

INTEGRATING MEETINGS, INCENTIVES, CONVENTIONS/CONFERENCES AND EXHIBITIONS TOURISM AND HERITAGE IN DESTINATION BRANDING

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Abstract: Business travel is an important form of tourism, and despite the increasing prevalence of remote work, people traveling for business purposes is growing. One such form of tourism is MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions/conferences and exhibitions). MICE tourism is big business, and many destinations throughout the world have targeted this lucrative form of tourism for economic development. However, most MICE attendees are multi-motivational and desire to have other experiences beyond the bounds of their business encounters. This paper examines the crossover between MICE tourism and heritage tourism, both working together to create a destination brand through stakeholder collaboration and brand equity. The study investigates the role of heritage institutions in creating a broader consumer base for people who travel for business purposes, which can lead to longer stays and greater expenditures in the destination. Using qualitative interviews with heritage stakeholders, the study explores how cultural heritage assets contribute to destination branding and complement the MICE sector. The findings indicate that heritage resources, including culinary traditions, music, festivals, and cultural institutions, enhance the attractiveness of destinations for business travelers and encourage engagement beyond MICE activities. The results further highlight the importance of stakeholder collaboration in creating distinctive destination experiences and strengthening destination brand equity. Such goals, however, can only be achieved through intersectoral collaboration. This study contributes to a better understanding of the synergistic relationship between heritage tourism and MICE tourism in destination branding and development.

Keywords: destination branding, MICE tourism, cultural heritage tourism, destination experience

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid increases in consumer demand for distinctive travel opportunities mean that people are seeking more culturally immersive, transformative and diverse experiences (Baruca & Čivre, 2022; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Matheson, 2005; Meng & Choi, 2017). This is even the case with business travelers and other non-leisure tourists, many of whom seek recreational or educational opportunities while in the destination for other reasons (Frost & Frost, 2025; Liu et al., 2025). This paper focuses on one type of business traveler—people participating in meetings, incentives, conventions (or conferences), and exhibitions (MICE tourism) (Chiang et al., 2012). Heritage sites can help meet the ancillary needs of business travelers.

The destination's cultural attractions and events help create a unique distraction for MICE tourists and create additional appeal for non-leisure tourists. One of the most pervasive tourism resources on the planet, heritage assets are an important part of the tourism landscapes of most MICE destinations, making the destination more interesting and attractive for MICE travelers. Event planning organizations often select cities or regions with interesting cultural or natural heritage to draw additional attendees to their meetings (Ciuffreda & Simonetti, 2024; Harris & Pressey, 2021). Well managed and marketed cultural heritage can help maintain a destination's unique qualities that often give business travelers a reason to extend their stay before or after their MICE event (Chhabra & Kim, 2018).

Stakeholder collaboration is critical to ensure that destinations are managed holistically, in ways that would appeal to many different types of visitors and tourists. Research has revealed the important role of stakeholder collaboration and partnerships in successful destination branding (e.g., Hankinson, 2012; Scott et al., 2008), yet empirical studies focusing on stakeholder interactions and their importance in branding and tourism development remain limited (Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019). Also, there is a growing body of recent literature examining the importance of the destination brand experience (Guleria et al., 2024; Mandagi & Centeno, 2024; Ngwira et al., 2023; Steriopoulos et al., 2024). However, most of this research focuses on consumers' experiences and emphasizes the significance of their perceptions, while

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studies that address the perspectives of destination managers or stakeholders and their collaborative efforts are still limited. In addition, there has been little research into the destination brand experience of MICE destinations, particularly from the viewpoint of heritage and cultural managers as auxiliary experience providers.

This study seeks to address this research gap by enhancing an understanding of destination marketing and branding development from a multi-stakeholder perspective. Given the crucial role of stakeholders in destination management, this study aims to demonstrate stakeholders' understanding of the importance and value of combining MICE and heritage tourism for creative destination branding, rather than focusing only on the business element of MICE travel. Our results show that a destination can effectively create a symbiotic relationship between MICE tourism and heritage tourism to improve branding, positioning and marketing efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted above, MICE tourism entails people undertaking personal or employer-funded trips to attend meetings, conventions and exhibitions, or participate in incentive travel. Cultural and heritage tourism entails people visiting localities of historical, artistic, or cultural importance (Silberberg, 1995; Timothy, 2021). In this study, heritage institutions include museums, historic sites and monuments, cultural events, and other assets that serve as cultural attractions.

Destination marketing and branding involve activities that identify the uniqueness of a location and set it apart from other places. Recent reviews have further emphasized the importance of destination image in shaping travel decision-making and destination competitiveness. A favorable destination image helps destinations differentiate themselves from competitors and influences visitors' perceptions and behavioral intentions (Sekhniashvili, 2021). Its goal is to enhance what makes the destination special and appealing, to create a positive image that influences consumer choices and fosters emotional connections with visitors (Blain et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2004; Qu et al., 2011). Although a destination's image can develop organically through time as its reputation develops without much intervention, most branding today is an intentional planning exercise in creating a desired image. A destination brand is the positive result of successful unity and collaboration among tourism destination stakeholders (Prideaux & Cooper, 2002). As Morgan et al. (2004) observe, the long-term sustainability of a destination brand is essential for successfully appealing to target markets and to efficiently deliver brand values. This ability of the brand is a function of how a destination can incorporate the different interests of diverse stakeholders involved in the branding process (Morgan et al., 2004; Shoukat et al., 2023). Much of the tourism industry relies on cultural attractions and events; heritage tourism is among the most pervasive types of tourism on the planet (Timothy, 2021). Heritage resources also play an important role in sustaining local identity, fostering community participation, and strengthening cultural pride. As living cultural expressions, heritage traditions contribute not only to tourism development but also to identity formation and community sustainability (Kurniawan et al., 2026). Heritage institutions must engage with other stakeholders to address not only conservation and educational needs but also broader community needs, including tourism and economic development (Silberberg, 1995; Liu et al., 2025). In the past, many heritage institutions have been reluctant to acknowledge their role in tourism, as they saw themselves as curators of culture rather than commodifiers of culture. Nonetheless, most heritage institutions (e.g. museums and archaeological sites) now acknowledge their reliance on tourism to fund their activities and to provide audiences for their educational and preservation mandates (Timothy & Tahan, 2020). Collaboration is a crucial factor for the sustainable development and competitiveness of destinations (Gill & Williams, 1994; Goffi et al., 2023; Khusaini et al., 2024; Timothy, 1998).

Silberberg (1995) notes that collaborating between tourism subsectors may offer a variety of experiences that many people seek, thus enhancing the perceived value of their time and money. Researchers have also suggested that heritage managers should collaborate with other stakeholders, including MICE organizations, to achieve community goals and mitigate some of the challenges the tourism industry faces (Ciuffreda & Simonetti, 2024; Minh, 2025; Silberberg, 1995).

Buhalis (2000) stresses that destination marketing should balance the strategic objectives of all stakeholders and the sustainability of local resources, including the increasingly vital role of cultural heritage (Timothy, 2021). To achieve successful destination marketing and branding in the MICE sector, partnerships with heritage institutions can offer MICE planners alternative attractions and activities for business travelers, thereby adding appeal to the potential MICE destination and creating symbiotic relationships and synergies between business travel and other forms of tourism (Ciuffreda & Simonetti, 2024; Li et al., 2006; Minh, 2025; Silberberg, 1995). Emphasizing MICE destinations' cultural heritage can foster creative tourism and encourage visitors to engage in a wider range of activities in situ and potentially stay longer in the destination.

According to Marzano & Scott (2009), a destination brand is the product of comprehensive collaboration between stakeholders, yet most of the literature has focused overwhelmingly on external stakeholders, or customers (Chen et al., 2020; Park & Petrick, 2006). García et al. (2012) acknowledge that many branding studies ignore local communities as stakeholders, although several studies have warned against bypassing communities' voices and perspectives (Freire, 2009; García et al., 2012; Marzano & Scott, 2009). Several destination marketing and branding studies have focused on travelers' experiences. One study shows that tourists' experiences with heritage brands, their cultural intelligence, and their loyalty to destination brands are positively linked to the equity of consumer-based heritage destination brands (Rahman et al., 2021). The study recommends that heritage and hospitality organizations focus more on enhancing tourists' experiences and cultural intelligence to build stronger consumer-based heritage destination brands (Rahman et al., 2021).

Guleria et al. (2024) find that positive and memorable experiences significantly influence the satisfaction tourists feel towards a destination, contributing to strong customer-based destination brand equity (CBDBE). Guleria and colleagues advise that destination management organizations should prioritize creating memorable experiences and fostering positive emotions to gain a sustained competitive advantage, rather than solely focusing on single product-

centered marketing. The Creative MICE Tourism Destination Branding Model (CMDBM) (Figure 1) illustrates destination branding as co-created by various stakeholders (Kim et al., 2022). The fundamental element of the CMDBM relies on MICE travelers' assessments of a destination's ability to generate brand equity by leveraging its cultural and heritage resources as value-added attractions. Kim et al. (2022) argue that the importance of the destination brand experience is predicated upon the value that cultural experiences and heritage resources add to the MICE destination. Even though there have been several recent studies on destination brand experiences, heritage tourism brand experiences and co-created destination brands, most of them focus on the tourists without considering the perspectives of destination managers or tourism providers (Kim et al., 2018; Mandagi & Centeno, 2024; Ngwira et al., 2023; Steriopoulos et al., 2024).

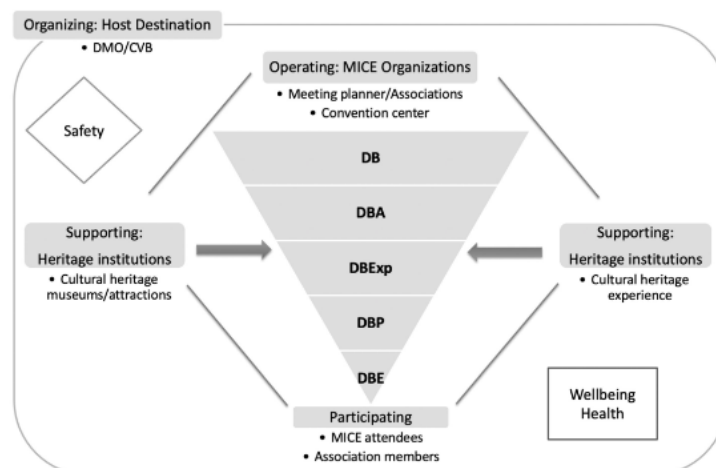


Figure 1. Creative MICE Destination Branding Model (CMDBM) by Kim et al., 2022

STUDY METHODS

The study took place in New Orleans, USA. The city is a popular MICE tourism destination, hosting over 100 major national and international business events each year, including conventions and trade shows. Many of these events are hosted in the popular New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. New Orleans is also home to many heritage attractions and events that draw a more leisure- and cultural-oriented clientele. The combination of the city's key position as a MICE destination and an iconic heritage locale in the United States made New Orleans a suitable location for this study.

Research and Interview Design

At this stage in the research, interviewing heritage professionals in the destination would suggest how a destination can effectively make use of MICE and heritage resources to better perform their branding and marketing efforts. Interview data can show stakeholders' understanding of comingling MICE opportunities and heritage tourism for creative MICE tourism-based destination branding. Interviews can communicate interpretive and evaluative knowledge and are especially suitable for studying phenomena about which little is known (Creswell, 2013b). This study utilized interviews with executives of ten popular cultural heritage institutions in New Orleans, including New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival and Foundation, New Orleans Jazz Museum, the Southern Food & Beverage Museum, Preservation Hall, The Cabildo & Presbytere, Ogden Museum of Southern Arts, the New Orleans Museum of Arts, and the Historic New Orleans Collection. Interviews involve semi-structured, open-ended questions that were intended to draw out the views and opinions of key players (Creswell, 2013a). A representative of the city's main DMO was contacted to obtain first-hand knowledge about the city's branding strategy. This information was used to direct interviews with heritage attraction managers. The questions were also derived from existing models and examples from the literature. Questions about heritage organizations' role in destination branding were developed, including their knowledge about the use of multiple forms of tourism in a MICE destination to help create a recognizable brand. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with heritage stakeholders.

Data collection

Online interviews were conducted with executives from ten popular cultural heritage institutions in New Orleans. Interviews were conducted via email. Email interviews are rich sources of data (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004), particularly among busy managers who are able to answer questions at their own pace and in their own time. The quality and the richness of data obtained via asynchronous email interviews are similar to data acquired in face-to-face interviews (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Email interview data tends to be more structured and less constricted by data repetition. This style of interviewing allows participants to focus better, providing more time for participants to consider their answers. The participants can review their responses and reflect on them, which helps them engage in more careful and meaningful communication (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Participants received informed consent options and detailed information about the research. Interviewees were initially informed about the subject, purpose, and importance of the study through an introduction letter during the recruitment process. From the initial recruitment contact until the final interview confirmation, the researchers and all interviewees had at least three opportunities for two-way communication. Each participant was given a link to a Qualtrics survey. The data was immediately cleared of identifying information and the contents copied into a Word

document (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). Participants were given 2.5 weeks to answer the online questions. To check reliability, efforts were made to ensure that there were no shifts in the meaning of the codes during the coding process by constant data comparisons with the codes and by memo writing about the codes (Creswell, 2013a). To check validity, this study used member checking and peer debriefing to decide the accuracy of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2013a). Transcripts were also checked several times to ensure that no misstatements occurred during the downloading of the data from Qualtrics.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Transcribed data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti, and two sequential phases of coding were used. In the first phase, transcripts were examined and compared to each other. The first coding process allowed the researchers to remain open to all possible emerging theoretical directions, and to provide an opportunity to reflect on the contents and the nuances of the data (Saldaña, 2025). Also, besides the codes, personal analytic memos were used to reflect the process of coding. After the first coding, the data were reconstructed to develop a better sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical association (Saldaña, 2025). In this stage, some codes were combined, whereas some codes were deleted if there were sufficient infrequency, irrelevance, and redundancy (Silver & Lewins, 2014). To increase validity, observation notes were used to check if there were potential biases or vague answers while documenting the process of data collection and coding. In addition to the analysis of coding and interpreting, word clouds were developed to provide visual data and analyze large amounts of text (Wang et al., 2014). Word clouds are useful for showing what words appear more and less frequently in a document. They are a visualization tool that provides an overview of textual documents, encodes additional information, and aids in comparing words and their frequencies across texts (An et al., 2023; Lohmann et al., 2015). Three or more word clouds for each concept are provided in the findings section to provide insight into the perspectives of interviewees.

FINDINGS

Executives from ten of New Orleans' lead heritage institutions participated in the study. These representatives were asked about the city's destination branding, any extant relationships between heritage tourism and MICE tourism, and partnerships with other tourism organizations to promote heritage and MICE tourism.

Destination Branding in New Orleans

After a brief introduction, the heritage managers were asked about destination branding. They were asked how they expected New Orleans' new branding campaign to make the city more distinctive and attractive, and how they felt the brand might be beneficial to the city's tourism industry. Questions also asked if destination branding benefits MICE travelers in New Orleans in experiencing the unique heritage features of the destination and whether or not it affects MICE travelers' satisfaction with their entire travel experience. Finally, they were asked if they believe the new destination brand would benefit their cultural institutions and how they rate New Orleans' branding strategy in promoting heritage tourism.

Participants were confident that New Orleans has a reputation as a premier destination with an interesting history, an abundance of dining, musical and festival experiences, and unique cultural heritage places and celebrations. According to participants, the city does make an effort to attract more business events, and they believe that people visiting New Orleans for conferences and events do participate in leisure activities outside their work environment.

Regarding the city's recent branding campaign, *One Time in New Orleans*, both positive and negative perspectives were highlighted. Some participants were unsure about the effectiveness of the new branding effort. A few noted that the campaign name is somewhat vague, which makes it hard to understand what the phrase is meant to convey. Since the city's tourism is operated largely by word of mouth, some stakeholders doubt how long the tag line would last. Skeptics believed that the branding was ineffective in making the city more attractive or distinctive. Some believed that it fails to utilize the city's cultural milieu to promote tourism, and it may not affect their organization positively or negatively. Examples of perceived inadequacies in the New Orleans promotional campaign include:

"I don't think this campaign makes New Orleans more distinctive and attractive" (Interviewee 5).

"One time in New Orleans' seems to be a little on the vague side" (Interviewee 9).

"While it is always good to have a marketable brand or image to promote tourism, I am not sure that 'One Time in New Orleans' captures the spirit of the city" (Interviewee 7).

"The tag line seems too similar to Las Vegas's 'What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas'" (Interviewee 7).

"One Time in New Orleans' does little to make the city seem more distinctive or attractive" (Interviewee 7).

"New Orleans is already seen as a premier destination" (Interviewee 2).

"New Orleans is constantly selling its culture as its main attraction; however, [the DMO] did not utilize the actual culture bearers to promote the city" (Interviewee 5).

On the flipside, several participants had more positive views of the campaign, suggesting that the words combined with a strong visual may portray the uniqueness of New Orleans. They believe that the campaign creates an appeal for the city as a destination for once-in-a-lifetime experiences. They see the idea behind the campaign is to emphasize how everyone who visits New Orleans has a story, and the campaign is meant to encourage people to share their experiences. The same participants think the brand does a good job of showcasing a lot of assets New Orleans has to offer. Some of them believe that the branding effort is more focused on leisure travel, but they also believe that the effort has the potential to benefit MICE travelers as well. Destination branding is essential to convey the message that New Orleans is a prime location for conferences and meetings. Many participants suggested that the destination brand helps attract visitors to the city, including drawing people to its cultural institutions. They believe the destination brand is beneficial for local heritage institutions because the

marketing effort celebrates New Orleans' rich living and built cultural heritage. In addition, some interviewees believe that the city's branding efforts do contribute to MICE visitors' overall satisfaction. Examples of positive opinions of the brand include:






"In my experience, MICE travelers are seeking something different and unique, especially for conference related affairs. This branding contributes to their overall satisfaction" (Interviewee 5).

"The brand does a great job of showcasing all that New Orleans has to offer, and I think highlighting those offerings makes the city seem more attractive as a destination" (Interviewee 8).

"...anything that brings people to the city will help us. Then it is our jobs to get them to visit us" (Interviewee 3).

This part of destination branding is divided into five codes: about New Orleans, branding for heritage, branding for New Orleans, branding for travelers, and 'One time in New Orleans.' Each code was embedded into the word cloud generator to visualize the word frequencies. Music shows up as the largest word in the first cloud with other important words being culture, heritage and food. This suggests the concepts that executives of cultural heritage institutions in New Orleans believe are the most valuable resources of the city. The large and noteworthy words associated with branding for heritage, as indicated in the second cloud, are people, music, help and beneficial, which suggests that heritage managers believe the branding strategy is helpful and beneficial for their institutions. The cloud related to branding concepts for New Orleans shows several notable words including city, more, diverse, unique, cultural, spirit, and tourism, suggesting several components are used in describing the destination branding itself for the city. 'Experience' shows up as the largest word in the fourth cloud depicting branding for travelers, with 'cultural' being the next remarkable word in this code. Other notable words including heritage, music, memorable and unique, suggesting characteristics the city's brand can provide for New Orleans visitors. Finally, the last cloud, One Time New Orleans, shows that people and experiences are the most significant words here, followed by unique, city and visitors. This underscores the importance of people and unique experiences in the city's branding.

Table 1. Five Word Clouds for Destination Branding in New Orleans

1. About New Orleans	2. Branding for Heritage
	
3. Branding for New Orleans	4. Branding for Travelers
	
5. One Time in New Orleans	
	

Heritage Tourism

In the second part of the interviews, participants were asked about cultural heritage and tourism in New Orleans. They were asked if they believe that a destination's unique natural and cultural resources attract more MICE travelers and that eventually these unique qualities can be more effective in differentiating the destination from its competitors. They were also asked to elaborate their thoughts on whether New Orleans' cultural heritage assets are beneficial for the destination and tourism organizations in attracting more MICE events and travelers to the city.

Not surprisingly, all interviewees strongly believe that New Orleans' cultural heritage resources are important assets and make the destination unique and more attractive for travelers. The area's heritage preserves the city's unique qualities, which is a primary reason people frequently extend their stays in New Orleans beyond their business-related activities. They stress that New Orleans' heritage is what makes the city attractive, including for MICE event attendees. Heritage

managers believe the city’s tourism marketing organization does a good job of promoting local heritage sites and events. Some interviewees noted that business travelers usually want MICE events to be held in interesting places, which means that marketing strategies that make places more interesting and would increase the number of events and attract more MICE visitors. Examples of positive opinions about the attractiveness of cultural heritage resources include:

“I believe the resurgence of traditional music and culture has differentiated New Orleans in the past five years” (Interviewee 4).

“...as time goes on, more and more visitors want to take part in what makes a city unique, rather than [being] the same as other cities” (Interviewee 5).

“We serve as an asset to New Orleans tourism organizations, as we directly do what they are trying to market” (Interviewee 5).

“...New Orleans is an exciting location for MICE travelers... When people have to travel here for work, they know they are also going to have fun, and experience things they won’t experience in Las Vegas, LA, Houston, Atlanta, etc” (Interviewee 8).

“...our natural and cultural heritage resources are definitely attractive to MICE travelers” (Interviewee 10).

Participants also voiced concerns about the sustainable use of heritage in the destination. Among culture purveyors and protectors there is a growing sense of heritage exploitation with the growing influx of tourists. The proliferation of no-fee music clubs on Bourbon Street and Frenchman Street could undermine the work of artists trying to support themselves.

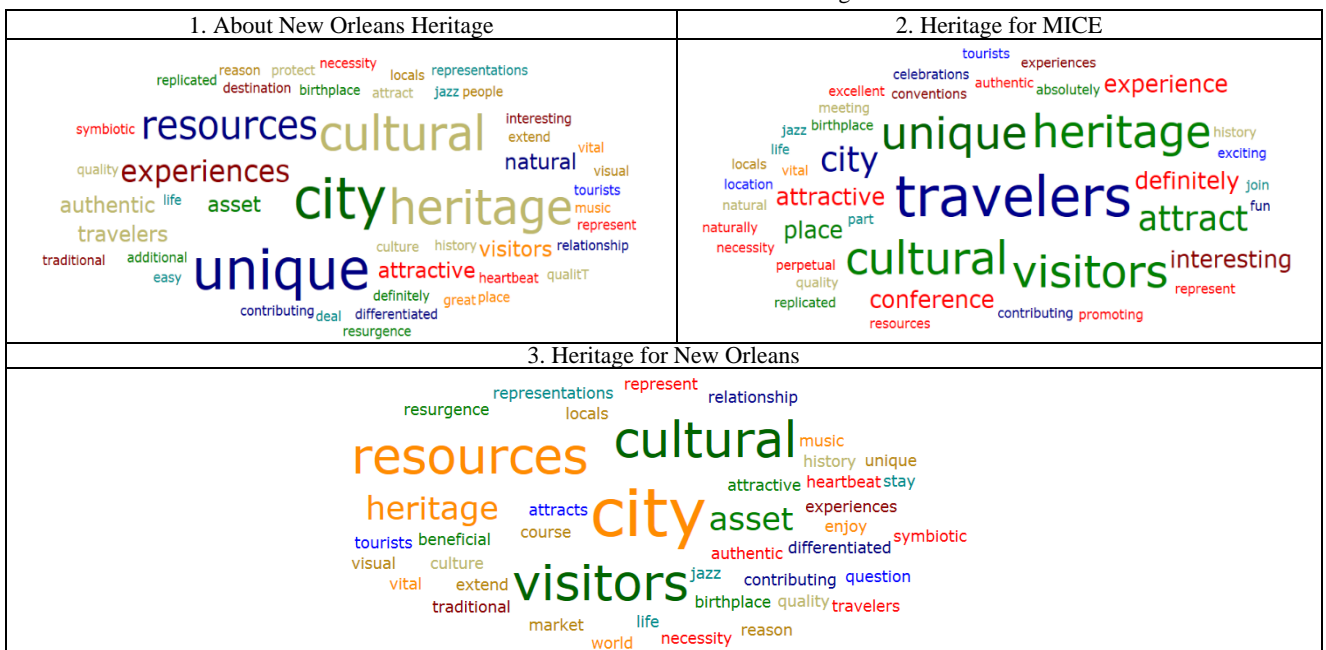
There is a pervasive opinion that simply marketing the city is not enough to assist cultural heritage activities and institutions. Sustainable cultural economies must utilize public funds to support the protection, interpretation, and display of cultural heritage to increase visits and visitors’ expenditures. Examples of concern for the destination’s cultural heritage tourism include:

“New Orleans is a unique American city. Everything must be done to protect the city’s unique qualities. My fear is that with everyday become a Mardi Gras day that the unique nature of these special seasonal events will be minimized” (Interviewee 9).

“The cultural heritage resources represent a vital quality of life necessity for both locals and tourists. More should be done to promote such events” (Interviewee 9).

“...I often wonder what programs tourism agencies are doing to assist local heritage and cultural activities and venues” (Interviewee 4). This part of heritage tourism in New Orleans is divided into three codes: about New Orleans heritage, heritage for MICE, and heritage for New Orleans. Each code was selected and pasted into the word cloud generator to visualize the word frequencies. ‘Unique’ and ‘city’ are the biggest words in the first cloud, which is the best descriptions for New Orleans heritage. According to the second cloud, other impactful words include ‘cultural’, ‘heritage’, ‘resources’ and ‘experiences’. The second cloud displaying data on heritage for MICE shows several notable words including ‘unique’, ‘cultural’, ‘heritage’, ‘attract’ (attractive), ‘travelers’ and ‘visitors’. The last cloud of heritage for New Orleans shows that ‘city’, ‘cultural’, ‘resources’, ‘assets’ and ‘visitors’ are the most often repeated words. All three word clouds demonstrate interviewees’ belief that the city’s unique cultural heritage is a significant asset for the destination in providing unique experience for all visitors, including MICE travelers.

Table 2. Three Word Clouds for Cultural Heritage Tourism



Collaboration (partnership) to promote both MICE and heritage tourism

Study participants were also asked about their collaboration and/or partnership efforts with other organizations. They were asked if they have had partnerships with tourism organizations including the convention center, the convention and visitors bureau, and/or any other tourism-related organizations in New Orleans, and if they believe it is beneficial for their institutions to collaborate with these organizations to promote the heritage they manage. Considering the destination, they were asked if they believe that the MICE sector should consider collaborating and partnering more with heritage attractions

and events to attract more MICE events and increase the number of MICE travelers to the destination. Findings suggest that many cultural institutions have collaborated with the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB, recently changed its official name to New Orleans & Company) and the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC) in terms of promotional activities. This is important when considering that some cultural/heritage institutions do not regard themselves as part of local tourism (Gillot, 2020). Some interviewees said that NOCVB and NOTMC are supporters and promoters of heritage institutions, and they believe that this is how many visitors learn about the city’s living culture and built heritage. Some interviewees indicated that local heritage institutions support NOCVB and NOTMC by providing all the data and materials these tourism organizations request. Some expressed doubt that these activities are helpful for the heritage institutions themselves. A few heritage agencies admitted not collaborating with the destination’s tourism organizations, as they do not see the value in doing so. Examples of opinions about collaboration include:

“All tourism-related organizations benefit the museum because they help in spreading the word about it” (Interviewee 2).

“We always support the initiatives of the NOCVB is speaking to visiting journalists and others” (Interviewee 3).

“We often support tourism development initiatives directly providing content and identity for their campaigns” (Interviewee 4).

“...we are regularly included in the NOCVB guide distributed to tourists. We have also advertised in their publications” (Interviewee 7).

“We do partner with the NOCVB and NOTMC to promote the museum to visitors. It is absolutely beneficial” (Interviewee 8).

“There is a lot of benefit in collaborating with these institutions” (Interviewee 8). “...we are in partnership with the NOCVB...it is beneficial” (Interviewee 10).

“While we are open to collaborations, I do not think it is the opportunity our venue needs. We’ve operated for this long without collaboration” (Interviewee 5).

“...our individual culture bearers should have the opportunity to partner with the tourism industry to better contribute to our overall economy” (Interviewee 5).

Despite some trepidation on the part of a few, most participants believe that there is considerable benefit in collaborating with tourism organizations, as well as in supporting MICE organizations in general, because such efforts help build an appreciation for the city’s culture. Most of the interviewees welcome opportunities to partner with tourism organizations if cultural assets can be better promoted and if they will help enrich people’s travel experiences and destination satisfaction. Some heritage managers, however, noted their preference for tourism organizations to focus more on making the city more integrated and livable for cultural institutions, rather than focusing only on increasing visitor numbers.

This concept of collaboration for tourism is divided into three codes: collaboration promotes heritage, collaboration promotes MICE, and suggestions for collaboration. Like previously, each code was pasted into the word cloud generator to visualize the word frequencies. ‘City’, ‘visitors’ and ‘partner’ show up most frequently in the first cloud which describes the collaborative promotion of heritage. Other keywords include ‘collaborate’, ‘collaborating’, ‘benefit’, ‘beneficial’, ‘sincere’, ‘promote’ and ‘support’, suggesting an overall sense that cross-sectoral and intrasectoral collaboration is beneficial. Displaying data on collaboration for MICE, ‘experience’ is the most common word in the second cloud, and several noteworthy words include ‘collaboration’, ‘city’, ‘always’ and ‘special’, indicating participants’ belief that collaborating with tourism organizations will help provide special experiences for MICE travelers. In the last cloud denoting collaboration, ‘culture’ and ‘cultural’ are the commonest words, followed by ‘heritage’, ‘better’, ‘focus’ and ‘promote’. This suggests that heritage officials may recommend the NOCVB and other tourism organizations to focus more on cultural heritage resources for the city to be positioned and promoted as an attractive MICE destination.

Table 3. Three Word Clouds for Collaboration (partnership)

1. Collaboration promotes Heritage	2. Collaboration promotes MICE
	
3. Other collaboration suggestions	
	

more business events and encourage people to visit a special experience. Even though heritage managers shared both positive and negative perspectives on the branding campaign, their views are overall quite positive. The destination brand helps attract visitors to the city and draws people to its cultural institutions, even visitors whose main motivation is to attend a MICE event.

This study examines the implications of how cultural heritage assets complement the appeal of a MICE destination through branding. By examining the destination brand experiences supported by heritage stakeholders who may represent the local community and cultural asset managers, the results validate the Creative MICE Destination Branding Model proposed by Kim et al. (2022). This confirms that the significance of the destination brand experience is reinforced by the support of local heritage institutions and the cultural experiences available to MICE visitors.

For a destination to achieve long-term viability (and sustainability), successful branding depends on its ability to incorporate the interests of diverse stakeholders (Morgan et al., 2004; Timothy, 1998). The destination brand ultimately results from collaboration that considers the perspectives of these complex, multiple stakeholders (Marzano & Scott, 2009). Previous studies have highlighted the risks of overlooking local communities in the destination branding process (Freire, 2009; Marzano & Scoot, 2009; Morgan et al., 2004) and the risk of a traditional strategy when focusing only on visitors but overlooking the local stakeholders (García et al., 2012). García et al. (2012) claim that a conceptualization of the brand value based on the stakeholders is more suitable than the usual configuration based only on the visitor, as emphasizing the necessity of working collaboratively on destination branding dimensions with visitors and local community. In this regard, Campelo et al. (2014) indicate that destination branding is significantly influenced by an appreciation of sense of place for people who belong there and stress the importance of understanding sense of place and positioning the local community at the center of a branding strategy for the development of an effective destination brand. Destination branding strategies must recognize the cultural characteristics of the place, including understanding the values held by residents (Campelo et al., 2014).

Although this study is limited to a single case study, it highlights several key insights regarding destination branding and the symbiotic relationship between MICE and heritage tourism. The co-creation of experience with local assets and tourists in building a destination branding process (Kim et al., 2018) factors significantly in this study. The study confirms the significance of local stakeholders in successful destination branding by gauging the views of heritage managers to explore how a destination can effectively leverage MICE and heritage resources for improved marketing and branding. Through the active involvement of local heritage producers in co-creating destination experiences for business travelers, including MICE attendees, local heritage values can be enhanced for more satisfying experiences (Richards, 2011).

MICE tourism has become a significant development tool for many destination economies, and many new facilities in cities have been built to accommodate the growing business sector in tourism. An effective destination brand is a way MICE stakeholders can work together to design and market MICE tourism (Kim et al., 2022), and local heritage can play an important role in developing such a brand. Efforts should focus on producing sustained benefits for the destination such as co-created opportunities between stakeholders, economic benefits for the destination and its residents, increased community empowerment, and enhancement of local pride when heritage becomes important in decisions to host or plan MICE events.

The cultural heritage of New Orleans is an essential part of the city's image and brand appeal. In fact, given its vast range of culinary heritage, musical traditions, built environment, and folklore, heritage is perhaps the most salient tourism asset in the city. Recognizing this, heritage managers in New Orleans believe they play a critical role in causing MICE travelers to choose the destination and extend their stay beyond the business purposes of their trip. Rather than focusing only on attracting more tourists, developing and implementing better marketing/branding strategies through co-created practices, particularly with cultural heritage institutions, will enrich business travelers' destination experiences and increase their satisfaction with the destination, thereby enabling the destination to attract increasing attention in the are of MICE tourism.

The study confirms that collaboration between heritage and MICE organizations will enhance the destination experience. Most heritage managers welcome opportunities to partner with tourism organizations if it means that the heritage will be better promoted. These sorts of partnerships are helpful in enriching visitors' travel experiences and satisfaction with the destination. Tourism organizations should focus on building more connections between tourism subsectors and ensuring the inclusion of all tourism sectors rather than focusing only on attracting more mass tourists. By continuing to incorporate music, art, museums, built heritage, food and living culture into its marketing strategies, the destination becomes increasingly desirable for business travelers. If the destination managers, cultural heritage institutions, and MICE facilities all work together to provide more holistic tourism experiences that are unique to the destination, it will naturally attract more MICE organizers to choose the location that offers more than only business meeting and event opportunities.

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