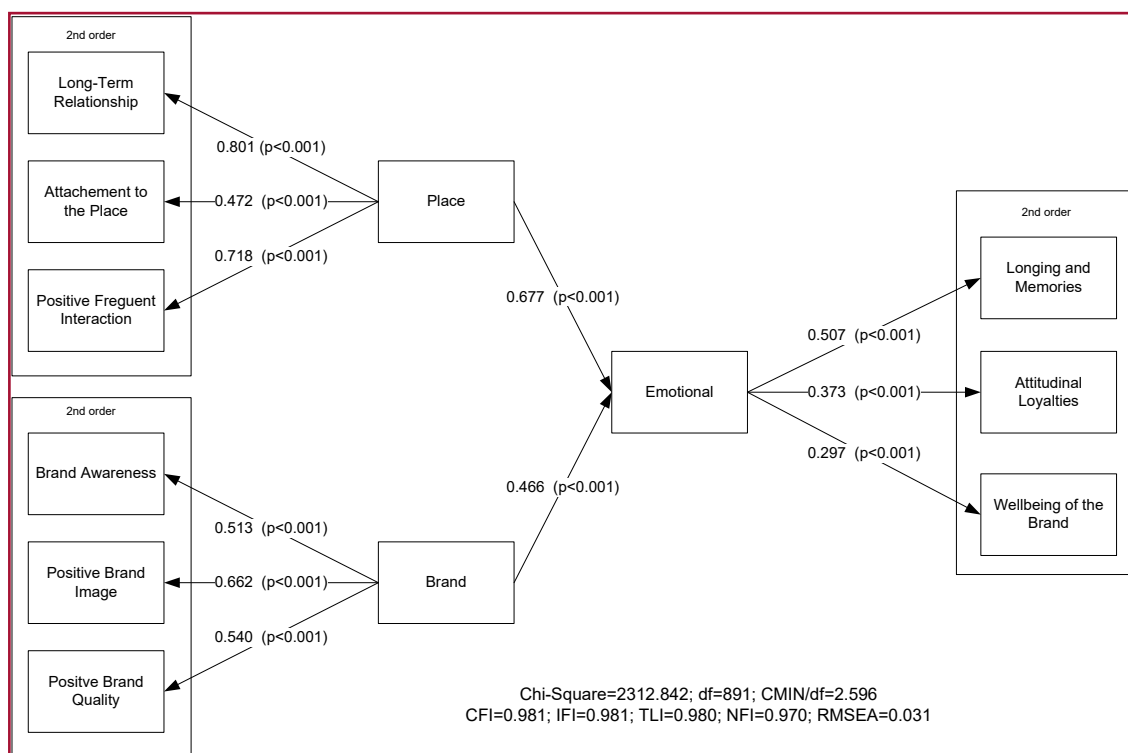
Notation: *** - $p < 0.001$

Source: own elaboration

Figure 2 represents the full results of the SEM analysis. This detailed diagram demonstrates all the relationships identified by the model, highlighting the statistical significance of the second-order effects. Specifically, the figure shows how the variables “Place” and “Brand” exert significant positive influences on the Emotional component.

Through this graphical representation, it is possible to observe not only the directions and magnitudes of these influences but also the complex interconnection between the different variables in the model. Therefore, Figure 2 is crucial for understanding the relationship patterns within the analyzed dataset, confirming the robustness of the proposed SEM model and providing valuable insights into the dynamics between “Place”, “Brand”, and the “Emotional” component.

Figure 2 – Results of the SEM



Source: own elaboration

6 DISCUSSIONS

The second-order factors of each construct, as a representation of the subdimensions, show statistical relevance. Furthermore, the hypotheses that were developed and studied are supported.

The result that Place positively influences the emotional component suggests that places can evoke specific emotional responses due to the way they are perceived and interpreted by people. Mainly because of the long-term relationship people have with places, as well as the feelings of attachment and positive interactions they have. Thus, the bond that is created suggests that there is a pleasant environment and tends to promote feelings of well-being and satisfaction.

On the other hand, the socio-cultural context of the places under study can have a significant impact on emotions. Essentially, because they are places with a strong cultural and community identity that are projected internationally, they can provide a sense of belonging and pride on a global scale.

Thus, personal experiences and memories associated with certain places can activate emotional responses. This is because places refer to positive past and current experiences, which can induce feelings of nostalgia and happiness, as well as creating memories.

The study also highlights that the symbiosis of local brands also suggests that there is a positive influence on people's emotions, largely because the various factors with which they interact can develop strong emotional connections between people and brands.

The symbiosis of brands can benefit from a sense of familiarity and belonging that resonates with the local community, as well as international projection due to their internationalization and immense reputation. This can generate feelings of pride and loyalty, which leads to feelings of connection to something that represents and supports their own community. This cultural and regional identification strengthens

the emotional bond, as people tend to value and support what is familiar and close to them, even if they are not from those places.

In addition, the symbiosis of local brands by having a positive image and quality leads to brand recognition and this is perceived and built through personal and direct relationships. The physical proximity and accessibility of the local brand allows for a level of interaction and personalization that is difficult to replicate by larger, more distant brands, but also contributes to positive emotions such as pleasure, security and well-being. This interaction can lead to more satisfying and memorable experiences, generating positive emotions such as trust, gratitude and satisfaction.

Thus, the influence of brands and locality play a crucial role in the decision to visit and in reducing uncertainty, which leads to a more positive emotional experience in visitors. This emotional influence is complex and multifaceted, deriving from several interconnected factors.

Familiarity with local brands creates a sense of comfort and trust, making it easier for consumers and tourists to choose. Cultural identification, in turn, reinforces this connection, as brands that reflect local values and traditions resonate more deeply with consumers. The perceived quality of brands, which is often associated with reputation and consistency, also contributes to a positive perception, encouraging loyalty and repeat purchases.

In addition, brand recognition both within the community and in wider regions strengthens the sense of belonging and local pride. This recognition helps to create and consolidate positive memories associated with brands, increasing consumers' sense of well-being.

All the elements of each dimension work together within their spectrum to influence the development of strong emotions in visitors, which leads to the creation of connection. This connection not only increases brand loyalty, but also promotes a more rewarding and emotionally satisfying consumer experience. Ultimately, the influence of brands and their locality translates into a lasting bond that benefits both consumers and the brands themselves.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Local brand-based development is becoming increasingly challenging and necessary for regions and localities to distinguish themselves from one another. However, when local brands come together and collaborate to attract visitors to their markets, without competing with each other or carrying out actions that could harm the group, they enter into a symbiosis that generates positive synergies.

According to the analysis of the data, the symbiosis of brands not only contributes to the visibility and prominence of the town and region, as well as the brands themselves, but also has a positive influence on visitors' emotions. This influence results from the effects associated with the brand and the location. The symbiosis of local brands creates synergies that go beyond simple individual promotion; they strengthen the sense of community, improve the visitor experience and generate a lasting impact. These combined effects promote sustainable and balanced development, benefiting everyone involved.

Thus, the symbiosis of local brands should be seen as a powerful creator of emotions, essential for building visitor loyalty and encouraging them to return again and again. Brands create a welcoming and cohesive environment that resonates deeply with visitors. This synergy not only increases the visibility and prominence of the brands and the location, but also builds a unique and memorable emotional experience.

In addition to creating cultural identification and perceived quality, they also create trust and comfort, crucial elements for creating a strong emotional bond. Visitors don't just see products or services, but a vibrant and welcoming community that values its roots and traditions. This emotional connection is what turns a simple visit into an unforgettable experience and brand recognition within the community and beyond reinforces a sense of well-being and local pride.

When visitors perceive that they are taking part in something bigger and more significant, this boosts revisits and increases the profitability of localities and regions.

This is because the positive memory associated with these experiences strengthens loyalty and the desire to relive pleasant moments.

Therefore, the symbiosis of local brands not only attracts visitors, but also turns them into emotional ambassadors for the region. They come back not just for the product or service, but for the whole experience and the sense of belonging that has been carefully cultivated. Ultimately, this symbiosis creates a virtuous cycle of loyalty and return, which drives sustainable development and continued growth for the brands and for the town and region.

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The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

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