



## Using attribution theory to explain tourists' attachments to place-based brands

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### ABSTRACT

Assuming a holistic view of attribution, the paper presents hypotheses regarding the mediating role of brand related attributions in the relationships between tourists' experiences (pleasure, arousal, satisfaction) and their emotional attachments to place-based brands. Testing the hypotheses involves a sample of 3460 visitors to fifteen international regions and examining wine (e.g., regional umbrella brands such as Bordeaux, Rioja, Tuscany, Napa, and Western Hills) as the tested stimulus. Results suggest that brand related attributions fully mediate the influence of pleasure and satisfaction on brand attachments, whereas arousal has a direct effect; prior place attachment and place to brand associations enhance effects of the tourism experience.

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### 1. Introduction

Research on consumer brand relationships advocates examining consumers' affective experiences as their influence may extend beyond short-term effects to the longer-term relationship (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Marketing practice also acknowledges such a link between consumer affective experiences and attachment. For example, the CEO of a well-known California winery describes the interaction between travelers, the destination, and the regional brands as follows, "We know that the experience they have in visiting this region, the pleasure and the stimulation they receive from visiting our region and the wines associated with it, will lead them to buy our wines in the future. Their experience in this place can be

invaluable to building long-term relationships with them as buyers of our brand." Managers directing and positioning regional brands (i.e., unique foods, arts and crafts, or apparel originating from a designated geographical place) realize that, as tourism destinations, their location provides an important means of enhancing visitors' attachment to their products (Iversen & Hem, 2008). Preliminary research specific to umbrella brands also shows that consumer experiences in one category can impact substantially relationships to products in other categories (Erdem, 1998).

Previous research examines relationships between consumer affective experiences and their attachment to places in a tourism, leisure, and recreation context (e.g., Gross & Brown, 2006; Hammitt, Backlund, & Bixler, 2006), and tests the impact of consumer experiences on brand evaluation in retail environments, museums, brandscapes and other contexts where the experience associates strongly with a focal brand (Hollenbeck, Peters, & Zinkhan, 2008; Kozinets et al., 2002). Importantly, results demonstrate the influence of store evoked pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction can extend beyond the place (retail environment) to influence consumer attachments to brands (Orth, Limon, & Rose, 2010). However studies have not yet investigated the impact of affective experiences on consumers' attachments to brands when "place" (such as a tourism destination) is an

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integral part of the experience, thereby representing an important gap in the current literature.

Relationship theory supports a direct link between consumer affective experiences and post-visit brand attachment (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011; Orth et al., 2010); this research extends existing studies by examining specific attributions that explain the association. This holistic perspective on attribution theory (Bierhoff, 1989; Wang, 2008) posits that consumer cognitive attributions are critical to explaining more fully this experience to attachment linkage (Feeney, 2004; Gallo & Smith, 2001; Hammitt et al., 2006). Previous studies, however, do not test this connection in a consumer/brand relationship context. Therefore, this research synthesizes and extends the existing literature by examining the impact of consumer hedonically based motivations (i.e., pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction) evoked during the visit to an international tourism destination on their subsequent levels of attachment to the region's brands. Strong brand attachments are important as they contribute to brand equity (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), increase consumer loyalty (Orth et al., 2010), and stimulate the buyer's willingness to pay a price premium (Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008). Investigating the experience-attachment link the study reveals the mediating influences of consumers' experience based attributions on brand attachment; thus reporting on the impact of both the attribution and attributional processes involved (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Wang, 2008: p 459). Given consumers' pre-existing beliefs and motivations influence causal attributions (see Kelley & Michela, 1980), the present research also examines prior place-attachment and the strength of place-to-brand associations as moderators.

Hence the study builds upon and contributes to several research streams by assessing the brand attachment implications of tourism experiences. The work also provides managers and marketers with critical insights to the development of successful marketing strategies that leverage the affective side of consumer tourism experiences and the brands produced in the region.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1. Attachments

Brand attachment's theoretical underpinning assumes antecedents reflected by a series of repeated satisfactory outcomes with the brand (Orth et al., 2010), connections to self-identity (Park et al., 2010), and a strong positive affect toward the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Consumers form emotional attachments to both brands (Thomson et al., 2005) and places (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993). Defined as a developmental bond between an individual and a tangible or intangible entity (Bowlby, 1979), such attachment's strength varies and predicts an individual's commitment to the relationship target (Thomson et al., 2005). Antecedents of differing attachments include characteristics of the target, consumer use of and experience with the target, socio-psychological, and cultural interpretations and constructed meanings of people and target interactions (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). Consumer affective experiences can influence their attachments to targets significantly featured during these experiences (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011; Gross & Brown, 2006; Hammitt et al., 2006; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Orth et al., 2010). These affective experiences potentially modify consumers' behavior by creating or strengthening brand attachment.

### 2.2. Affective experiences

Consumers' affective experiences while visiting a place directly influence their behavior (Brakus et al., 2009; Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005; Sherman, Mathur, & Smith, 1997). For example, store evoked affects impact short-term outcomes such as product evaluations, approach/avoidance behaviors, and in-store spending (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000). More importantly, the affect

evoked while visiting a tourism destination creates an attachment to that particular place (Gross & Brown, 2006; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) attribute this phenomenon to an "emotional memory" effect. Researchers frequently conceptualize affect as pleasure and arousal (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Sherman et al., 1997) and examine these reactions' impact on satisfaction (Oliver, 1997; Sherman et al., 1997; Wirtz, Mattila, & Tan, 2000). Hence, satisfaction reflects an affective state resulting from the consumer's appraisal of the environment (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001). In summary, strong evidence supports the affect-attachment link.

### 2.3. Attribution response to affective experiences and influence on brand attachment

The central theme underlying attribution theories is that causal analysis is inherent in an individual's need to understand events (Weiner, 2000). Because attachment formation involves both attribution (tourism experience as a perceived cause) and attributional processes (influence of attributions on attachment), adopting a holistic perspective (Wang, 2008) helps to understand what part of an experience is responsible for positive (or negative) consumer perceptions and any resulting brand attachments (Bierhoff, 1989; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 2000).

Fig. 1 illustrates the hedonically motivated contributing factors comprising affective tourism experiences (pleasure, arousal and satisfaction), and the hypothesized relationship between tourism experience (both place and brand related) and place-based brand attachments. The figure also shows the expected mediating influence of brand-related attributions on attachment.

The model is consistent with established theoretical frameworks of relational exchanges that suggest attributions mediate the influence of affective experiences on a person's attachment to the target (Babu, 2004; Diamond, 2001). Additional support for attributions' mediating role influencing attachments stems from preliminary findings in the tourism literature (Babu, 2004; Zins, 2002), brand management (Brakus et al., 2009), consumer affiliation behaviors (Menon & Kahn, 2002), store environments (Babin & Attaway, 2000) and satisfaction (Oliver, 1997).

Marketing researchers apply attribution theories to explain consumer attitudes and behaviors by indicating cause-and-effect relationships (Folkes, 1988). The causal attribution categories people generate in response to experiences include stimulus, medium, circumstances, or a combination of these three (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Place-based brands serve as the stimulus, the medium is the tourism experience (pleasure, arousal and satisfaction), and the causal attribution is the cognitive outcome generated by a consumer to derive the cause of their visit's affective outcome (e.g. "The region's wines played a key role in making the visit pleasant"). The consumer's deductive reasoning is an example of attribution process, where consumers attribute external and internal influences in forming judgments of a situation or experience (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Wang, 2008).

If the consumer undergoes a change in behavior as a result of their judgments, like those associated with brand attachment (Fournier, Aaker, & Brasel, 2004; Riley, Niininen, Szivas, & Willis, 2001), this case would be an example of an *attributional* process (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Wang, 2008). Recent criticisms by Wang (2008) specific to the application of attribution theories in many previous marketing studies incorrectly interpret these two distinct aspects of theory leading to erroneous and/or confounding results. However, Wang (2008) also argues that a more "holistic" perspective that incorporates both processes simultaneously is advisable in marketing research, especially when investigating changes to consumer behavior due to their beliefs and motivation (Wang, 2008). The present study adopts this latter view. The aspect of the model testing the

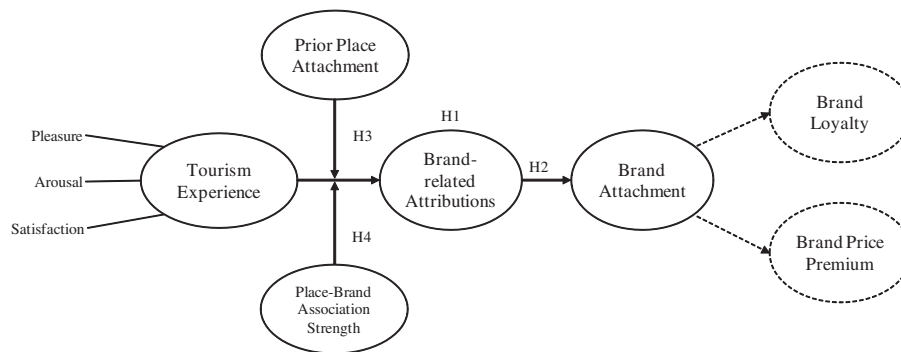


Fig. 1. Relationships between study constructs.

antecedents to brand-related attributions represents the consumer attribution process, whereas the mediating influence of these cognitions on brand attachment reflects the attributional process.

Brand attributions should exert a generally positive effect on attachments because, in the case of tourism experiences, consumers are more motivated hedonically (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Hence, their impressions are driven largely by affective responses that leave lasting impressions associated with the products encountered (c.f. Gross & Brown, 2006). An example of consumer thinking could be: “I drank that wine on my holiday and my holiday was wonderful. That wine is made in that special place and so it's wonderful and special too – just like my holiday!” A positive tourism experience plays a significant role in enhancing brand-related attributions (e.g., perceived brand ‘specialness’) contributing to stronger brand attachments. Therefore:

**H1.** A positive tourism experience, comprised of destination-evoked pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction, enhances brand-related attributions. and

**H2.** Brand-related attributions generated in response to an affective experience positively relate to brand attachment.

#### 2.4. Prior place attachment and place brand associations

Prior research shows that the effects of consumers' positive affective experiences on brand attachments likely increase when consumers hold prior positive beliefs (Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Kaltcheva & Weitz, 1999; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). As information and beliefs represent established influences to consumer attributions (Kelley & Michela, 1980), consumers should attribute positive affective experiences to a location. Following this perspective, researchers suggest effects of positive place attachment extend beyond the destination (Gross & Brown, 2006; Hammitt et al., 2006). Therefore, a consumer's existing bond with a region should influence their attribution to affective experiences. In other words, a stronger a priori attachment to the place should increase the bonding effect of the tourism experience because the tourist typically attributes impression-consistent information to the brand, rather than deflecting and discounting the input (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001). This view follows research showing that consumers unlikely engender positive attributions directed at the target when they have less favorable associations with it (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 1999). Given the cognitive process mechanisms of attribution based biasing (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004), and discounting (Posavac, Sanbonmatsu, Kardes, & Fitzsimons, 2004), consumers should generate positive attributions towards region-based brands when a positive experience coincides with a prior positive attachment to the specific place. Conversely, a less positive effect likely results when consumers feel less attached a priori (Brakus et al., 2009). Perceptions of a strong and exclusive link

between the region and the brands encountered there should further reinforce the “specialness” of those associated brands in consumers' minds, with the alternative true when such associations are weak. Therefore:

**H3.** Prior place attachment enhances the influence of the tourism experience (pleasure, arousal and satisfaction) on brand-related attributions. and

**H4.** The strength of place to brand associations enhances the influence of the tourism experience (pleasure, arousal and satisfaction) on brand-related attributions.

### 3. Empirical study

#### 3.1. Methodology

##### 3.1.1. Overview

To test the specified hypotheses, a field study investigated how the affect evoked during tourists' visits to a region influences their brand-related cognitions and subsequent attachments, through consumer attribution and attributional processes (Thomson et al., 2005; Wang, 2008). This approach aligns closely with attributions in advertising research (Laczniak et al., 2001), tourism (Choi & Cai, 2010), sports contexts (Madrigal, 2003), and more general attribution research investigating the motivational role of affect (Gorini et al., 2009; Oikawa, Aarts, & Oikawa, 2011).

Respondents were visitors to fifteen regional wine destinations in eight countries; Australia (Adelaide Hills), Austria (Burgenland, Wachovia), France (Bordeaux, Burgundy), Hungary (Eger, Tokaj), Italy (Marche, Tuscany), Spain (Ribera del Duero, Rioja), Switzerland (Geneva), and the United States (Napa, Sierra Foothills, Sonoma). Focusing on wine regions and wines is appropriate because wine is a hedonically rich category where regional umbrella brands (e.g., protected designations of origin such as the “Bordeaux” or “Rioja” appellations) have strong ties to places, making them especially suitable for examining the influence of affective experiences on attachments (Jiang & Wang, 2006). Also by examining wine regions and wines, there is a greater probability for large variations in independent variables due to differences in regions, regional umbrella brands, and visitors.

##### 3.1.2. Participants

Random intercepts at various wine oriented tourist attractions in the participating regions recruited a total of 3460 male and female participants. These received a variety of regional specialties as incentives for collaboration. Subsequent analyses later excluded 137 participants because of missing data. The final sample size is 3323 respondents (48.7% women and 51.3% men) with an average age of 39.5 years ( $SD=15.8$ ), and a mean traveled distance of 737 miles ( $SD=1823$ ). The use of such a heterogeneous sampling frame is

recommended as theory test procedures require the selection of diverse respondent groups, such that rigorous examinations can be conducted (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1982).

### 3.1.3. Procedure

The data are consistent with a convenience sample, where trained interviewers intercepted participants and handed them a paper questionnaire in the language of their choice (English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, or Spanish). Following instructions from the interviewer to answer all questions to the best of their knowledge, participants completed the questionnaire without further assistance. The survey includes questions about independent variables and the dependent experiential aspects of their visit to the region, such as place based brand attributions, brand attachment, place attachment, the strength of region to brand associations, and managerially relevant consequences. After completion the participants returned the questionnaire and received their incentive.

### 3.1.4. Cross-cultural equivalence

Assessing the applicability of our model in several countries is an important step in establishing the generalizability of the proposed theory. In order for such comparisons to be meaningful, the instruments used to measure the theoretical construct must exhibit adequate cross-national equivalence (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Therefore, a major methodological challenge in this type of international research is ensuring measurement equivalence in the combined use of samples from different countries and cultures. With the current understanding of 'emic/etic' issues and statistical methods, blindly using scales with samples from different cultures without establishing measurement equivalence is unacceptable (Mullen, 1995; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Mullen (1995) states that, if the research goal is ensuring comparability, the equivalence of constructs, samples, and measurement across cultures must be addressed empirically. Cross-cultural equivalence issues include translation, calibration, and metric equivalences (Limon, Kahle, & Orth, 2009). To achieve translation equivalence, bilingual speakers assisted (Douglas & Craig, 2007) in developing analogous, comprehensible and equivalent questionnaires in several major languages. Calibration and metric equivalences in scales used here are based on cross-cultural methodological literature (Mullen, 1995; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998) and yield cross-culturally equivalent data.

### 3.1.5. Measures

Measures for the independent variables include multi-item batteries for pleasure and arousal, and satisfaction as well as measures of prior place attachment and the strength of the place-brand association. The measures for dependent variables include multi-item measures of the brand-related attribution (operationalized as brand specialness), and attachment. Including brand loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price ascertained capturing managerially relevant consequences (Fedorikhin et al., 2008; Orth et al., 2010; Park et al., 2010).

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) seven-point six-item Likert scale measured pleasure and arousal. A seven point, three-item semantic differential scale ranging from one (highly satisfactory, very pleasant, delightful) to seven (highly unsatisfactory, very unpleasant, terrible) (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002) assessed satisfaction. A three-item seven-point metric developed and validated by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) assessed emotional attachments to the brand, and Thomson et al.'s (2005) metrics assessed loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium.

A customized three-item scale assessed brand attributions (i.e., specialness) based on guidance provided by Lichtenstein and Bearden (1986) and Weiner (1980), using item-batteries developed and validated by Laczniak et al. (2001). A number of theoretical perspectives from the literature assist in capturing the richness of brand attributions, specifically, Orth, Wolf, and Dodd's (2005) and Orth and Kahle's

(2008) levels of benefits aid in detailing attributions. After scale purification and refinement procedures, the final measure uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree) for the items "Wines from the [REGION] are varied and exciting", "The local wines are much sought-after specialties", and "Wines from the [REGION] are unlike any others". Exploratory factor analysis yields a single factor accounting for 87% of the variance with inter-item correlations ranging from 0.78 to 0.91. Aggregating the items (by mean-computing) into a single index ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ ) results in a measure with good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

Orth et al.'s (2005) three-item measure assesses the strength of region-brand associations on a seven-point Likert scale. Example items include "The local wines are a big part of what makes this region special," "[REGION] is well-known for fine wines", and "The local wines have a great reputation." Exploratory factor analysis yields a single factor accounting for 68% of the variance with inter-item correlations ranging from 0.71 to 0.89. Aggregating the items (by mean-computing) into a single metric ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) yields good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ).

Items developed and validated by Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) and Gross and Brown (2006) assess prior place attachment as an affective bond or link between people and specific places. Leisure researchers study place attachment primarily as a psychological element of recreation experiences (Hammitt et al., 2006), and typically describe the construct as having two distinct dimensions: place identity, which refers to a symbolic or affective attachment to a place, and place dependence, which refers to a functional attachment to a place (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). The measure here consists of three items from the place identity subscale: "I feel strongly attached to [REGION]", "I am strongly emotionally connected to [REGION]", and "I do not feel any emotional bond towards [REGION]". Aggregating items (by mean-computing) into a single metric ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) yields good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

Table 1 provides summary statistics, reliabilities, and fit indices for the measures employed. Examining whether the pairwise correlations (adjusted for measurement error) among these constructs are significantly different from 1.0 tests the discriminant validity among them. No correlations are greater than 0.49, and all are more than three standard errors away from 1.0, thus indicating discriminant validity (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991).

## 3.2. Results

### 3.2.1. Analyses

Testing the mediation hypothesis of attributions on the tourism experience – brand attachment model (H1) involves using hierarchical multiple regression procedures (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Moderated regression analyses assess the effects of prior place attachment and place-brand association strength on the attribution measure

**Table 1**  
Summary statistics and reliabilities for study constructs.

Variable	# items	M	SD	$\alpha$	IFC*	VE**
Tourism experience						
Pleasure	3	1.9	.98	.89	>.88	.82
Arousal	3	2.6	1.31	.80	>.87	.88
Satisfaction	3	2.0	.97	.90	>.73	.73
Brand attributions						
Brand specialness	3	3.5	2.14	.90	>.78	.87
Brand attachment	3	3.4	1.68	.90	>.77	.68
Prior place attachment	3	3.1	1.69	.88	>.81	.78
Region brand association	3	2.7	1.36	.75	>.71	.68
Brand loyalty	3	2.8	1.29	.79	>.80	.72
Price premium	2	.77	.56	.79	>.80	.72

\* Item-factor correlation.

\*\* Variance explained.

'brand specialness', and regression analysis aids in assessing downstream effects on brand attachment.

3.2.2. Mediation analyses

Determining whether or not the attribution variable mediates the relation between the tourism experience and brand attachment, involves employing a three-step regression analyses procedure. Following procedures outlined by Zhao et al. (2010) involves: (1) regressing the mediator on the independent variables (IVs); (2) regressing the dependent variable (DV) on the IVs; and (3) regressing the DV on both the IVs and on the mediator. These procedures estimate and test separate coefficients for each equation. The three regression equations provide tests of the mediational model's linkages. Mediation occurs when (a) the IVs significantly affect the mediator, (b) the IVs significantly affect the DV in the absence of the mediator, and (c) the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV, and (d) the effect of the IVs on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator in the model (MacKinnon, Warsi, & Dwyer, 1995). In regard to condition d, a continuum exists ranging from only partial mediation to full mediation when the effect decreases to zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Thus a mediator is a variable that accounts for all, or part, of the relationship between a predictor and the outcome. Table 2 reports the study's mediation results.

Regressing the affect variables on brand attachment yields beta coefficients that are significant for pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction (Table 2, Eq. (1)). Attachment is higher for pleasant, arousing, and satisfying experiences. Furthermore, pleasure and satisfaction, but not arousal, are significant predictors of brand attributions (Table 2, Eq. (2)). Including brand attributions in the regression model along with the experiential variables (Table 2, Eq. (3)) yields that brand attributions and arousal remain significant predictors, whereas the influence of pleasure and satisfaction decreases (becomes insignificant). Important to the mediation hypothesis, adding brand attributions to the set of attachment predictors increases the variance explained relative to the first equation.

These findings provide initial evidence that brand attributions account for all or part of the relation between pleasure and satisfaction, and brand attachments (MacKinnon et al., 1995). Given the marginally significant results for pleasure, MacKinnon et al. (1995) recommend additional statistical methods to more formally assess mediation. Specifically, to test whether brand attributions mediate the influence of pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction on brand attachments the present research conducts Sobel tests (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) employing the Aroian test equation with the formula:  $z\text{-value} = a * b / \text{SQRT}(b^2 * s_a^2 + a^2 * s_b^2 + s_a^2 * s_b^2)$ , where  $a$  = raw (unstandardized) regression

Table 2  
Testing the mediating effect of attributions.

	$\beta$ (standardized)	t	p	F	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj.</sub>
<b>1. Brand attachment = f{tourism experience}</b>					
Pleasure	.20	9.01	.001		
Arousal	.16	8.56	.001		
Satisfaction	.18	7.94	.001	120.80	.12
<b>2. Brand specialness = f{tourism experience}</b>					
Pleasure	.29	14.03	.001		
Arousal	.01	.08	.936		
Satisfaction	.34	16.14	.001	279.86	.24
<b>3. Brand attachment = f{tourism experience, brand specialness}</b>					
Brand specialness	.43	22.09	.001		
Pleasure	.06	2.25	.061		
Arousal	.16	9.30	.001		
Satisfaction	.02	1.07	.282	220.48	.26
<b>4. Results of mediation test (Aroian)</b>					
		z	p	Mediated	
Pleasure		8.01	.001	Yes	
Arousal		2.77	.235	No	
Satisfaction		10.04	.001	Yes	

coefficient for the association between IV and mediator,  $s_a$  = standard error of  $a$ ,  $b$  = raw (unstandardized) regression coefficient for the association between mediator and DV, and  $s_b$  = standard error of  $b$ . Resulting critical ratios indicate whether the indirect effect of the IV on the DV via the mediator is different from zero.

Consistent with MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002) the results (z- and p-values) of the Aroian test corroborate the initial conclusion and indicate that attributions fully mediate pleasure and satisfaction effects but not arousal. This finding supports Hypothesis H1 for pleasure and satisfaction. The coefficient's directional nature reflects brand attribution's influence on brand attachment ( $\gamma = 0.43$ ) further supporting H2 and the claim that attributions relate positively to brand attachment.

3.2.3. Moderator analyses

H3 posits that prior attachment to a place enhances effects of the tourism experience on brand attributions. Testing the hypothesis includes performing a series of moderated regression analyses for each of the affective experience variables (Irwin & McClelland, 2003; Zhao et al., 2010). The first step of each regression analysis includes the predictor variables. The second step enters step 1 predictor variables and place attachment as independent variables. The last step of the analyses enters all step 2 predictor variables plus the moderator variables (i.e., the interaction variable with place attachment). The previous finding that brand attributions do not mediate the effect of arousal on attachment necessitates regressing brand attributions on pleasure and satisfaction, whereas brand attachment represents the DV for effects involving arousal.

Results in Table 3 indicate a significant effect of the Affective experience x Place attachment interaction term for arousal on attachments and for pleasure but not satisfaction on brand attributions. For attachments the explained variance increases from 0.14 to 0.23, and for attributions from 0.27 to 0.30. Further, the significant interaction is in the predicted direction suggesting that place attachment enhances rather than mutes effects from arousal and pleasure. These findings support Hypothesis H3 for the arousal and pleasure dimensions of tourism experiences.

Table 3  
Testing for the moderating role of place-brand association strength (PBAS).

	$\gamma$	t	p	F	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj.</sub>
<b>1a. Brand specialness = f{Affective experience}</b>					
Pleasure	.23	11.61	.001		
Satisfaction	.30	14.72	.001	397.39	.22
<b>2a. Brand specialness = f{Affective experience, PBAS}</b>					
Pleasure	.19	10.26	.001		
Satisfaction	.19	10.28	.001		
PBAS	.41	25.52	.001	540.16	.37
<b>3a. Brand specialness = f{Affective experience, BNS, Affective experience x PBAS}</b>					
Pleasure	.22	5.24	.001		
Satisfaction	.25	6.03	.001		
PBAS	.49	13.55	.001		
Pleasure x PBAS	.04	.60	.557		
Satisfaction x PBAS	.10	1.57	.119	325.82	.37
<b>1b. Brand attachment = f{Affective experience}</b>					
	$\gamma$	t	p	F	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj.</sub>
Arousal	.18	9.14	.001	83.64	.03
<b>2b. Brand attachment = f{Affective experience, PBAS}</b>					
Arousal	.17	8.99	.001		
PBAS	.26	13.66	.001	137.98	.10
<b>3b. Brand attachment = f{Affective experience, BNS, Affective experience x PBAS}</b>					
Arousal	.16	8.65	.001		
PBAS	.24	8.50	.001		
Arousal x PBAS	.32	8.19	.001	117.35	.14

Finally, H4 posits that place to brand association strength enhance the effects of affective experiences on brand attributions. Results in Table 4 indicate that the interaction between tourism experiences and associations is significant for arousal on attachment only. Explained variance increases from 0.10 to 0.14. In addition, place to brand association strength has a direct positive effect on both brand attributions and attachment. These results support Hypothesis H4 regarding the moderating role of place to brand association strength in the formation of attributions and subsequently attachments for arousal.

Two regression analyses complement the study by assessing downstream effects of brand attachment on loyalty and willingness-to-pay a price premium as consequences important to managers. Attachment has a significant positive effect on loyalty ( $\gamma=0.61$ ,  $F=211.3$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and on willingness-to-pay a premium price ( $\gamma=0.28$ ,  $F=105.6$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This finding corroborates previous more general research and underscores the managerial importance of brand attachment in the investigated tourism and place-based brands context.

#### 4. Discussion

Affective experience's influence on consumer attachment to brands appears significant; however, empirical research dealing with this phenomenon is scarce. Specifically, few studies deal with the manner in which consumers cognitively process affective experiences. This study draws on prior conceptual evidence to develop and test hypotheses relating to the attributional responses used by consumers when experiencing affect during their visit to wine destinations. Generally, the results support the hypotheses and provide several key theoretical contributions.

First, findings show that, except for arousal, causal attributions mediate the affective experience–brand attachment relation. Thus, not only do consumers infer causal attributions when experiencing

pleasure and satisfaction while visiting a destination, but they use these attributions to form subsequent attachments to place-based brands. Second, analysis reveals that prior attachments to the place and the strength of the place brand association influence consumers' responses to the affective experience. The examination of attributional mechanisms bridging two categories, namely, tourism destinations and place-based brands, adds to our understanding of the attachment phenomenon, which, up to this point, draws from empirical investigations of within-category effects (e.g., Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Kozinets et al., 2002; Orth et al., 2010). Third, this research finds that different levels of prior place attachments and place to brand associations lead consumers to form different attributions, hereby identifying two important moderators of effects.

In summary this research's outcomes hold a number of significant implications for managers. First, managers of place-based brands should be aware that visitors to their region actively process their experiences and form strong brand attachments under certain conditions. For example, consumers form stronger attachments when they are more attached to the place and when they perceive the place to brand link as stronger. Thus, it appears that brand managers may be well-advised to focus on visitors whose primary interest initially lies more with the region than with regional brands.

Second, the results imply that consumers have the ability to extend their attachment to places to place-based brands. This finding should encourage brand managers to join forces with tourism managers, as making visits pleasant, arousing, and satisfying may benefit both constituents. Third, the results suggest that managers can enhance the potential effects of positive tourism experiences by strengthening consumer perceptions of the link between the region and the brand.

Several factors possibly limit the generalizability of the findings and represent directions for future research. First, this research deals with attachments in a single place-based category (wine). Although the present study purposefully examines wine as a place-based category, results may not generalize to other categories. For example, goods produced in multiple locations, or with multiple 'places of origin' may limit the "discovery" aspect of encountering local brands while on vacation (Chao, 1993). Conceptualization and design of this study reflect tourist experiences where brands (or categories) may be largely responsible for the consumers' visit to those locations. Further, prior attachment to the place visited and the strength of the association between the brands and the place were tagged moderating variables. These conditions suggest that the findings would generalize to many tourist-oriented locations, where products such as specialized foods, fashion, jewelry, glass/crystal or other locally made crafts are a lure to visitors. Hence the attribution model represents a framework that researchers can modify to account for additional moderators (such as the category, brand name strength, or visitor characteristics).

Second, the results originate from an extensive international field study chosen to represent realistic settings and large variance in conditions. Future research should attempt to investigate relations in more controlled environments (such as experimental settings) to determine if the effects remain robust and comparable to the ones found in this work. Finally, classic attribution theory posits that certain experiential configurations would lead to interactive attributional responses of consumers (e.g., region  $\times$  brand attributions). This study does not deal with these interactive attributions because the current state of theory lacks clear direction as to how they may affect the ultimate dependent variable (attachment).

In conclusion, this study represents an initial attempt to model the process consumers employ when experiencing pleasure, arousal, and satisfaction in tourism settings that lead to place-brand attachments. The results indicate that such affect not only impacts place-based brand attachments directly, but also has an indirect effect through causal attributions made by consumers. In addition, the results

**Table 4**  
Testing for the moderating role of prior place attachment.

	$\gamma$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	$R^2_{adj.}$
<i>1a. Brand specialness = f(Affective experience)</i>					
Pleasure	.23	11.61	.001		
Satisfaction	.30	14.72	.001	397.39	.22
<i>2a. Brand specialness = f(Affective experience, Prior place attachment)</i>					
Pleasure	.26	12.92	.001		
Satisfaction	.18	9.05	.001		
Place attachment	.24	13.59	.001	344.52	.27
<i>3a. Brand specialness = f(Affective experience, Prior place attachment, Affective exp. <math>\times</math> Prior Pl. Att.)</i>					
Pleasure	.24	3.84	.001		
Satisfaction	.18	6.87	.001		
Prior place attachment	.22	6.32	.001		
Pleasure $\times$ Prior place attachment	.13	4.62	.001		
Satisfaction $\times$ Prior place attachment	.01	.016	.990	226.64	.30
<i>1b. Brand attachment = f(Affective experience)</i>					
	$\gamma$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	$R^2_{adj.}$
Arousal	.18	9.14	.001	83.64	.03
<i>2b. Brand attachment = f(Affective experience, Prior place attachment)</i>					
Arousal	.05	2.87	.004		
Prior place attachment	.38	20.77	.001	216.38	.14
<i>3b. Brand attachment = f(Affective experience, Prior place attachment, Affective exp. <math>\times</math> Prior Pl. Att.)</i>					
Arousal	.18	5.16	.001		
Prior place attachment	.64	16.74	.001		
Arousal $\times$ Prior place attachment	-.41	-7.72	.001	167.32	.23

highlight the usefulness of brand and place factors in influencing the effects.

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