

## Distilling the Resources That Support Moonshine Tourism Destination Image

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Despite growing use of craft beverages as a cornerstone of travel experiences there is limited knowledge of the strategies and resources needed to create a cohesive destination image based on craft beverage tourism. In the state of North Carolina (USA), the corn-based spirit moonshine is recognized as an important element of local heritage. This study employed the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique to gather qualitative data from North Carolina tourism and moonshine stakeholders. The Destination Resources Acceleration Framework and the Model for Destination Branding guided analysis and revealed that natural, cultural, built, social, and human resources interplay with the components of the image development process (i.e., unique, cognitive, affective) to ultimately form a destination image that integrates craft beverage tourism and the heritage that underpins its creation. The findings can aid destination leaders to develop and sustain a destination's image based on a craft beverage.

**Key words:** Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique; Craft beverage tourism; Destination Resource Acceleration Framework; Destination image strategy; Moonshine

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### Introduction

Tourists' search for memorable culinary experiences has contributed to the continuous growth of the food and beverage tourism segment since its emergence in the early 2000s (Wolf, 2017; World Tourism Organization, 2012). In 2017, over a quarter of outbound tourists indicated local food and beverages were a primary motivator when choosing a destination (Boutsoukou, 2018). A recent study indicated that 72% of tourists choose a destination based on its food and beverages (Stone, Migacz et al., 2020).

Tourists' interest in tasting and learning about local food and beverages is driven by their desire to experience a more authentic connection with the destination (Stone, Garibaldi, & Pozzi, 2020). Moreover, food and beverage tourism can contribute to a destination's competitive advantage and enhance economic and non-economic benefits (Knollenberg et al., 2021). Tourists' motivations to experience local food and beverages, and food tourism's capacity to strengthen a destination's appeal have encouraged the development of new food and beverage-related activities globally (Kumar Dixit, 2019).

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Craft beverage tourism is defined as travel motivated by an interest in learning about and tasting craft beverages like wine, beer, and spirits (Kline et al., 2017). This tourism niche generates many benefits for host communities (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021), contributing to their overall sustainable development (Plummer et al., 2005). Craft beverage tourism increases visitors' knowledge about agriculture, local products (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017), and production processes (Galloway et al., 2008) and encourages emotional attachments to a destination (Albano & Lolli, 2021; Talmage, 2020). It also fosters community collaboration, strengthens community pride, and the preservation of intangible (e.g., traditions) and tangible (e.g., distilling equipment) heritage and cultural identities (Rogerson & Collins, 2015; Xu et al., 2020).

Economically, craft beverage tourism allows producers to sell their products directly to consumers and benefit from a short supply chain (McCole et al., 2018). At a broader scope, it generates a wide range of jobs and foreign currency revenue further stimulating local economies (Graefe & Graefe, 2021). Environmentally, craft beverage tourism increases awareness of the need for the protection of natural resources (Lee et al., 2020; Lourenco & Piotto, 2024). The production of craft beverages depends on agricultural production, such as vineyards to produce wine, promoting the continuity of rural landscapes and agricultural heritage (Gil Arroyo et al., 2023). For some landowners committed to sustainable production, agricultural lands can also generate environmental benefits such as protecting the land from erosion or serving as wildlife refuge (Ellis et al., 2018).

A destination that could maximize the benefits of craft beverage tourism is North Carolina (USA) where moonshine, a corn-based spirit, is part of the state's heritage (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017; Pierce, 2019). The growing interest in moonshine-related experiences led the state tourism office (VisitNC) to feature in 2018 moonshine distillery visits in their award-winning "Firsts that Last" promotional campaign. Most recently, VisitNC helped establish the "Moonshine and Motorsports Trail," which features attractions and communities with historic connections to moonshine production (North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, n.d.), indicating the potential of this segment to

attract visitors to the state. However, there is limited knowledge of the strategies and resources needed to create a cohesive image of moonshine tourism. Creating such image is key to attracting visitors and reaping the benefits that craft beverage tourism can deliver across communities in North Carolina (Styliadis & Cherifi, 2018).

As craft beverage tourism becomes a growing competitive advantage for destinations—strengthening their ability to stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace—understanding the elements that shape a destination's image around craft beverages is essential. Although many destinations feature what might be seen as essential elements for devising a destination image related to craft beverage tourism—a history of production of the beverage or current production facilities—there is little evidence on how a destination's image can be shaped around craft beverage production. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the resources that contribute to the creation of a destination image for moonshine tourism in North Carolina. Determining such elements will offer insights to better design promotional efforts that resonate with the target markets, resulting in greater visitation and the expansion of community benefits. We used the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) to assess perceptions of moonshine's meaning among moonshine stakeholders in North Carolina. Doing so will inform moonshine tourism in North Carolina and the tourism development of other emergent food and beverage tourism destinations that have a staple—yet underutilized—product.

## Literature Review

### *Craft Beverage Tourism in North Carolina*

Craft beverage tourism already benefits many North Carolina communities by increasing economic benefits beyond the tourism sector, strengthening community ties, and generating jobs (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021). Existing success of craft beverage tourism development suggests other communities, particularly in rural areas, can capitalize on the growing interest in craft beverage tourism by leveraging the heritage of moonshine production as a foundation for craft beverage tourism experiences.

Moonshine became engrained in the culture of North Carolina in the 1800s when Scottish immigrants brought whiskey-distilling practices to the Appalachian region (Lippard & Stewart, 2019; Pierce, 2019). The lack of well-developed roads made it difficult for farmers to sell their produce before it spoiled, so they began converting corn into a spirit, which prevented spoiling and was more profitable (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017). The increase in alcohol consumption at the time, as part of social gatherings and medicine, motivated many farmers to build corn whiskey production stills across the Appalachian region, becoming one of the most valuable fixtures in farmsteads (Stephens & Nichols Mulder, 2017).

Corn whiskey production provided an opportunity for economic diversification for farmers, but income on alcohol production was taxed by the US government through the Office of Internal Revenue (Stephens & Nichols Mulder, 2017). The taxes imposed on alcohol production made it difficult for farmers to profit from producing corn whiskey, eventually leading distillers to avoid paying them by producing liquor in hidden, illicit stills. This is when the term moonshine emerged to refer to alcohol produced in that concealed manner (Stewart, 2019), usually distilled at night—under the moonlight—to avoid detection (Pierce, 2019). Prohibition banned the commercialization and consumption of alcohol in the US for nearly 30 years in the early 1900s (Pierce, 2019), which benefited moonshiners, eliminating the competition of legal distillers, and increasing the demand of alcohol (Lippard & Stewart, 2019). Thus, moonshine became a staple of North Carolina culture, even after Prohibition ended and it was not illegal to produce it anymore (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017; Pierce, 2019).

Since 2007, there has been a resurgence of craft beverage production facilities in North Carolina, including those dedicated to moonshine production (Stephens & Nichols Mulder, 2017). Given the illegal connotation of the term moonshine, some producers have chosen to distance themselves from the term and call their product Carolina whiskey or white whiskey, while others have capitalized its obscure origin to brand their products. Yet, the incorporation of moonshine in tourism is more recent as the state's strict laws around the commercialization of spirits were hindering its development. In 2015,

the North Carolina legislature passed a bill allowing distilleries to sell their products on-site, which motivated many of them to offer tours and tastings in their facilities and resulted in a growing number of tourists seeking to learn about, taste, and purchase moonshine (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017).

The renewed public interest in craft spirits, along with moonshine's strong ties to the state's cultural heritage, demonstrates that North Carolina has the potential to become a competitive craft beverage tourism destination. The strong ties of moonshine to the history and heritage of the state, along with its underutilization in establishing it as an element of the state's craft beverage tourism industry, provides an opportunity to assess moonshine stakeholders' perceptions about the resources needed to shape North Carolina's destination image around moonshine.

### *The Destination Resources Acceleration Framework*

The Destination Resources Acceleration Framework (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021) (Fig. 1) provides a mechanism for examining the resources needed to support craft beverage tourism development. This framework integrates the main elements of the community capitals (Flora et al., 2018) and creative placemaking (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010) frameworks that interplay in craft beverage tourism development.

The Destination Resources Acceleration Framework details how **creativity** and **meaning** (elements

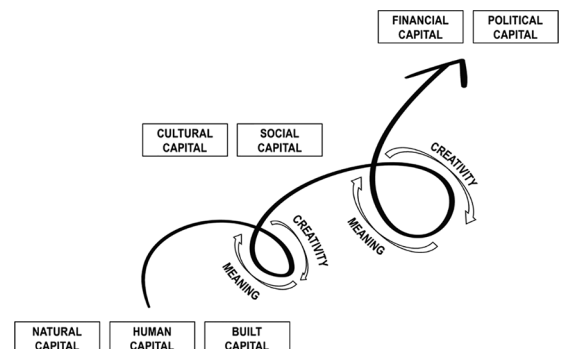


Figure 1. Destination Resources Acceleration Framework. Reproduced from Gil Arroyo et al. (2021) with permission from Elsevier.

of creative placemaking; bolded for easier reference throughout the manuscript) accelerate the spiraling up of the *natural*, *built*, *human*, *social*, *cultural*, *financial*, and *political* (italicized for easier reference throughout the manuscript) community capitals in the development of craft beverage tourism. This spiraling action has been identified in other tourism development processes, most notably wildlife-based community tourism (Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). During this process, **creativity** and **meaning** trigger the development of community capitals as either inputs or outputs. That is, creative placemaking contributes to the progressive development of new (inputs) or the strengthening of existing (outputs) community capitals. Specifically, capitals on the first level (*natural*, *human*, and *built*) need to be strengthened or developed to trigger the second-level community capitals (*cultural* and *social*). Once these are strengthened or developed, they feed the third level community capitals (*financial* and *political*), which upon maturation feed the spiraling up process.

The application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework in a community in North Carolina with an emerging craft beverage industry documented specific resources (i.e., capitals) that were most predominant in the destination development (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021). Agricultural products (*natural*), farmland (*natural*), production facilities (*built*), taprooms (*built*), and trained staff (*human*) were the foundational capitals that stimulated craft beverage tourism development in this community. Once **creativity** and **meaning** spiraled these three types of capitals, they became inputs that fostered the development of stakeholder networks (*social*) and the incorporation of traditional distilling procedures (*cultural*) as outputs. For instance, producers' **creativity** made possible the blend of local agricultural products (*human* and *natural* inputs) into unique beverages (e.g., sweet potato vodka). This contributed to the sense of hyperlocality and authenticity of a craft beverage destination, which is paramount for the development of *cultural* capital. The consolidation of *cultural* and *social* capitals triggered the increase of profits (*financial*) and collected taxes (*financial*), as well as a cohesive voice that influenced the change in distribution laws (*political*). Specifically, **creativity** infused in partnerships among craft beverage industry

stakeholders (*social* input) facilitated the diversification of their offerings (e.g., festivals), which increased their profits (*financial* output).

Although the application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework provided meaningful insights related to the overall craft beverage tourism industry, its examination in other contexts is needed to ensure its broader application. For example, it is important to determine if the capitals identified on each level, the interactions between capitals, and the spiraling up effect take place in the same manner within specific subsegments of the industry. The spiraling up effect describes how capitals can serve as input for the development of other resources within a community (Emery & Flora, 2006). The application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework to evaluate moonshine tourism in an emerging craft beverage destination could shed light on its replication and suitability to other destinations and subsegments. Given North Carolina's current promotional efforts such as featuring activities and experiences related to moonshine, we deemed it fitting to frame this framework within the concept of destination image and branding.

### *Model for Destination Branding*

Branding a destination is pivotal to boost tourism development, as it reflects the image the destination wishes to project and be known for by actual and potential visitors. Thus, the brand should be anchored by unique attributes to distinguish it from other destinations. Given the current attention and interest of tourists in craft beverages and tourists' interest in North Carolina's craft beverages, moonshine has the potential to be that anchor for positioning the state as a craft beverage tourism destination. To determine the extent to which the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework contributes to the development of North Carolina's destination image based on moonshine, we adopted the parameters of the Model for Destination Branding (Qu et al., 2011) (Fig. 2).

The Model for Destination Branding integrates elements of branding and image to explain its combined influence on tourists' future behaviors such as intention to revisit a destination and recommend it to others, an integration that makes it appropriate

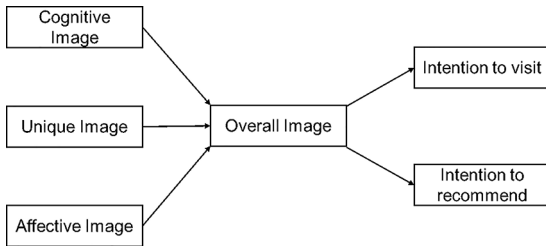


Figure 2. Model for Destination Branding. Adapted from Qu et al. (2011).

to assess the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework. This model sustains that the overall branding of a destination is made up of three image components. The *cognitive* component, which includes quality of experiences, touristic attractions, environment and infrastructure, and entertainment and outdoor activities, refers to the beliefs and knowledge associated with a given destination (C. Y. Wang & Hsu, 2010). The *affective* component is built upon feelings (e.g., pleasant, relaxing, and exciting) related to a destination, thus tends to have a greater influence on pretrip attitudes toward a destination (Wu & Liang, 2020). The *unique* component, conceptualized as cultural and natural environment, appealing destination, and local attractions, refers to the attributes that play a major role in differentiation (Qu et al., 2011).

The Model for Destination Branding has been used to evaluate the overall image of destinations (Prayag et al., 2017; Stylidis et al., 2017) and the image of specific tourism segments, such as sport venues (Hallman et al., 2015), events (Deng & Li, 2013), and national parks (Lo et al., 2019). These studies have served to advance this model in different ways. For example, Deng and Li (2013) found that the image of a specific event (a world fair) has a positive, yet indirect, effect on tourists' attitudes towards the entire destination, such as the intention to visit in the future. Several studies have also focused on assessing specific elements of the image components. For example, Lo et al. (2019) identified hard and soft services (*cognitive* image elements) as strong determinants of destination competitiveness and contribute greatly to experience quality perceptions.

There is limited consensus on the most influential element on destination image. A set of studies

concluded that tourists' *cognitive* image, especially related to tangible elements (e.g., facilities, physical appearance), has the greatest impact on the overall image of a destination (Stylidis et al., 2016) and repeat visitation (Hallman et al., 2015). In contrast, other studies have determined that *affective* image components, especially related to dispositions (e.g., intrapersonal constraints) and symbolic meanings (e.g., place attachment), are the major contributors of tourists' future behaviors (e.g., willingness to recommend, revisit intentions) and perceived destination competitiveness (Khan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015).

The Model for Destination Branding has exclusively been applied using quantitative approaches, mainly by surveying tourists (Lo et al., 2019; Prayag et al., 2017), potential tourists (Khan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015), and residents (Stylidis et al., 2016). Although major advances have been achieved (e.g., mediation role of different types of destinations in the prevalence of one image component over others), the exclusive emphasis on quantitative approaches carries two major issues. First, the focus on tourists and residents omits the perspectives of other key stakeholders (e.g., service providers, government) that are needed to construct a cohesive image of a destination. Second, the exclusive use of quantitative methods limits the opportunity to identify additional factors intervening in developing destination image. Furthermore, extant literature shows that most Model for Destination Branding studies have focused on cognitive and affective images, overlooking the unique element of destination branding.

### Research Methodology

This study applied ZMET to assess the extent to which the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021) contributes to the development of destination image based on moonshine according to the Model for Destination Branding parameters (Qu et al., 2011). An interpretivist approach framed this study to account for the subjectivity of participants and allowed a deep understanding of their worldview (Willis, 2012). In doing so, interpretivism allowed uncovering participants' perceptions of destination image and a fluid interpretation of the Destination Resources



Acceleration Framework and Model for Destination Branding. The subjective nature of interpretivism requires researchers to acknowledge how their worldview could affect their interpretation of study findings (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). As such, it is important to acknowledge that two members of the research team are familiar with the geographic and cultural context of moonshine, which aided in creating rapport with study participants. Yet, the remaining members' unfamiliarity with the study context provided an outside perspective in the interpretation of findings. All members of the research team have experience in food and beverage tourism and tourism product development. Their experience with these topics as researchers and educators significantly contributed to the data analysis stage.

### *Study Setting and Sampling*

The study was conducted in North Carolina, which is home to 84 distilleries producing moonshine or similar spirits offering tours and tastings (Distillery Trail, n.d.). Along with the producers, other stakeholder groups are involved in the moonshine tourism industry such as tourism promotion organizations and government agencies that support the marketing of agricultural products such as moonshine. The participation of members from each stakeholder group is fundamental for the continued development of this niche segment and for North Carolina to position itself as a craft beverage tourism destination. Therefore, this study sought participants from the moonshine tourism industry operating throughout the state from each of the following stakeholder groups: moonshine producers, state and county level tourism promotion agencies, and historians.

This study used a purposive sampling technique (Emmel, 2014) to identify potential participants from publicly available information in online databases and directories as well as professional contacts. An invitation explaining the study purpose and requesting participation in an interview was emailed to potential participants. Ten interviews were conducted between July and August of 2021. After eight interviews, no new themes emerged from the data collected; two additional ones were conducted for confirmation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The sample included four moonshine producers, one

tourism promotion agency at the state level, four at the county level, and one historian. As tourism in North Carolina was beginning to rebound from the impacts of COVID-19 travel restrictions and society's self-imposed limitations on travel at the time of the study, data collection yielded a valuable insight from moonshine tourism stakeholders. This sample provided insights from individuals responsible for developing and promoting tourism destinations who had to consider the interests and demands of visitors at this unique point in time.

### *Data Collection and Analysis: The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique Protocol*

The ZMET is a participant-driven method that uses images and metaphors to uncover participants' unconscious feelings and ideas following one-on-one in-depth interviews (Ji & King, 2018; D. Wang et al., 2015). This technique draws from the tradition of photo elicitation (Hancock & Foster, 2019) and is grounded in theories affirming that emotion and thought play a key role in decision-making and that most communication is nonverbal (Coulter, 2006; Plummer et al., 2012). Thus, the use of images and metaphors facilitates participants sharing emotions and thoughts, allowing researchers to identify psychological traits that would otherwise be overlooked (Plummer et al., 2012). By incorporating different methodologies (e.g., photo elicitation, repertory grid techniques) and elements (e.g., psychodrama, phototherapy) of various fields of study (e.g., visual anthropology, semiotics, psychology), ZMET allows a clearer understanding of consumers' experiences and decision-making processes and reduces overreliance on verbal communication (Coulter, 2006; Plummer et al., 2012).

This technique was originally developed for marketing research, to understand consumers' unconscious emotional needs about goods. However, its application has expanded to the service industry over time. The use of this technique in tourism studies has been very limited. While investigating the antecedents forming loyalty behaviors among sport tourists, Chen (2006) emphasized the value of ZMET in eliciting thoughts and feelings that participants would not usually share, hence it enhances trustworthiness in a qualitative study (DeCrop, 2004). Cruz and Buchanan-Oliver (2016) also deemed it essential to

conceptualizing the effect of tourism in the acculturation process and social capital accumulation among immigrants in New Zealand.

This study applied ZMET using seven steps that included questions to initiate discussion and probing questions to allow participants to elaborate on key theoretical constructs. (1) *Storytelling* was elicited by asking participants to bring between six and nine pictures that capture what moonshine represents to North Carolina as a destination. During the interviews, participants described the meaning of their pictures and explained their selection. The facilitator initiated the conversation by asking “This is image number 1. Can you explain what this image is about?” (2) Participants were then asked if there were any *missing images* that they could not find and to explain their relevance. The facilitator then asked “Are there any images that you looked for that represented the role of moonshine in North Carolina’s destination image, but could not find?” (3) In the *sorting images* step, participants organized the pictures into groups following their criteria and to elucidate the reasoning behind their criteria (e.g., types of moonshine, moonshine-related facilities), and then were asked to rank them in order or place them in a sequence. The facilitator guided this step by asking “Please sort these images into groups, what name, theme, or description would you give each group?” (4) The facilitator then randomly selected three of the participants’ pictures for *construct elicitation* and asked “Considering your thoughts and feelings about the meaning of moonshine a component of North Carolina’s destination image, can you tell me how two of these images are similar, yet different from the third one?” Then participants explained, for example, how one picture showed where moonshine is produced while the other one showed where moonshine is sold. (5) During the *metaphor elicitation* step, participants selected three pictures they consider the most representative of moonshine’s role as part of North Carolina’s destination image. The facilitator asked the participant to widen the picture frame and describe the elements that would be present in that additional space. (6) Through the *sensory images* step, participants used their five senses to describe the pictures they brought to the interview. For example, one question the facilitator asked was “When

you think about what moonshine means to North Carolina, what smells do you think of?” (7) During the *vignette*, the interviewer asked them to tell a story of how a tourist would experience North Carolina through moonshine. The use of the collage step of ZMET was omitted from this protocol to reduce the duration of the interview and avoid participant fatigue. Given this technique’s purpose and flexibility, most studies adapt the number of steps to their available resources, research questions, or sample characteristics (Ji & King, 2018).

The application of the ZMET steps (supported by the questions to initiate conversation) provided space for the participant to illustrate their own ideas and vision for moonshine tourism destination image in North Carolina. While the facilitator allowed the participant to lead the conversation, they listened for constructs related to the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework and Model for Destination Branding. When these constructs emerged, the facilitator would probe for further details to better understand how these theoretical constructs manifested in practical contexts. For example, the facilitator asked about the different crops needed (*natural capital*) in moonshine tourism development or about the role of heritage (*cultural capital*) in the construction of the overall image of North Carolina as a craft beverage tourism destination. These probing questions were different for each participant depending on the content they introduced based on the images they shared.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and had an average duration of 74 min. Interview transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo 12 for data organization and manual coding. Two types of analysis were applied on the collected data. On the first round of analysis, members of the research team used open coding to identify emerging ideas, themes, and concepts. The second round of analysis focused on axial coding to identify construct pairs, which are concepts or ideas that participants associate with one another, allowing the identification of relationships between constructs. The remaining key constructs and construct pairs served to build the consensus map, which helped determine the influence of moonshine tourism in the image of the destination (Khoo-Lattimore & Prideaux, 2013).

## Findings

The consensus map developed through the analysis of interview data allowed the identification of how constructs in the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021) contributed to the creation of elements of destination image as conceptualized through the Model for Destination Branding (Qu et al., 2011; Fig. 3). In line with the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework, we found that key capitals—*natural* (e.g., agricultural products), *cultural* (e.g., distilling traditions), and *built* (e.g., stills)—laid a foundation to establish the *unique* elements associated with destination image. **Creativity** and **meaning** facilitated the “spiraling up” effect, integrating *social* capital (e.g., social spaces and bonds shared by moonshine enthusiasts) creating opportunities to raise tourists’ awareness of moonshine in North Carolina (the *cognitive* element of image).

However, data showed that this development is hindered by moonshine’s history and reputation. Again, **creativity** and **meaning** advance the “spiraling up” effect, bringing in *human* resources (e.g., tour guides, mixologists) that help elevate the quality and the experience of moonshine. This third level represents moonshine’s *affective* image, as it is through moonshine tourism experiences that tourists can develop emotional attachments with moonshine and, in turn, with North Carolina.

### First Level: Natural, Cultural, and Built Capitals

North Carolina has the potential to build a destination image aligned with the *natural* resources needed to produce moonshine, such as corn and fruits. The state has an agroecological environment

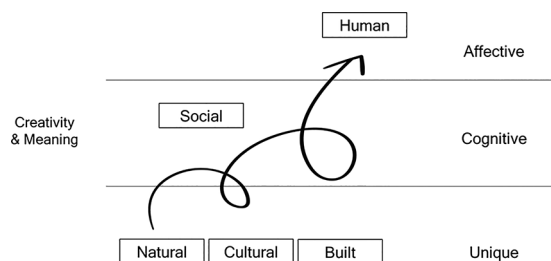


Figure 3. Integration of MDB (Qu et al., 2011) into DRAF (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021) in the context of moonshine tourism.

that is conducive to the production of a variety of agricultural products, like a moonshine producer expressed:

North Carolina, we got good soils, we got good climate, we got a lot of agriculture, so the products are readily available. We just got a good [all-around] situation where we can grow corn, wheat, barley, rye. Anything you would make whiskey with. (Producer 1)

Producers are aware of the close relationship between agriculture and moonshining, and that the quality of their product is greatly determined by the quality of the ingredients used to produce it.

*Cultural* resources were also associated with North Carolina’s destination image and moonshine tourism. As this participant describes, distilling is an element of the Southern US culture and has its roots in agriculture as farmers looked for alternative ways to utilize their production surplus:

In [our county], people from Scotland and Ireland settled here. They already knew how to distill spirits because they would take their leftover grains. They didn’t want them to go to waste, so they would distill them into liquor. That liquor would be used to drink or as medicine or as currency. (Tourism Promotion Agency 4)

Prohibition, the federal government’s decision to ban alcohol production and consumption, created an opportunity for farmers that were struggling due to the economic crisis of that time, as a participant indicates:

For many people it was making the illegal moonshine and selling it that they were able to support their families and keep them from starvation. They had a product that they could make at home and sell or transport and sell easily. (Producer 3)

Policy (i.e., the implementation of Prohibition) informed North Carolina’s *cultural* heritage as the illegal production of moonshine became a source of pride for some communities, as Historian 1 shared:

Even though we had Prohibition statewide for quite a number of years, a lot of North Carolinians have always produced alcohol and have been very proud of that. And have taken pride in producing a quality product.



Producers also noted that visitors look to share their experience with moonshine and use the tasting and distillery tours to facilitate passing on their heritage. For example, Producer 2 indicated:

We get a lot of people that visit, they're bringing somebody that they have done it or they have bought moonshine in the past. Something that they're wanting to pass on to future generations.

*Built* resources related to moonshine, including distilleries, other constructions, and equipment, such as stills (copper apparatus to distill ingredients or "mash") and mash boxes (containers where the mash rests and ferments) could potentially contribute to North Carolina's destination image. These gain even more significance because they are also part of the state's *cultural* heritage. As Producer 1 indicated:

We built that whiskey still from scratch. I designed it, drew it out. It's a 500-gallon, all-copper pot still. That shape and style is traditional to this area.

These three types of resources (*natural*, *cultural*, and *built*) make North Carolina's *unique* destination image, as they compose such an appealing local environment that set it apart from other craft beverage destinations. The particularities of North Carolina's *natural*, *cultural*, and *built* resources are the source of its competitive advantage, as Producer 2 mentioned:

We can capitalize on that with something different than the average spirit where a lot of other distilleries are this vodka, whiskey, bourbon. [Moonshine] It's something different.

Moonshine and its related resources can provide the one-of-a-kind experience tourists are looking for and its illicit origins augments their curiosity, increasing North Carolina's appeal as a craft beverage tourism destination. In this regard, this producer expanded:

A lot of people still don't know about (moonshine). They've heard about it, but they haven't experienced it. There is that curiosity of it, which is really good for tourism because people like to experience things they haven't already experienced.

These three foundational capitals are accelerated by **creativity** and **meaning** consistent with the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework. For instance, a tourism promotion agency shared:

The creativity of the individuals who have, over the years, cultivated this unique product and so much more than just a product. The brand of moonshine and the reputation and the cultural impact that they've created over time. They were just trying to make a living. In the meantime, they've changed the course of history. (Tourism Promotion Agency 4)

Moonshine emerged as a crude spirit made illegally and the term itself is often associated with the negative cultural stereotypes. However, over time moonshine has claimed an important spot in the state's lore and has become a source of cultural pride. This has been possible due to the effort of different moonshine and tourism stakeholders that have developed experiences around it (e.g., trails, tasting tours), making evident its value as part of the local culture.

### *Second Level: Social Capital*

Accelerated by **creativity** and **meaning**, the *natural*, *cultural*, and *built* resources related to moonshine create a setting for the development of *social* bonds among stakeholders. Moonshine tourism facilitates the creation of *social* spaces where producers can meet other industry stakeholders. These *social* spaces also serve as a stage where visitors can create connections with moonshine producers and aficionados, as a participant mentioned:

You have NASCAR producing giant parties, and you have the moonshine in the country, at local houses, in families producing small house parties. It's an interesting kind of comparison between the two that you have the moonshine is the lubrication for celebrating life and what interests us and makes us feel good and share happy stories and laugh. (Producer 3)

Events such as NASCAR races facilitate sharing moonshine knowledge and experiences, whether about its role in North Carolina's cultural heritage, or production processes and consumption. Increased knowledge among visitors strengthens

the *cognitive* image of the destination and is conducive to the development of *affective* image.

While moonshine creates spaces to develop *social* relationships and cooperation among stakeholders, it typically conveys a different notion to potential visitors. Moonshine's illegal origins have given it a negative image that hinders the development of moonshine tourism. Although some stakeholders acknowledge this negative connotation, they favor highlighting its value as part of North Carolina's heritage. For example, Producer 3 shared:

I think it has an image problem and I don't think we can get away from that. It is what it is. Its place, it was unique to this culture. It was made by simple people to enjoy their alcohol and they had to produce it illegally because the feds said, "No, it's not allowed."

Further, the negative image of moonshine affects perceptions of its quality as a distilled spirit. However, instead of attempting to remove such perceptions from the narrative of moonshine, stakeholders try to mitigate them by including an educational element into their moonshine tourism offerings. By increasing the visitors' knowledge and providing spaces where this knowledge can be shared, social resources can aid to change tourists' negative perceptions.

Moonshine stakeholders know that they need to make their tourism offerings and educational experiences meaningful to resonate with visitors. For that purpose, they infuse **creativity** when presenting moonshine to their visitors in different ways, notably by incorporating elements that entice a positive image such as Southern hospitality. A producer shared their vision for the design of moonshine tourism experiences:

If I were to design a tourism thing that focused on moonshine, it would need areas that would have some sort of event that included food, liquor, music, and dance in a rural setting that is reminiscent of the heritage of the production of this, but with real people. I mean, you're going to have tourists there but also locals who are either, let's say, playing the part but who privately live the part themselves, that give a sense of Southern hospitality lubricated by moonshine. (Producer 3)

This **creative** approach to establishing *social* connections through moonshine (e.g., events bringing

together tourists and stakeholders) incorporates all resources identified in the first two levels (*natural, cultural, built, social*). This resource integration should be added to the design and development of moonshine tourism experiences because it is appealing to the tourist and can contribute to the improvement of moonshine's image. In turn, this will allow the development of positive associations with North Carolina's destination image.

### *Third Level: Human Capital*

The acceleration of *social* resources and the spaces they create support the development of *human* resources, which are necessary to create moonshine tourism experiences. Tourists seek experiences that go beyond tasting moonshine or learning how it is made. Moonshine tourism service providers recognize that having people with specialized knowledge about moonshine and its production is an appealing element to visitors and one that allows the development of a deeper emotional connection with the destination. Tourism Promotion Agency 2 mentioned:

Visitors today want to hear the personal stories of people no matter where they are. Sure, they want to taste the moonshine and understand that, but they also want to know about the person. Where are they from? What was their father or grandfather or grandmothers . . . how did they influence their lives about making moonshine in North Carolina? I think that's a story that everyone can tell differently.

Moonshine producers also acknowledge the value of expertise as they have experienced first-hand the interest and curiosity of visitors in making connections with members of the local community and learning about their lifestyle and life stories. Producers feel that tourists look for these emotional connections as an indicator of an authentic experience, hence contributing to the development of *affective* image. Producer 3 explained:

What I'm seeing is [people] coming to visit and getting a taste of it through both formal tours, museum events, and rural experiences of the life and the culture of it. The one they're going to remember most will be the one where they go and enjoy the evening with people rather than sit in a car.

Staff (*human*) trained to communicate to visitors the nuances of moonshine's history and heritage can influence visitors' experiences. Therefore, it is not enough for staff to be knowledgeable; they also need to be empowered to share their knowledge and experiences with visitors and trained to communicate this knowledge effectively. In doing so, staff that acquire such communication skills will be able to connect with visitors and develop affective bonds.

Moonshine stakeholders are aware of the negative perceptions potential visitors may have about moonshine and its origins such as the stereotypes attached to the habitants of rural areas of the state. Thus, they seek to change these negative perceptions in several ways. For instance, producers take pride on distilling high-quality spirits that tourism promotion agencies can market. Marketing strategies seek to reposition moonshine by collaborating with local bartenders and mixologists (*human*) who use their knowledge and skill to create moonshine-based cocktails. As an example, Tourism Promotion Agency 4 explained how they used a picture of the winner of a cocktail contest, a local bartender preparing a moonshine-based cocktail, to elevate the craft spirits' image:

Here's an industry that people think of backwards hillbillies, and here's a man with culinary experience. . . . It also helps to elevate the product to appreciation of people who might not have any knowledge of moonshine. He introduces the drink to a new group of people who might not think of moonshine as moonshine, but they might think of it as a beverage, or some kind of an elevated way to enjoy their life.

Conversely, some stakeholders have applied an opposite stance to lean into stereotypes to market their products, which has proven to be successful. This success is due to the popularity of shows, like *Moonshiners*, that portrayed this lifestyle and have piqued the interest of the public. Tourism promotion agencies also capitalize from these trends by incorporating these stereotypes into their marketing efforts as visitors see them as the embodiment of the moonshine culture and help convey their message in a meaningful way. Tourism Promotion Agency 2 shared how these characters are often featured in special events:

This was a special event that had a moonshine distiller who was popular from a TV show. His name is JB Rader. He was an old-time

moonshiner in North Carolina. . . . You'll see most special events in North Carolina today have some moonshine exhibitor or giving samples or something along that.

Both approaches have been successful in increasing potential visitors' interest in tasting moonshine on-site and learning more about it. Thus, these findings illustrate how *human* resources can shape the experience of moonshine and increase the appeal to different market segments whether facilitating a visitor's experience (e.g., tour guides, bartenders) or with popular characters (e.g., historical figures, reality shows) attending a particular event or destination. These forms of *human* capital provide an opportunity for moonshine stakeholders looking to diversify their offerings or to incorporate tourism experiences in their endeavors. Personal encounters during visitors' experiences help and strengthen affective connections with the destination, which are critical for the development of destination image.

*Human* resources also play a critical role in the moonshine experience because they are responsible for creating or strengthening *affective* connections between the tourists and the destination. Staff (*human*) with culturally specific expertise and storytelling skills can take a standard visit where tourists only receive information and transform it into an immersive experience that generates a meaningful and long-lasting reaction in the tourist. A producer described the emotional responses expected from tourists when participating in their offerings:

We're in the happy business of having people make a happy experience of making spirits that make people happy, creating celebratory atmospheres, that bring happiness on and bring joy and celebration, and products they can take home, that will create that at home. (Producer 3)

## Discussion

This study integrated the *capitals* of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021) with the *cognitive, affective, unique* elements of the Model for Destination Branding (Qu et al., 2011) to identify the specific set of resources and their interplay in destination image development related to moonshine tourism

using the relatively novel (in tourism studies) ZMET method. Study findings indicate that from the perspective of tourism stakeholders (i.e., development and promotion leaders, moonshine producers, and historians) the overall set of resources needed can develop sequentially (i.e., it is not necessary to have all of them from the beginning) and across three levels, as upward mobility across levels is accelerated by **creativity** and **meaning**.

This study indicates that unique *natural*, *cultural*, and *built* resources are foundational (level 1), which, once accelerated, foster potential visitors' *cognitive* recognition across *social* resources (level 2); the *affective* element appeared key with the emergence of the *human* resources (level 3). These findings indicate that all these resources may represent a competitive advantage—the *unique* element—for the state of North Carolina as a moonshine destination, which can be leveraged to help North Carolina stand out in a global marketplace and capture a greater portion of the growing craft beverage tourism market (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017; Knollenberg et al., 2021). Thus, these *capitals* should serve as focus elements for the development of a cohesive destination image of the state and, therefore, should be featured in promotional efforts. This builds on prior explorations of destination image development (Prayag et al., 2017; Styliadis et al., 2017; Su et al., 2015) to provide greater specificity on the types of resources that should be developed to establish destination image. Furthermore, we highlight the roles of **creativity** and **meaning** in leveraging natural, cultural, built, social, and human capitals to create crucial elements of destination image. Most critically these findings advance the established knowledge that many resources are needed for destination image development to illustrate what those resources are specifically for craft beverage tourism image development—in this case, moonshine tourism. Going beyond a prescriptive “check list” of what is needed to establish craft beverage tourism, this study uses the Model for Destination Branding to illustrate how those resources can be leveraged to create a destination image.

Although this study utilized the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework to assess destination image development rather than product development (Gil Arroyo et al., 2021), findings

show several consistencies, extending its applicability to other aspects of craft beverage tourism development. A key element, the spiraling up effect accelerated by **creativity** and **meaning**, still became evident for destination image development. Another similarity pertains to the role of resources in destination image development. *Natural* resources (e.g., rye, fruits) appeared as foundational elements for both product and destination image development. *Social* resources also emerged in the second level in both framework's applications (product and destination image development), which supports the pivotal roles of *social* resources in the development of craft beverage tourism (Cavaliere, 2017) and relationships among industry members and across industries in tourism and host communities' tourism development (Knollenberg et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020).

Yet, the application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework to destination image development provided new insights in two ways. First, the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework application to product development did not include *cultural* resources as foundational, as this study found for destination image development, which makes sense as *cultural* resources can convey the authenticity of the destination (Gil Arroyo et al., 2023; Yi et al., 2018). Second, the application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework for destination image development revealed differences in the resources that come into play in comparison to its application in product development. Namely, *political* and *financial* resources are absent in the development of destination image, although they do play an important role in the development of craft beverage tourism products (Barbieri & Baggett, 2017; Gil Arroyo et al., 2021).

In the case of moonshine, a distinction should be made between policy (e.g., Prohibition) and political resources (e.g., a collective voice for action on a political issue). Conversations with moonshine tourism stakeholders clearly state the important role of policies enacting Prohibition in moonshine's establishment in the culture of North Carolina. Yet, this is not the same as political resources—which would manifest as collective efforts to change policy related to craft beverage tourism. It was surprising that there was not more conversation about the current role of political resources in shaping a



destination image around moonshine as there have been policies recently passed in the state allowing for increased sales of liquor at distilleries. But perhaps this omission was due to the focus on destination image in the conversation and participants felt that such elements would not influence travelers' decision when choosing a travel destination nor evident during their experiences. As such, it appears that *financial* and *political* resources do not need to be featured in promotional materials.

Another major difference was found regarding *human* resources, initially identified at the first level first (product development) but becoming more evident at the third (destination image development) level in this study. These changes of order in the resource levels are important to consider as they indicate which resources stakeholders should prioritize either to stimulate product development or to highlight in their promotional efforts. For example, this study's findings suggest that when developing a craft beverage destination, stakeholders should make sure to nurture as *social* and *cultural* resources simultaneously (second level) whereas for destination image *cultural resources* may be supported by *social* resources.

This application of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework in the development of North Carolina's destination image provides evidence that moonshine, despite its stereotypes, can be used to establish the state as a craft beverage destination. Evidence from these interviews indicates that moonshine-related resources (i.e., capitals) serve as Model for Destination Branding elements, which can be used to develop a cohesive image of North Carolina as a moonshine tourism destination. In this study, *affective* image emerged in the third level of destination image development, which is important to consider as visitor's emotional bond with a destination is critical to increase the destination appeal and dictate their future behavior (Khan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). Styliadis et al. (2016) determined that a destination's *cognitive* image is the basis of destination image, and often the most influential in tourist's travel intention. However, this study's findings indicate that in the context of moonshine tourism, stakeholders perceive that *unique natural*, *cultural*, and *built* elements serve as the potential foundation for moonshine tourism.

Regarding this study's methodology, the application of qualitative inquiry with stakeholders of the moonshine industry (supply side), rather than visitors (demand side), enabled the garnering of rich data to enhance understanding of the moonshine culture, history, and its nuances. Such rich data also enabled the identification of elements relevant to the development of North Carolina's destination image. More specifically, the use of ZMET—an image-based technique—to examine destination image development broadened the participant's ability to fully explain their perceptions, feelings, and concepts attached to their understanding of moonshine (Plummer et al., 2012). The generation of such rich data allowed the researchers to disentangle the way in which the spiral effect in destination image development works. Additional applications of ZMET in other destination image development studies are needed to assess whether the specific sequencing and leveling of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework capitals—and the extent to which spiraling up is spurred by creativity and meaning and linked to the elements of Model for Destination Branding—are transferable to other contexts. Future studies should closely examine each level and its elements, not just in relation to moonshine tourism, but to other craft beverages, especially those that have strong relationships with local culture to determine whether these levels and resources identified are beverage specific or can be observed across all types of craft beverages.

## Conclusions

The integration of constructs of Model for Destination Branding with the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework contributes to the body of knowledge on craft beverage tourism by expanding both frameworks through an integrated qualitative study. This study illustrates that this framework can be applied beyond the development of craft beverage tourism products, but also in the crafting of a cohesive destination image. The Model for Destination Branding's application to assess supply-side stakeholders' perceptions adds to the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework's possible applications to evaluate and develop destination image. The application of these established theoretical frameworks in the context of moonshine



tourism in North Carolina sets the foundation for further exploration of how different destinations, craft beverages, and stakeholder perceptions may contribute to the creation of a craft beverage destination image. Methodologically, this study's novel application of ZMET to assess the development of destination image demonstrates its value to tourism studies through the enabling of broader and perhaps more profound understanding of both the context and its stakeholders' perspectives.

Study findings also carry several managerial implications. First, they can inform strategies for destination image development by aligning perceptions from different stakeholders, such as producers, tourism promotion organizations, and potential tourists. By addressing multiple perspectives, a more authentic image can be developed, which may better resonate with future visitors. Second, this study's findings also provide insights on the types of foundational resources (*natural*, *cultural*, and *built*) of craft beverage tourism that should be prioritized to develop and position a destination image. More specifically, destinations could identify resources they currently have which need strengthening or are lacking to develop their image as a craft beverage tourism destination. The integrated use of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework and Model for Destination Branding frameworks used in this study can help destination leaders identify and address barriers hindering the development of craft beverage tourism and its destination image. For example, it revealed stakeholders' negative perceptions attached to the image of moonshine, which can enable destination leaders to actively address such perceptions (e.g., turning them to pique visitors' curiosity) and to increase their destination appeal. Study findings also allowed identifying strategies that can help moonshine's image, such as emphasizing the quality of the spirit (e.g., featuring awards and recognitions) and its value as part of the state's cultural heritage.

This study's contributions should be considered in view of some study limitations. Given its qualitative and novel nature, these findings are most applicable to the state of North Carolina but provide valuable considerations for similar destinations. As such, further research would help to determine whether the resources identified as critical for the development of a cohesive destination image are unique to moonshine tourism or can be applied

to other types of craft beverage tourism and even other niche tourism contexts. Although study participants belonged to different stakeholder groups, they all represented the supply side perspective. In this regard and considering the previous Destination Resources Acceleration Framework application have also focused on the supply side, it is advisable that future research incorporate both supply and demand perspectives to offer a holistic understanding of how community capitals contribute to the development of destination image based on moonshine tourism. Furthermore, future research should expand the use of the Destination Resources Acceleration Framework and Model for Destination Branding frameworks to explore other destination image creation via other craft beverages including beer and wine. Collectively this study advanced the theoretical foundation of craft beverage tourism and destination image development and the methodologies available to tourism researchers, providing new insights and potential lines of research to be explored and continue building on the extant knowledge.

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