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From Impression to Tourist Behavioral Intentions: Digital Heritage Representation as a Pathway to Archaeological Destination Branding — The Case of Djemila

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Abstract

Digital media increasingly shape how audiences encounter heritage places, often before or without physical visitation. This raises a key question in heritage place branding: how does a materially distant heritage site acquire cognitive and affective presence through digital representation? This study addresses this question by bringing selected concepts from David Hume's philosophy—perception, association, habit, and sentiment—into dialogue with contemporary heritage place-branding perspectives.

Using Djemila, a Roman archaeological site in Algeria, as a case study, the study adopts an exploratory quantitative design based on 267 valid questionnaire responses. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was employed to examine the empirical structure linking digital heritage identity, digital communication, perceived cultural value, emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions. Two principal dimensions emerged, accounting jointly for 74.372% of the total variance. The first dimension (44.099%) associated digital heritage identity, digital communication, and perceived cultural value, while the second (30.273%) brought together emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions.

The findings do not establish causal relationships or empirically test Hume's philosophy. Rather, they identify an empirical configuration that can be interpreted through selected Humean concepts. Building on this interpretation, the study proposes the **Heritage Impression Pathway (HIP)** as a conceptual framework for understanding how a materially situated heritage place may acquire mediated cognitive and affective presence through digital

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representation, association, evaluation, and engagement. The study consequently conceptualizes heritage place branding not merely as institutional message transmission, but as an ongoing process through which the cultural significance of a place becomes perceptible, memorable, and meaningful to audiences.

Keywords: heritage place branding; digital heritage; Djemila; David Hume; perception; association; cultural value; emotional engagement; digital representation.

1. Introduction

Digital media increasingly shape how audiences encounter heritage places, often before and sometimes without physical visitation. Photographs, short videos, historical narratives, visitor reviews, institutional websites, social media posts, and user-generated content may constitute an individual's first contact with a place never physically visited. Geographical distance, therefore, does not necessarily imply psychological absence: a materially remote heritage site may acquire cognitive and affective presence through digital representation.

This raises a question that remains insufficiently addressed in heritage place branding: **how does a materially existing heritage place become mentally present through mediated representation?** Conventional approaches to place branding emphasize identity, image, communication, reputation, and stakeholder experience. Heritage places introduce a distinctive theoretical challenge because their historical and cultural significance precedes contemporary branding activity. Unlike commercial products, heritage value cannot simply be designed or created through communication. Rather, communication mediates, selects, interprets, and makes aspects of an existing cultural significance accessible to contemporary audiences.

Digital media intensify this mediation. Representations do not reproduce the heritage place in its entirety, yet they can contribute to how the place is perceived, interpreted, remembered, and emotionally evaluated. Repeated exposure, association, interpretation, and interaction may therefore transform representations into elements of a broader mental image of the place. Understanding this process requires attention not only to what institutions communicate, but also to how audiences form and connect perceptions, meanings, evaluations, and responses.

This study approaches the problem through a dialogue with selected concepts from David Hume's philosophy. Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas, his account of the association of ideas, his treatment of habit and custom, and his analysis of sentiment provide a conceptual vocabulary for examining how mediated representations may acquire psychological significance. Hume is not presented as a theorist of digital heritage or place branding, nor are digital representations equated with Humean impressions. Instead, his philosophy is used as an interpretive resource for reconsidering how representations of historical places may become perceptions, ideas, associations, cultural evaluations, and affective orientations.

The empirical analysis focuses on Djemila, a Roman archaeological site in Algeria. Based on 267 valid questionnaire responses, Multiple Correspondence Factor Analysis (MCFA/AFCM) is used to explore the structure linking digital heritage identity, digital communication, perceived cultural value, emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions.

The study makes two related contributions. Empirically, it identifies the dimensions through which these constructs are organized in audience responses to digitally mediated heritage. Conceptually, it proposes the **Heritage Impression Pathway**, a framework describing how a materially situated heritage place may acquire mediated cognitive and affective presence through processes of representation, association, evaluation, and engagement. The framework shifts attention from branding as the transmission of an institutional message toward branding as a process through which cultural significance becomes perceptible, memorable, associatively meaningful, and potentially consequential for audiences.

Accordingly, the study examines: (1) how digital representation, heritage identity, and perceived cultural value are empirically organized; (2) how emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions relate within the same empirical structure; and (3) how selected Humean concepts can provide an interpretive framework for these patterns without being treated as empirically validated causal mechanisms.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Impression to Association

2.1 From Material Site to Mediated Place

A heritage place does not necessarily enter public consciousness through physical encounter. In digital environments, photographs, videos, historical narratives, visitor accounts, institutional publications, and social media content may constitute an individual's first contact with a site and may sometimes substitute for direct visitation. Heritage presence can therefore be understood not only materially but also as **mediated cognitive and affective presence**. **(Taylor & Laura Kate , p p : 145-147)**

This distinction concerns two analytically connected levels: the heritage site as a material entity, and the site as perceived, represented, imagined, remembered, and discussed by audiences. These are not different places; rather, they represent the difference between a place as an external material object and a place as an object of mental presence. **(Hanna, S. A, & Rowley, J, 2011, p 459)**

This distinction is central to heritage place branding because historical and cultural significance does not automatically become a perceived image, emotional response, or behavioral orientation. Between the material characteristics of a site and audience responses lie processes of perception, interpretation, memory, association, evaluation, and emotion. **(Kavaratzis, M, 2005, p 331)**

2.2 Hume: From Perception to Ideas and Association

Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas provides a conceptual point of departure. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, impressions are characterized as more forceful and lively perceptions, whereas ideas are comparatively fainter perceptions involved in thinking, remembering, and imagining . This distinction is not applied literally to digital heritage: a digital image of Djemila is not a Humean impression, and screen-based viewing is not equivalent to physical experience. **(Wright. John. P, 2009, p 113)**

Its relevance lies instead in Hume's broader account of how perceptions enter mental life and subsequently participate in memory, imagination, and association. Digital representation can therefore be understood as an **occasion for mediated perception**. An image of Djemila, particularly when accompanied by historical information or narrative, may become an object of memory, imagination, interpretation, and further association.

This provides a conceptual basis for understanding how a place may remain psychologically present in the absence of physical visitation:

Digital representation → perceptual encounter → mental retention → recall/imagination → place image

This is a heuristic reconstruction rather than a literal Humean model or a tested causal sequence.

Hume's account of the association of ideas provides a second conceptual resource. Ideas become connected through principles including resemblance, contiguity, and causation, Digital heritage environments are particularly conducive to such connections because a representation of a site commonly appears alongside historical, cultural, architectural, educational, touristic, and personal meanings. Djemila may consequently become associated with Roman civilization, antiquity, architecture, authenticity, cultural identity, or historical memory, depending on the content encountered and the audience's prior experience. (**Hume.D, 1987, p 116)**

The study refers to this contemporary configuration as a **digital heritage associative structure**: a network of images, ideas, memories, values, and emotions through which a heritage place acquires broader meaning. The term is an analytical development inspired by Hume rather than a Humean concept.

2.3 From Association to Cultural Value and Emotion

Association becomes particularly important when moving from awareness of a site to perceived cultural value. Knowing that Djemila is a Roman archaeological site differs from perceiving it as evidence of past civilization, architectural achievement, authenticity, or cultural memory. Such value is not created by audiences or by digital communication; rather, historically existing significance becomes meaningful through processes of perception, interpretation, association, and evaluation.

Hume's discussion of sentiment and aesthetic judgment offers a complementary interpretive resource. His treatment of taste emphasizes experience, comparison, and delicacy of sentiment , The present study does not equate perceived cultural value with Hume's theory of taste. The narrower analytical connection concerns how an encounter with an object may become a value judgment about that object. **(Wright, John P., and Kathryn Tabb, 2023, p 293)**

Digital media also represent the experiences of other people. A representation of a Roman theatre communicates characteristics of the site, whereas a visitor's account communicates a person's response to it. Hume's discussion of sympathy suggests that representations of another person's feeling may, under certain conditions, influence an observer's sentiments. The study does not assume that digital interaction constitutes Humean sympathy or that emotion is directly transmitted. Rather, digital environments expand opportunities to encounter representations of other people's emotional responses, potentially shaping expectations about one's own experience.

2.4 Repetition, Familiarity, and Engagement

Digital environments enable repeated exposure to heritage through images, videos, recommendations, reviews, and user-generated content. Hume's discussion of habit and custom provides a conceptual vocabulary for considering how repetition may contribute to familiarity and stabilize associative patterns. However, the present cross-sectional design cannot establish that repeated exposure causes such changes. **(Owen D. , 2014, p 337)**

The relevant proposition is therefore heuristic:

Exposure → familiarity → strengthened association → readiness for further engagement

This proposition complements the preceding account by suggesting how a digitally mediated place may move from unfamiliarity toward recognizability, memorability, emotional significance, and engagement without assuming a deterministic sequence.

3. Heritage Place Branding Beyond Commercial Branding

Applying branding to heritage places requires a distinction from commercial branding. A commercial product may be designed, modified, repositioned, and packaged through institutional strategy, whereas a heritage site possesses historical, material, and cultural significance that precedes contemporary branding activity. Djemila did not acquire its historical value through digital representation; digital communication instead mediates how aspects of this pre-existing significance become visible and meaningful to contemporary audiences. **(Radcliffe, Elizabeth S, 2018, p 122)**

Accordingly, heritage place branding is understood here as a process of **mediating, organizing, and making meaningful the perceptions and associations surrounding a place of historical significance**, rather than as the invention of heritage value.

Three analytically interconnected levels can be distinguished: **(Kavaratzis, M, 2005, p 341)**

1. **Existing heritage value:** the historical, archaeological, architectural, geographical, and cultural characteristics of the site.
2. **Digital representation:** photographs, texts, videos, maps, narratives, visitor accounts, and digital interactions through which aspects of the site are communicated.
3. **Audience experience:** perception, memory, imagination, association, evaluation, perceived cultural value, emotional response, engagement, and behavioral orientation.

The heritage place brand emerges from the interaction among these levels rather than from institutional communication alone.

4. Djemila and the Digital Mediation of Heritage

Djemila provides a useful case for examining this process because its archaeological and architectural characteristics generate extensive visual and narrative possibilities for digital representation. Yet audiences do not encounter the site in its entirety through digital media. Representation necessarily selects particular views, objects, narratives, and experiences and is shaped by the medium, context, and content producer.

The study therefore distinguishes analytically between **Material Djemila**, the archaeological and historical site, and **Digital Djemila**, the constellation of images, videos, texts, narratives, experiences, comments, and associations circulating around it. Digital Djemila does not replace the material site; it constitutes another mode through which the site's significance becomes cognitively and culturally accessible. Because users can also produce and circulate content, digital mediation is potentially recursive: audiences may become contributors to the subsequent representation and interpretation of the site. **(Djémila. unesco, 2001)**

5. The Heritage Impression Pathway

Building on the preceding discussion, the study proposes the **Heritage Impression Pathway (HIP)** as an interpretive framework for understanding how a materially situated heritage place may acquire mediated cognitive and affective presence. **(Taylor & Laura Kate , 2017, p 234)**

The pathway can be represented as:

Existing heritage value

↓
Digital representation

↓
Perceptual encounter

↓
Ideas and associations

↓
Perceived cultural value

↓
Emotional significance

↓
Digital engagement

↓
Behavioral intentions

The sequence is conceptual rather than causal. It summarizes a possible process through which existing heritage significance becomes perceptually accessible, associatively meaningful, evaluatively significant, and potentially connected with engagement and behavioral orientation.

Importantly, digital mediation is recursive rather than strictly linear:

Heritage place → digital representation → perception/imagination → association/evaluation → interaction → new representation → subsequent audiences

This recursive dimension recognizes audiences not merely as recipients but also as participants in the reproduction of a place's public image.

The theoretical contribution of the HIP lies in connecting **place-brand formation** with the **cognitive-affective processes through which heritage becomes meaningful to audiences**. In this formulation, heritage place branding is not simply the transmission of an institutional message. It is a mediated process through which an existing cultural significance may become perceptible, memorable, associatively structured, emotionally meaningful, and potentially consequential for engagement with the place.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The study adopted an exploratory quantitative design to examine the empirical structure linking the digital representation of Djemila with perceptions of heritage identity and cultural value, emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions. Rather than assuming that heritage image is formed through historical knowledge alone, the study examined whether these dimensions formed identifiable patterns within audience responses.

The philosophical contribution of David Hume was employed interpretively rather than tested empirically. Concepts such as impression, idea, association, habit, and sentiment were not operationalized as directly measurable variables. Instead, they provided a conceptual vocabulary for interpreting the empirical configuration identified through the analysis.

Accordingly, the research design did not presuppose a causal sequence from digital representation to behavioral response.

The dataset comprised 267 valid responses to an online questionnaire examining respondents' perceptions of Djemila and its representation in digital environments, together with demographic characteristics, digital-media use, and sources of information about archaeological and heritage sites. The measurement structure comprised two broad analytical domains. The first included digital/historical heritage identity (DH1–DH5), digital communication and content quality (DC1–DC5), and perceived cultural value (PCV1–PCV5). The second included emotional-cognitive responses (DE1–DE5), digital engagement and participation (TM1–TM5), and behavioral intentions (TI1–TI5), including visitation, recommendation, following, and future engagement.

This organization was analytical rather than causal. It was intended to distinguish between representational and evaluative responses on the one hand and emotional, engagement-related, and behavioral responses on the other.

6.2 Analytical Procedure

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was employed to explore the underlying empirical structure of the observed response patterns. The purpose was not simply to assess respondents' knowledge of Djemila or their overall evaluation of the site, but to examine how indicators relating to heritage identity, digital communication, perceived cultural value, emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions were organized across the principal dimensions identified by the analysis.

The analysis converged at the 28th iteration. The final variance-accounted-for value was 10.555878, with a residual loss of 19.444122. These iteration statistics indicate the computational convergence of the MCA solution and should not be interpreted as the percentage of variance explained by the retained dimensions. Substantive interpretation therefore focuses on the eigenvalues, inertia, explained inertia, and discrimination measures associated with the extracted dimensions.

7. Results

7.1 General Factorial Structure

The MCA identified two principal dimensions accounting jointly for 74.372% of the total variance. Dimension 1 had an eigenvalue of 12.030 and accounted for 44.099% of the variance, whereas Dimension 2 had an eigenvalue of 9.282 and accounted for 30.273%. The MCA solution yielded Cronbach's alpha values of 0.918 for Dimension 1 and 0.901 for Dimension 2, indicating high internal consistency within the respective dimensional solutions.

These reliability coefficients provide evidence of internal consistency among the items associated with the respective dimensions, but they should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships or, by themselves, as validation of the underlying philosophical framework.

Table 1. Characteristics of the principal dimensions

Dimension	Cronbach's α	Eigenvalue	Inertia	Explained inertia
1	0.918	12.030	0.401	44.099%
2	0.901	9.282	0.303	30.273%
Total	—	**21.312**	**0.704**	**74.372%**

Source: Authors' analysis based on SPSS output.

7.2 Dimension 1: Digital Representation, Identity, and Perceived Cultural Value

Dimension 1 accounted for 44.099% of the total variance and was primarily characterized by indicators related to digital heritage identity, digital communication, and perceived cultural value. Several indicators within these constructs showed relatively high discrimination measures on this dimension, as reported in Table 3. The pattern indicates that these indicators contributed to a common empirical configuration in the observed responses.

Accordingly, Dimension 1 is interpreted as representing Digital Representation and Perceived Cultural Value. This interpretation refers to the empirical association of the indicators within the observed dimensional structure and should not be understood as evidence of a causal effect of digital communication on perceived cultural value.

Table 3. Selected discrimination measures for Dimension 1

Construct	Item	Discrimination
Digital Heritage Identity	DH1	0.755
Digital Heritage Identity	DH2	0.702
Digital Heritage Identity	DH3	0.760
Digital Heritage Identity	DH5	0.715
Digital Communication	DC1	0.835
Digital Communication	DC3	0.791
Digital Communication	DC4	0.813
Digital Communication	DC5	0.713
Perceived Cultural Value	PCV1	0.797
Perceived Cultural Value	PCV3	0.770
Perceived Cultural Value	PCV4	0.761

Source: *Authors' analysis based on SPSS output.*

7.3 Dimension 2: Emotional Responses, Digital Engagement, and Behavioral Intentions

Dimension 2 accounted for 30.273% of the total variance and was primarily characterized by indicators related to emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions. As shown in Table 4, several indicators from these constructs displayed relatively high discrimination measures on Dimension 2. The pattern indicates that emotional, engagement-related, and behavioral indicators contributed to a common empirical configuration in the observed responses.

This configuration suggests that respondents' relationship with Djemila extends beyond information acquisition to include emotional responses, digital engagement, and behavioral orientation. Because the data are cross-sectional, however, the observed configuration should be interpreted as an empirical association rather than as evidence of a temporal or causal sequence among emotion, engagement, and behavioral intention.

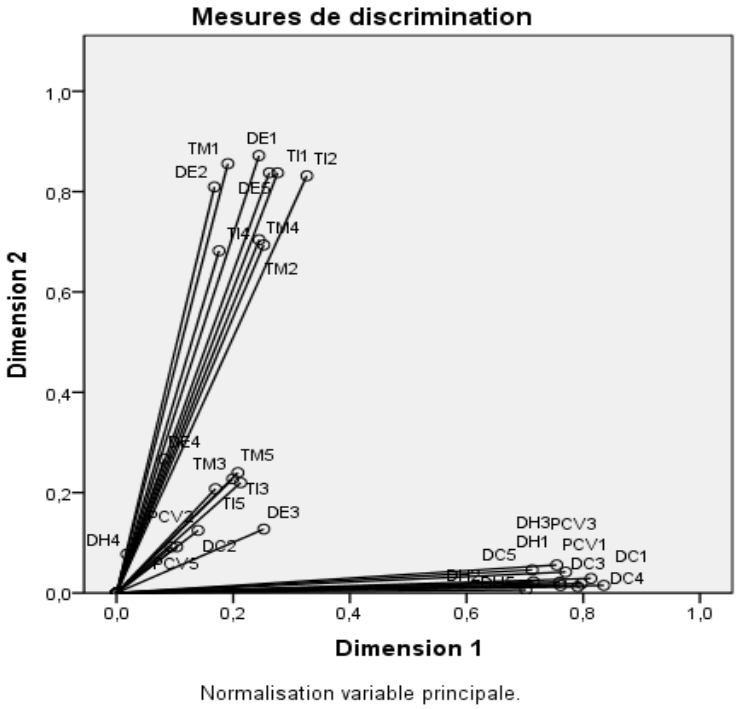
Table 4. Selected discrimination measures for Dimension 2

Construct	Item	Discrimination
Emotional/Cognitive Response	DE1	0.872
Emotional/Cognitive Response	DE2	0.809
Emotional/Cognitive Response	DE5	0.837
Digital Interaction	TM1	0.856
Digital Interaction	TM2	0.704
Digital Interaction	TM4	0.694
Behavioral Intention	TI1	0.838
Behavioral Intention	TI2	0.831
Behavioral Intention	TI4	0.682

Source: Authors' analysis based on SPSS output.

The pattern suggests that the digital relationship with Djemila extends beyond information acquisition. Emotional responses, digital engagement, and behavioral orientations appear together within a substantial empirical dimension. As with the first dimension, however, the result does not establish a causal sequence in which emotion produces engagement and engagement produces behavioral intention. It indicates only that these indicators form a common structural configuration in the observed data.

Figure 1. Discrimination Measures of the Items across the Two MCA Dimensions



Source: Authors' analysis based on SPSS output.

8. Discussion

8.1 Digital Representation and Mediated Perception

The first dimension is directly relevant to the central theoretical question of how a physically distant heritage place may acquire mental presence through digital representation. Hume's philosophy provides a useful conceptual vocabulary for approaching this question because perception occupies a foundational position in his account of mental life. Nevertheless, digital representation should not be equated with a Humean impression. Viewing a photograph or video of Djemila does not reproduce the physical texture, spatial scale, sounds, temperature, materiality, or sensory conditions of direct visitation.

A more defensible interpretation is that digital content provides a form of mediated perceptual access through which a place may acquire cognitive presence. Different forms of representation can foreground different dimensions of the same site. A photograph emphasizing a mosaic produces a different encounter from one emphasizing monumental architecture, while a panoramic video differs from a historical narrative. Similarly, representing Djemila primarily as a Roman archaeological site may generate different associations from representations emphasizing Algerian cultural identity or contemporary visitor experience. **(Owen D. , 2014, p 345)**

The empirical association among digital identity, communication, and perceived cultural value is therefore consistent with the proposition that the perceived identity of a heritage place

is shaped not only by its material characteristics but also by the contexts through which those characteristics become digitally visible and interpretable. **(Hanna, Sonya A., and Jennifer Rowley., 2011, p 462)**

8.2 From Representation to Association and Cultural Meaning

Hume's account of the association of ideas offers a second conceptual resource for interpreting this configuration. In digital environments, representations of Djemila rarely appear in isolation. Images, videos, and narratives may coexist with references to Roman civilization, archaeology, North Africa, architecture, authenticity, education, tourism, or cultural identity. Meaning is consequently generated not only by the represented object but also through the network of associations surrounding it.

This perspective helps explain why knowledge of a heritage site is not equivalent to perceived cultural value. Knowing that Djemila is a Roman archaeological site represents historical information; perceiving it as evidence of a past civilization, an architectural achievement, an expression of authenticity, or an element of cultural memory involves interpretation and evaluation. Historically existing heritage value is therefore not invented by audiences or by branding. Rather, it becomes meaningful to particular audiences through processes of perception, association, interpretation, and evaluation.

The first empirical dimension can thus be interpreted as consistent with an associative understanding of heritage place branding: digital communication provides contexts within which identity and cultural significance may become connected within broader cognitive and evaluative structures.

8.3 Emotion, Engagement, and Behavioral Orientation

The second dimension introduces a different level of relationship with the heritage site. Knowing that Djemila exists or recognizing its Roman heritage differs from experiencing it as culturally important, distinctive, beautiful, personally meaningful, or worth visiting. The empirical configuration indicates that emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions are represented within the same substantial empirical dimension.

This finding can be interpreted through Hume's broader account of human motivation, in which sentiments and inclinations form an important part of human orientation toward objects. The study does not claim that the findings empirically validate Hume's theory of motivation. Rather, the coexistence of emotional and behavioral indicators makes his emphasis on sentiment conceptually relevant.

A useful distinction is therefore between information that makes a heritage place **known** and sentiment that may make it **significant**. This distinction should not be understood as a demonstrated causal sequence. The cross-sectional design does not establish whether emotional response precedes engagement, whether engagement strengthens emotion, or whether both are influenced by other factors.

The contribution of digital engagement is particularly important because contemporary audiences can move beyond passive reception. Users may like, comment, share, recommend, review, photograph, reinterpret, and produce narratives about heritage places. The communication structure can consequently shift from a simple **institution → audience** model toward a more recursive configuration in which audiences also contribute to subsequent representations:

Representation → reception → response → new representation → subsequent reception

The present study does not demonstrate that this temporal cycle occurred among respondents. Rather, it highlights a structural characteristic of digital environments that complicates the understanding of heritage place branding as solely institutional communication.

8.4 Repetition, Habit, and the Stabilization of Place Image

Digital environments allow repeated exposure to a heritage site without repeated physical visitation. Djemila may appear through multiple photographs, videos, recommendations, reviews, and narratives. Hume's discussion of habit and custom provides a conceptual vocabulary for considering how repeated exposure might contribute to familiarity and the stabilization of associative patterns.

However, this mechanism was not directly tested. The cross-sectional design included neither longitudinal observation nor experimental manipulation of exposure frequency. The role of habit should therefore be treated as a theoretical proposition for future research rather than as an empirical conclusion.

The conceptual possibility can nevertheless be expressed as:

Exposure → familiarity → strengthened association → readiness for further engagement

This formulation complements the empirical findings by suggesting how mediated representations may, over time, contribute to the stabilization of a place image without implying a deterministic process.

9. Heritage Place Branding and the Heritage Impression Pathway

The application of branding to heritage places requires a distinction from commercial branding. A commercial product may be designed, modified, repositioned, and packaged through institutional strategy, whereas a heritage site possesses historical, material, and cultural significance that precedes branding activity. Djemila did not acquire its historical value through digital representation. Digital communication instead mediates how selected dimensions of this pre-existing significance become visible, interpretable, and meaningful to contemporary audiences. **(Anholt, 2008, p 5)**

Heritage place branding can therefore be understood here as a process of mediating, organizing, and making meaningful perceptions and associations surrounding a place of historical significance. Three analytically interconnected levels are particularly relevant:

existing heritage value; digital representation through images, texts, videos, narratives, and user-generated content; and audience experience, including perception, memory, association, evaluation, emotional response, engagement, and behavioral orientation.

Djemila illustrates this distinction particularly clearly. The material site consists of its archaeological remains, architecture, geographical setting, and historical significance, whereas **Digital Djemila** refers to the constellation of images, videos, narratives, comments, recommendations, experiences, and associations circulating around the site. Digital Djemila does not replace the material site; it constitutes another mode through which the site's significance becomes cognitively and culturally accessible.

Building on the theoretical discussion and the empirical configuration, the study proposes the **Heritage Impression Pathway (HIP)** as an interpretive framework:

Existing heritage value

↓
Digital representation

↓
Perceptual and cognitive encounter

↓
Ideas and associations

↓
Perceived cultural value

↓
Emotional significance

↓
Digital engagement

↓
Behavioral orientation

The HIP is developed as an interpretive synthesis informed by selected Humean concepts, contemporary heritage and place-branding scholarship, and the empirical configuration identified in the Djemila data. It is therefore proposed as a conceptual framework for understanding how pre-existing heritage significance may acquire mediated cognitive and affective presence, rather than as a statistically validated causal model.

The pathway is also potentially recursive. Engagement can generate new representations, new representations can modify existing associations, and subsequent physical visitation can revise perceptions initially formed through digital media:

Heritage place → digital representation → perception/imagination → association/evaluation → interaction → new representation

The theoretical contribution of the HIP therefore lies in connecting two levels that are often considered separately: the construction of a heritage place brand and the cognitive-affective processes through which that brand becomes meaningful to audiences. Heritage branding is consequently understood less as the delivery of a finished institutional message and more as an ongoing process of reception, interpretation, evaluation, participation, and re-representation.

10. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings support a broader conceptualization of heritage place branding as an associative and participatory process rather than merely a mechanism of institutional identity transmission. Heritage value is grounded in the history, archaeology, materiality, and cultural significance of the site; branding does not create that value. Instead, digital communication can contribute to making selected dimensions of that significance recognizable, meaningful, memorable, and emotionally salient.

This distinction has implications for digital heritage communication. If communication is evaluated solely in terms of visibility, metrics such as reach, views, and shares may dominate assessment. If the objective is to foster sustained mental presence, however, the coherence, contextual richness, historical grounding, and associative potential of digital content become more important. For Djemila, this may involve connecting architectural imagery with historical narratives, situating mosaics within their cultural context, relating archaeological remains to the surrounding landscape, and incorporating visitor experiences without allowing promotional framing to displace historical accuracy or authenticity.

The distinction can therefore be expressed as follows:

Heritage value refers to the historical, cultural, archaeological, and material significance of the site, whereas **brand value** concerns the extent to which aspects of that significance become recognizable, meaningful, memorable, and affectively associated among audiences. The latter cannot replace the former and depends, at least partly, on it.

11. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify the interpretation of the findings. First, the study is based on 267 valid responses and focuses on a single heritage site. Generalization beyond Djemila and its cultural context should therefore be approached cautiously. Second, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal order or causal relationships among digital exposure, perception, cultural value, emotion, engagement, and behavioral intention. Third, MCFA identifies patterns of association but does not test the causal pathway proposed by the HIP.

Fourth, the measurement indicators are not direct measures of Humean impressions, ideas, habit, sympathy, or sentiment. The relationship between Hume and the empirical findings is

therefore interpretive rather than an empirical validation of his philosophy. Fifth, digital experience cannot be equated with direct physical experience. Screen-based encounters do not reproduce the materiality, scale, landscape, soundscape, and sensory conditions of the archaeological site. Finally, the present data do not directly test repeated exposure, habit formation, or emotional transmission between users.

These limitations point toward several avenues for future research. Longitudinal and experimental studies could examine whether different forms and frequencies of digital exposure are associated with changes in recall, perceived cultural value, emotional response, engagement, and behavioral intention. Comparative research across multiple archaeological and heritage sites could assess whether the HIP is transferable across cultural contexts or whether its dimensions are case-specific. Finally, mixed-method approaches combining surveys with interviews, free-association tasks, digital content analysis, network analysis, and user-generated content could provide more direct evidence concerning the relationships among perception, association, emotion, engagement, and behavior.

12. Conclusion

This study examined how a digital relationship with Djemila may be structured and how selected concepts from David Hume can provide a productive interpretive vocabulary for understanding that relationship. The study began from the observation that heritage places are increasingly encountered through digital representations before, and sometimes without, physical visitation. Such representations may provide geographically distant sites with a form of cognitive and affective presence through which they can become recognized, interpreted, evaluated, and emotionally meaningful.

Based on 267 valid responses, the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) identified two principal dimensions accounting jointly for 74.372% of the total variance. The first, explaining 44.099%, brought together digital heritage identity, digital communication, and perceived cultural value. The second, explaining 30.273%, combined emotional-cognitive responses, digital engagement, and behavioral intentions. These findings indicate that the digital relationship with heritage operates across interconnected representational, evaluative, emotional, and engagement-related dimensions.

The study does not establish causal relationships, nor does it empirically validate Hume's philosophy. Rather, the empirical configuration provides a basis for interpreting contemporary digitally mediated heritage experience through selected Humean concepts concerning perception, association, habit, and sentiment. On this interpretive basis, the study proposes the Heritage Impression Pathway (HIP) as a conceptual framework describing how existing heritage significance may acquire mediated cognitive and affective presence through digital representation, perceptual encounter, association, evaluation, engagement, and behavioral intention.

The principal contribution of the framework is to shift attention from heritage branding as the transmission of an institutional message toward heritage branding as a process through which cultural significance becomes perceptible, memorable, associatively meaningful, and potentially consequential for audiences. Digital representation does not replace the material heritage site; it creates another mode through which that site can become present within the cognitive and affective world of audiences.

The dialogue with Hume is therefore productive not because Hume anticipated digital heritage or social media, but because his concepts provide a way of reconsidering enduring questions about perception, ideas, association, habit, and sentiment under conditions in which physical presence is no longer necessary for a place to become psychologically significant. Djemila provides an empirical setting in which these questions can be reconsidered, while the HIP offers a conceptual bridge between the material significance of heritage, its digital representation, and the ways audiences may come to perceive, value, engage with, and develop behavioral intentions toward the place.

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