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**Link to publisher's version:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2015.1035307>

**Citation:** Parker C, Roper S and Medway D (2015) Back to basics in the marketing of place: the impact of litter upon place attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 31(9-10): 1090-1112.

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## **Back to basics in the marketing of place: The impact of litter upon place attitudes**

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## **Abstract**

Attempts to apply marketing theory and principles to place have become a legitimate area of academic and 'real world' practice. However, place marketing does not typically incorporate all elements of the traditional 7 Ps, focusing far too often on just one of these - promotion. As well as this rather myopic approach, place marketing suffers from an overly strategic view of the world which ignores the meaning and lived experience of places to individuals, especially residents. The purpose of this article is twofold – first we investigate the impact of litter on place attitudes. Litter is a common, but negative, element of place, which is intimately connected to the lived experience of a place but typically far removed from the positive promotional activity favoured by place marketing effort and the study thereof. In this sense, the paper reframes place marketing from a strategic to a micro-marketing endeavour. We found that exposing respondents to litter significantly lowers their place attitudes. Our second contribution is to demonstrate the relevance of classic marketing research approaches, such as attitudinal measures, to investigate litter and its impact on place evaluations, through quasi-experimental design (with 662 respondents). Through this, we extend the range of theory and method applied in place marketing – away from controllable promotion endeavours investigated through case-studies to a more holistic and robust interpretation of place marketing, which has a measurable impact upon the places where people live and visit.

## **Keywords**

Place marketing; place branding; brand attitude; litter; semantic differentials; quasi-experiment

## **Summary statement of contribution**

This paper establishes a relationship between litter and place attitudes, through quasi-experimental design. Subjects exposed to litter evaluate places more negatively. The paper's main contribution is two-fold – first to provide evidence to extend place marketing research from its current promotional focus and second to demonstrate the value of 'tried and tested' marketing theory, principles and measures in building empirical understanding of the relationship between people and places.

## **Back to basics in the marketing of place: The impact of litter upon place attitudes**

Litter is one of the scourges of modern society. In the UK alone more than 30 million tonnes of unofficial litter (i.e. not in bins and recognised disposal units) are collected from streets annually (Keep Britain Tidy, 2013a), costing UK local authorities some £885 million to clean up (Keep Britain Tidy, 2013b). Litter has a clear environmental impact; if uncollected it washes into storm drains and river systems and ends up in oceans as massive floating gyres that cause a danger to seabirds and marine life (Nellemann and Corcoran, 2009; Sheavly and Register, 2007).

Litter also has an effect on the spatial environment in which it is found. For example, Tudor and Williams (2006) have demonstrated that clean and litter-free sand is *the most important* of 10 different criteria for beach selection amongst UK beach goers, suggesting litter can have a deleterious effect on tourism. The same study discovered that recognition and awareness levels of beach award schemes (e.g. Blue Flag) were found to be poor, and that most users were unaware if their chosen beach had such status. This led the authors to conclude “that beach awards do not attract the public – clean beaches do” (Tudor and Williams, 2006, p. 163). Such research implies that the impact of the ‘Blue Flag’ *brand* for clean beaches is negligible, yet the place marketing literature is far more focussed upon these kinds of branding initiatives than interventions that could deliver a litter-free environment. This is ironic when one considers that the majority of litter is itself a product of successful marketing. The top litter brands in the form of discarded packaging are often those with leading sales and market share (Roper and Parker, 2006). Thus, Coca Cola, the world’s most valuable FMCG brand in

2014 (\$81.6 billion, [www.interbrand.com](http://www.interbrand.com)), was identified in a recent survey (Keep Britain Tidy, 2013a) as the brand most likely to be seen as litter on the streets of the UK, making up 8% of all litter found.

As the title suggests, the aim of this paper is to go 'back to basics' and examine how litter affects people's attitudes towards place. This aim is examined from a marketing perspective so the recommendations and managerial implications are relevant to place marketers - although we also write these in a way we hope will have relevance to any stakeholder, within a specific location, trying to bring about place improvements. The research involves hypothesis development set around a video-based quasi-experimental study involving 662 participants. The paper starts out with a critical literature review of the development of place marketing theory to identify research questions and hypotheses, before reporting methodology, findings, discussion and conclusions.

Although it may seem obvious that litter will have detrimental effect on perceptions of place, our research establishes a previously missing causal link between seeing litter and more negative place attitudes. We demonstrate that what is currently viewed as a tolerable nuisance (Hope, 2014) or a by-product of the consumer society (Roper and Parker, 2013) significantly affects how individuals relate to a place. This is crucial in an age of government cuts to local authorities. Councils are accused of squandering large sums of money on marketing and branding activities dubbed 'futile' (e.g. Black, 2014; Copping, 2010; Salisbury Journal, 2011), whilst, at the same time, cutting funding for

litter clearance (Cain, 2014; Manchester Evening News, 2012), which our research suggests would have both a positive and demonstrable effect on place attitudes.

## **Place marketing – a critical review of theory and practice**

In their review of place marketing, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) assert that although academic interest in the subject may be fairly recent, the practice “is almost as old as government itself” (*ibid*, p.151). Their review identifies three interpretations of place marketing; *promotion*, *planning* and *branding*.

### *Is place marketing just place promotion?*

The first interpretation of place marketing, place promotion, principally describes place selling (Ward, 1998). Whilst there are many historical examples of this, place boosterism is still very much practised: “promotional tools are the ubiquitous video, the glossy brochure, the business fact pack, the snappy slogan...” (Gold and Ward, 1994, p.7).

The second type of place marketing, *place planning*, refers to the application of a more holistic marketing philosophy to places. Ashworth and Voogd (1990) explore the application of marketing ideas to urban planning and management; “from analysing the market to shaping the product” (*ibid.*, p3). Nevertheless, the title of Ashworth and Voogd's (1990) book, “*Selling the city: marketing approaches in public sector urban planning*”, still suggests a marketing promotion bias, and, in accordance with this, the

practical examples they review often focus on the creation of positive images for cities rather than changing the place product *per se*.

The third type of place marketing, “place branding”, also espouses a more holistic approach. For example, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) demonstrate the potential for corporate branding to be applied to places to create value and loyalty, thereby “transcending mere advertising” (*ibid*, p.159). The interpretation of places as corporate brands has also been popularised by Anholt (2002). Kavaratzis (2009, p.29) identifies a number of similarities between corporate branding and place branding. They both have “multidisciplinary roots, both address multiple groups of stakeholders, both have a high level of intangibility and complexity, both need to take into account social responsibility, both deal with multiple identities, both need a long-term development”. However, because of the limited control brand management can have over the place product, it emerges as an activity that is “only able to use one part of the marketing mix, namely promotion” (Virgo and de Chernatony, 2006, p. 379). Moreover, this form of promotion is quite one dimensional, with the visionary sense dominating (Medway, 2015). Indeed, in his analysis of place branding amongst practitioners in 12 UK cities, Hankinson (2001, p.135) notes that the practice “frequently focuses on what might be called the visual triggers, such as marques, logos, straplines/ slogans and names”. Put another way, place branding *practice* still appears to over emphasise promotion, and in particular the visual communication aspects of promotion, whilst neglecting the development of brand strategy, partnership infrastructure and culture, or all the other elements of academic place branding frameworks that have been identified (see, for example, Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2009; Hankinson, 2007; Hanna and Rowley, 2011) .



In summary, our first criticism is that place marketing, in practice, is only place promotion and this bears little resemblance to the academic interpretation of place marketing that has developed to include other parts of the marketing or corporate branding mix – e.g. product (Warnaby and Medway, 2013); people (Braun, Kavaratzis, and Zenker, 2013) and strategic planning (Oliveira, 2014). Nevertheless, these articles are purely conceptual – providing inspiration as to what marketing *could do* for places rather than evidencing what it *does do*. This leads us to the second criticism of place marketing; there is little evidence of its effectiveness.

### *Does place marketing work?*

Lucarelli and Berg (2011) conducted a review of 271 place branding articles, concluding “the domain is based upon qualitative studies focusing on one or few cases that draw conceptual and theoretical generalization from studies based on shallow empirical data” (*ibid.*, p.16). Similarly, Gertner's (2011a, 2011b) reviews of the literature on place marketing/ branding suggest it is overly qualitative, descriptive and lacking in theoretical development. Place marketing is also hampered by no clear consensus as to what it should be achieving. For example, Alves, Cerro and Martins (2010, p.29) discuss the impacts of small tourism events, such as the fact they “build community pride; help preserve local culture; [and] enhance community image”. Often high-level aims and aspirations for place marketing activity are chosen, at a phenomenological level, with little attempt made to operationalise these constructs into measures that demonstrate place marketing's effectiveness.

The problem is more than just methodological. As most place marketing activity is funded by the public purse, place marketing theory has, by default, become normative – assumed to ‘make the world a better place’, but with almost no evidence of doing so (Niedomysl and Jonasson, 2012). This brings us to the third criticism, the lack of marketing theory and marketing research in place marketing.

### *Where is the ‘marketing’ in place marketing?*

Summarising the place marketing review by Berglund and Olsson (2010), Niedomysl and Jonasson (2012) identify that place marketing research starts from one of two perspectives, spatial (place) or marketing, with the latter leading to either prescriptive or conceptual approaches (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). Niedomysl and Jonasson (2012, p. 224) also criticise place marketing researchers poor attempts “to advance generalizations based on their empirical work”, noting that, “[a]ny theories or models used are usually borrowed from marketing research”. However, marketing research is a very thorough endeavour. As the American Marketing Association (2004) state:

“Marketing research is the function that links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information - information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process.”

As we have seen, place marketing, both as practice and academic inquiry, does not operate in this manner. It is very poor at borrowing from academic research in the marketing discipline. Indeed, apart from corporate branding (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2009, 2010) and services marketing (e.g. Warnaby, 2009; Warnaby and Davies, 2006), we do

not find much evidence of marketing theory informing place marketing or the research associated with it. There is rich and well-established theory in the marketing sub-disciplines of consumer behaviour, innovation and new product development, relationship marketing and business-to-business marketing, for example, but very little of this has contributed to furthering understanding of place marketing effort. There are, of course, exceptions. For example, Insch and Florek (2008) explored the way in which customer satisfaction could be conceptualised for residents as a measure of place satisfaction. This leads us to our fourth criticism – the lack of appreciation of the importance of the **place**, or the place experience, in the place marketing literature.

#### *Where is the 'place' in place marketing?*

In a growing critical dialogue, much place marketing, and related place branding practice has been criticised for being overly top-down, strategic and managerialist (Clegg and Kornberger, 2010; Eisenschitz, 2010). Such activity is often responsible for applying a standardising veneer to places which stifles any genuine uniqueness that may arise from them. Echoing Ritzer (1998), this has been portrayed as a form of 'McDonaldisation' of space (Warnaby and Medway, 2013), in which the 'real' essence of a place, or more specifically the lived experience of a place which makes it different to being anywhere else, gets drowned out. This reflects Relph's (1976) warning of 'inauthentic' attitudes to places being promulgated through mass communication media and practices. It is also a situation in which practice is mirrored by academic inquiry, and a corpus of uncritical place marketing literature that is concerned with the ways that place marketing can be done (see, for example, Balakrishnan, 2009; Kotler,

Asplund, Rein, and Haider, 1999), rather than stopping to consider for a moment what a 'place', namely the thing that is being marketed, might be.

In line with critical perspectives on place marketing, especially in terms of a lack of appreciation of what place is, some have emphasised that this has been of particular disadvantage to residents. Thus, in respect of place branding, for example, Aitken and Campelo (2011; p. 918) suggest "[f]requently, residents and the local community are left aside in the branding process, and this leads to very little connection to and understanding of the sense of place...". Residents, it would seem, are often those most intimately connected with the lived experience of a place, so if place marketing ignores this experience, or sidesteps it, it is a practice that denies residents their voice – further emphasising Relph's notions of place inauthenticity, and for residents in particular, making their place 'placeless' (Warnaby and Medway, 2013). In essence, it would appear that place marketing is abstracted from place and occurs at a macro level. Warnaby and Medway (2013) have suggested that this holds resonance with de Certeau's (1984; p. 93) notion of the "panorama-city" as viewed from above, as opposed to "the ordinary practitioners of the city" who "live 'down below,' below the threshold at which visibility begins". Extending this analogy, 'the panorama city' might be viewed as the official representation of place marketing effort, whilst the 'ordinary practitioners of the city' are the residents who have the lived experience of the place. It is problematic that in place marketing practice any disconnect should occur between these two. The focus on litter in this paper is very much about the lived experience of place. Whilst litter is rarely a macro-level focus of place marketing strategic planning (especially when the marketing emphasis is on accentuating the positive), it is real and tangible. And, as a

host of literature on wider physical incivilities has demonstrated (e.g. Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Ceccato and Uittenbogaard, 2014; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Doran and Lees, 2008; Hunter, 1978; LaGrange et al, 1992; Maxfield, 1987), litter is one of several factors that can collectively affect people's perceptions of where they live. This holds resonance with Agnew's (1987) notions of 'sense of place', which "reinforces the social-spatial definition of place from the *inside*" (*ibid*, p.27). It is this inside-out understanding of place that place marketing needs to better understand. In other words, what does place mean, or how is place evaluated by its users? Until we understand this then any talk of place marketing seems premature.

Notions of a 'sense of place' (Agnew, 1987), or place as a lived experience or lived concept, hold an obvious connection with 'place attachment' in the environmental psychology literature. Indeed, it has been noted that many other similar terms abound within the social sciences, such as 'community attachment' (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974), 'sense of community' (Sarason, 1974), 'place dependence' (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981) and 'topophilia' (Tuan, 1974), which are often difficult to distinguish between in respect of their meaning and application. Hidalgo and Hernandez, (2001, p.274) define 'place attachment' as "an affective bond or link between people and specific places". This might occur at various spatial scales (e.g. house, neighbourhood, town and city), and have various physical and or social factors that influence it.

Conversely, Warnaby and Medway (2013) have also postulated the concept of 'place detachment', which causes people to distance themselves from a place and what it means to them as result of negative experiences, events or memories. According to Farnum, Hall, and Kruger (2005) it is only recently that the importance **individuals**

attach to places has been considered directly relevant to the management of public places (Cheng, Kruger and Daniels, 2003; Stokowski, 2002; Williams and Vaske, 2003). One can envisage situations when even littered places may be open to some personal interpretation. For example, litter seen after a sporting event, like the Great North Run, may, to one observer, signify success; an 'active' city and a popular location, reinforcing levels of place attachment. Conversely, to another observer, the same litter in the same location may signify failure; a 'lazy' city which cannot meet its most perfunctory responsibilities (keeping the streets clean), and/ or a divisive place which prioritises the needs of a specialised section of the population (runners) at the expense of others (residents). These negative evaluations may engender feelings of place detachment. Place and how it is interpreted, it would seem, "lies firmly in the eye of the beholder" (Warnaby and Medway, 2013; p 350).

Our four criticisms of place marketing: the narrow practical focus upon place promotion, the dearth of evaluation, the poor integration with the mainstream marketing literature and the lack of appreciation for the individuals' perceptions of place leads us to an important research question. *Are place marketers designing interventions that matter to the users of a place?*

Alves et al., (2010) criticise place marketers for measuring the economic value of events, whilst failing to protect and enhance the socio-cultural impact of events on place perception. However, it is not only events and positive, socio-cultural impacts that affect place perceptions. Having a great historical or socio-cultural story to tell about your place may well be negated by consumers' more straightforward or surface-level place evaluations. In such instances, a place may have negative associations that it wishes to

overcome. Certainly, at a macro level, place branding in areas previously known throughout the world for corruption or conflict, such as Bogotá (Kalandides, 2011a) and Northern Ireland (Gould and Skinner, 2007), has aimed to overturn widely held negative (and often historical) associations. This is clearly a job for the place brand manager (Anholt, 2002; Kalandides, 2011a). At a micro level, however, far less serious day-to-day issues may also have a negative effect on places. Residents and visitors may well appreciate the facilities a place has to offer, the rich history and places of interest to visit, even the 'feel' of the place; benefits that are individually defined. However, these benefits may be damaged or negated by factors that are currently given less importance (or ignored) by the place marketer. A measurement of attitude or snapshot evaluation may be rather less flattering, and certainly less 'phenomenological' or aspirational, than those responsible for place would wish for. In 2014, for example, Piccadilly Gardens, a green space in the centre of Manchester, was voted the city's worst attraction on Tripadvisor (Bartlett, 2014). The designers of Piccadilly Gardens, Arup claim that "Piccadilly Gardens transforms Manchester's central park from a problem area into an effective public space." Conversely, many of Tripadvisor's raters make negative comments about this place, such as: "a dirty horrible place", "the whole area is covered in rubbish", "a filthy concrete dystopia full of hustlers and noise" (Tripadvisor, 2014).

It appears, therefore, that low-level irritations, like litter and noise, can effectively undermine any place marketing activity that is taking place, such as events, or the language of positive promotion, which aims to 'talk up' a location.

Litter is an example of a physical incivility, what LaGrange et al. (1992, p. 312) have defined as 'low-level breaches of community standards that signal an erosion of conventionally accepted norms and values'. Over the last 50 years, there has been much work linking a variety of physical incivilities with space and examining the effects on people, typically in terms of their fear of crime (see, for example, Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Ceccato and Uittenbogaard, 2014; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Doran and Lees, 2008; Hunter, 1978; Maxfield, 1987). There is much less work associating physical incivilities with place perceptions. Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman and Chavis (1990) measured 'block satisfaction'<sup>1</sup>. However, the effect of litter on block satisfaction was not tested in the subsequent analysis. Nevertheless, on blocks with more litter residents had higher perceptions of harassment in the street ( $r = 0.54$   $p < .001$ ); loitering teens ( $r = 0.57$   $p < .001$ ); people fighting in the street ( $r = 0.69$   $p < .001$ ) and people selling drugs ( $r = 0.62$   $p < .001$ ). Deutsch and Goulias (2009) consider sense of place and lament the lack of literature on place attitude and more concrete attributes of human-place interaction, such as the risk of unpleasant encounters, level of crowdedness, amount of activity and safety of walking around. Hence:

**H<sub>1</sub> Subjects exposed to litter will have a lower attitude towards a place.**

## **Marketing and Litter**

So far, our paper has concentrated upon the 'conscious' interface between place and marketing. In other words, we have reviewed the research that designs and describes

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<sup>1</sup> How satisfied are you with this block as a place to live? Comparing your block to other blocks in the area is your block a better place to live, a worse place to live, or about the same? In the past two years have conditions on your block gotten worse, stayed about the same or improved? In the next two years, do you feel conditions on your block will get worse, stay about the same or improve?)



the application of marketing principles and practices to places. Thus far, none of the place marketing papers reviewed have made any reference to litter. Nevertheless, there is another stream of marketing literature which is concerned with the 'unconscious' interface between marketing and place; in other words the impact marketing practices have on places in terms of unintended consequences, such as how marketing activity affects societal well-being (Polonsky and Wood, 2001; Belk et al., 1996). Here, we do find references to litter. For example, Polonsky et al (2003) discuss a 'harm chain' of negative outcomes which might emanate from marketing activities, particularly related to packaging disposal, post-consumption.

Recent work in the marketing area (Roper and Parker, 2006, 2008, 2013; Wever, Van Onselen, Silverster, and Boks, 2010; Stevens, 2008) has examined connections between litter, brands and places. Roper and Parker's (2006) study measured the occurrence of branded litter in a city centre environment. In a quantitative investigation of 'gutter share' they identified that out of 4,363 recorded items of litter, the top five dropped brands were Walkers Crisps, Coca Cola, Cadburys, Diet Coke, with Marlboro Lite and Stella Artois being 5<sup>th</sup> equal.

In a more recent experimental study, Roper and Parker (2013) identified that survey respondents who had seen a fast-food brand as litter within a given environment had significantly lower attitudes towards the brand in question to those who had not. Thus, packaging when seen as litter had a negative, uncontrollable and unintended consequence on the brand of the packaging in question. Thus, branded packaging has a post-consumption effect, continuing well after the product has been advertised,

purchased, consumed and discarded. Of particular interest to the current study, is the potential 'carry over' effect of branded litter, not on brand evaluations, but on spatial evaluations of a given area. This leads to our second research question, does marketing activity, in particular branding, have an unintended impact on place evaluations? Branding (in other words the brand of litter) could act as a moderating variable - changing the relationship between litter and place attitudes, but we have no a-priori evidence of how or if it interacts. Hence:

**H<sub>2</sub> Attitudes towards a place will not vary between subjects that have been exposed to branded litter and subjects that have been exposed to unbranded litter.**

### **Demographic influences on place perceptions**

According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008, p.162) "the perceived effectiveness of place marketing is mostly appreciated in the field of tourism development". However, the most common measures of effectiveness are conversion rates (McWilliams and Crompton, 1997) and hotel bed occupancy (Visit England, 2014). Mirroring the place marketing literature, there is an absence of debate in tourism relating to the impact of marketing activity on *an individual's* place perceptions, or feelings, such as place attachment (Gu and Ryan, 2008). This stands in stark contrast to the popularity of Tripadvisor and other internet sites, which receive enormous volumes of qualitative feedback from visitors. Nevertheless, (Akehurst, 2008, p. 51) dismissed on-line, user-generated content which reflects tourists' perceptions and feelings because "content was relatively shallow and provided little detail about expectations, or satisfaction with

tourist products”. However, there is some useful research in the tourism literature on resident attitudes towards tourism development, which is relevant to our study. For example, Doxey (1975) identified a number of ‘irritants’ perceived by residents to be caused by visitors. Likewise, Gu and Ryan (2008) identified that tourism can bring disadvantages to residents such as congestion, changing retail patterns and petty crime. In this regard, litter could potentially be another disadvantage associated with increased visitor numbers. In their review of the literature Gu and Ryan (2008) identify a number of factors which may impact upon attitudes, including age and gender. Nevertheless, as these factors are often not replicable, they conclude that individual research findings may be time and place specific. This leads us to our final research question – to what extent are place attitudes *people specific*? In other words, are there certain, identifiable groups that will consistently hold higher (or lower) attitudes towards a place, regardless of temporal or spatial irritants such as litter.

McDowell (1999) discusses how men and women experience space and place differently and reinforces this by talking about the spatially reinforced inequality of urban areas. Likewise, there is a good deal of work in consumer research that highlights the different behaviours and interpretations of males and females. In terms of cognitive style, for example, Allinson and Hayes (1996) find females to be more analytical than males. The economics literature provides further justification of looking at demographic differences, where there is considerable work that identifies robust distinctions in risk preferences, social preferences and competitive preferences between male and female subjects (Croson and Gneezy, 2009). In the marketing literature, studies show that female customers tend to rate service quality lower when a comparison is made

between sexes (Juwaheer, 2011; Lin, Chiu, and Hsieh, 2001; Snipes, Thompson, and Oswald, 2006; Tan and Kek, 2004). Hence:

**H<sub>3</sub>: Females will have lower place attitudes than males, regardless of the presence of litter.**

As with gender, there is a body of work that demonstrates age-related difference in perceptions and behaviour in a variety of marketing-related fields, together with a large amount of literature dealing with differences in life and work satisfaction of different age groups. For example, Holbrook and Schindler (1994) discuss the development of aesthetic preferences over a person's lifespan. This leads to consumers having a nostalgic preference for cultural icons and the way things were from their late adolescence and early adulthood. Work by Deshpande (1997) demonstrates that older age groups (>40) are more likely to have a higher ethical stance than younger workers. Perhaps, because older individuals tend to be more conservative in their outlook (Serwinek, 1992). Hence:

**H<sub>4</sub> Older people will have more negative place attitudes, regardless of the presence of litter**

## **Method**

The research adopted a quasi-experimental methodology, which tested people's attitudes to a place. The experimental design allowed us to isolate the effect that we were measuring (i.e. the effect of litter on place attitudes). Internet data collection makes this a quasi-experiment. Three short films were produced especially for this

study. The films, taking the form of a television news story, were designed using a storyboard and scripting approach and then shot by a professional filmmaker and technician, using paid actors. The films were all of 1 minute 12 seconds duration and featured scenes from a park in Buxton, Derbyshire. They included some typical park images such as people walking, sitting on benches and ducks on a pond. There was a reporter (paid actor) discussing the increasing consumption of 'food on the go'.

The only difference between the three films was short interspersed cutaway shots reflecting the three experimental conditions, and respondents were randomly allocated to one of these using a feature within Qualtrics survey software. In the first condition, respondents saw the park with no litter present. In the second condition, respondents saw the same scenes but with evidence of discarded packaging from the leading UK fast-food brand. In the third condition respondents saw the same scenes with evidence of fast-food packaging, but this time carrying no branding colours, logos or information. This manipulation enabled us to investigate a general litter and branded litter effect upon place attitudes. Having seen one of the three films respondents then answered questions that measured their attitudes towards place as well answering some basic demographic questions relating to sex and age. A park was chosen as the place under study in the films because it might be conceived as fairly neutral space, in terms of the fact it is not overly urban or rural, yet the leisure and recreational dimension of the park still makes it an ideal subject for place marketing effort. The use of fast-food packaging as litter in the films reflects its position as the fastest growing category of litter in the UK (Roper and Parker, 2013).

### *Development of dependent variable - attitudes towards place*

Different yet overlapping interpretations of place are discussed and operationalised across a wide range of literatures (for example, geography, psychology, sociology, and marketing). These interconnected interpretations include place attachment, sense of place, place identity and place dependence – all of which appear to have some similarities with place attitudes. For example, Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) break down sense of place into three attitudinal components - cognitive, affective and conative. They relate these three components to the concepts of place identity (cognitive), a person's relationship to the physical environment; place attachment (affective), the emotional element or bond between a person and their environment; and place dependence (conative), a person's perceived strength of association with a place. Kyle, Graefe, Manning and Bacon (2004) also use attitudinal theory to consider place attachment, although they similarly highlight the confusion within the literature in that a variety of terms are used to describe people's connections with a place, including 'sense of place', 'rootedness', 'insidedness' and 'environmental embeddedness'. Semantic discrepancies aside, the notion of place attitudes is clearly important in understanding how the place product is consumed.

Attitudinal research has a long, established history in marketing research (see, for example, Bass and Talarzyk's (1972) use of an attitudinal model to predict brand preference). Attitudes have been defined as the "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour" (Eagly and Chaiken, 2007, p. 1). They represent the evaluative response to any object

(Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Attitudinal scales have the benefit of being applicable across concepts in the social sciences. Places as “spatial settings can also be considered as attitude objectives” (Kyle et al., 2004, p. 215). This could include places of any scale or type, allowing for the development of generalisable theory within place marketing, of the kind demanded by Niedomysl and Jonasson (2012).

The semantic differential can be thought of as a sequence of attitude scales. Therefore, a full list of Osgood, Suci, and Tannebaum's (1957) classic semantic differential adjectives were evaluated by 22 marketing academics to establish the most appropriate adjective pairs they would associate with place/ space. Osgood's classic semantic differential scale is an attempt to measure the meaning a concept may have for people. It involves selection from pairs of polar adjectives that help evaluate attitudinal measures. Using semantic differentials is useful for measuring the direction and intensity of attitude towards a concept (Mindak, 1961). Mindak (*ibid*) also recommends adapting the original list of polar adjectives into tailor-made lists for analysing specific problems. A questionnaire was prepared with the following instructions. “We are interested in adjectives that people associate with geographical space (such as a park). We have produced a list containing pairs of adjectives. Please let us know if you would (or would not) associate the adjective pair with feelings about a place.” Respondents had to rate the pairs of adjectives on a 3 point scale: ‘not at all associated with place’; ‘slightly associated with place’ and ‘strongly associated with place’.

A weighted average score for each pair of adjectives was calculated. 15 pairs of adjectives with the highest weighted averages were then chosen for the quasi-

experiment and measured on a 7 point scale (with the positive adjective anchoring the left-hand of the scale, and the negative adjective the right). The central position was 'neutral'. Cronbach's alpha for the place attitude scale was .933. A full list of adjectives can be found in Table 2.

### *Sample*

It was important to have a sample of the general public rather than a very specific age group like students, who, incidentally, are the demographic that litters most (Roper and Parker, 2008). In order to access appropriate respondents a sample was purchased from a consumer survey research company. The Internet survey resulted in 680 completed questionnaires, of which 18 were discounted as these respondents thought the film shown was a 'spoof' or a 'mock-up', leaving 662 usable responses.

Respondents were randomly allocated across the three interventions; branded litter (n=201); no litter (n=219) and unbranded litter (n=242). The sample was fairly evenly spread across the age categories (18-24, n=117; 25-34, n=191; 35-44 n=134; 45+ n=220) with more females (64%) than males (36%).

### **Results**

The distribution of the data was checked – and demonstrated characteristics of a normal distribution (e.g. the skewness of the dependent variables ranged from .02 to .31 firmly within the boundaries of the +.5 to -.5 deemed acceptable by Bulmer (1979).

Therefore, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean values of overall attitudes towards space/ place (overall park attitude) across the litter and no litter



conditions ( $H_1$ ) and the branded litter/ unbranded litter conditions ( $H_2$ ) with the results shown in Table 1. Overall park attitude was calculated as the mean of the 15 semantic differential pairs representing place attitude, for each respondent.

Hypothesis	Overall park attitude <sup>2</sup>	Standard deviation	T	$\rho$
H1: Attitudes towards place: litter/ no litter	54.28/41.16	15.76/13.19	11.27	.000
H2: Attitudes towards place: branded litter/ unbranded litter	54.66/53.97	15.97/15.94	.46	.65

**Table 1 : Results of T-tests for  $H_1$  and  $H_2$**

There was a significant difference in the overall park attitude scores for those respondents that had seen litter compared to those that had not; indicating that litter has a detrimental effect on place attitudes. Therefore,  $H_1$  is accepted. Subjects exposed to litter have a lower attitude towards a place. Conversely, there was no significant difference between the group that had seen the branded litter compared to the unbranded litter. It would appear that litter impacts on people's perceptions of space in a general way, as 'brand' does not act as a mediator or moderator. Again,  $H_2$  is accepted. Attitudes towards a place do not vary between subjects that have been exposed to branded litter and subjects that have been exposed to unbranded litter.

In relation to  $H_3$ , comparing the means of males and females in the litter and no litter conditions suggested there may be a moderation effect as the differences in the mean park attitude score between the two genders appeared greater in the no litter condition (see Figure 1). The sample was split to analyse the overall park attitudes held by males and females, across the litter and no litter conditions, by conducting T-tests (see Table 2).

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<sup>2</sup> As we have followed standard practice for positioning the semantic differentials (from positive to negative), lower scores are indicative of higher attitudes.

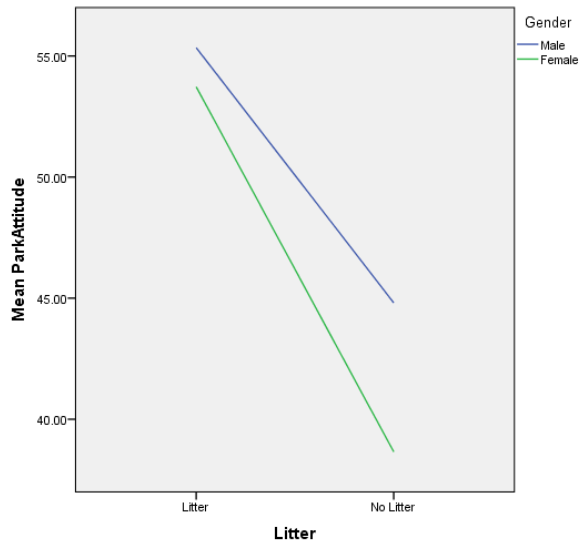


Figure 1 : Overall park attitude across males and females; litter and no litter conditions

<b>H3 : Females will have lower place attitudes than men, regardless of the presence of litter</b>	<b>Overall park attitude<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>ρ</b>
Litter: male/ female	55.34/55.73	14.32/16.46	1.02	.307
No litter: male/female	44.81/38.65	13.43/12.47	3.48	.001

Table 2 : Results of T-Tests for H<sub>3</sub>

Only in the no litter condition do females have different attitudes to males. However, their attitudes are significantly *higher*, not *lower* (as our hypothesis predicted), than the attitudes of males. Therefore we reject H<sub>3</sub> 'females have lower place attitudes than males, regardless of the presence of litter'. The attitudes of males and females are the same, in littered conditions. In non-littered conditions, then women have higher place attitudes than men.

<sup>3</sup> As we have followed standard practice for positioning the semantic differentials (from positive to negative), lower scores are indicative of higher attitudes.

To investigate H<sub>4</sub> we first compared the means of the different age bands, across the litter and no litter conditions (see Figure 2). Then we ran a one-way analysis of variance between the age range bands and overall park attitude scores (Table 3).

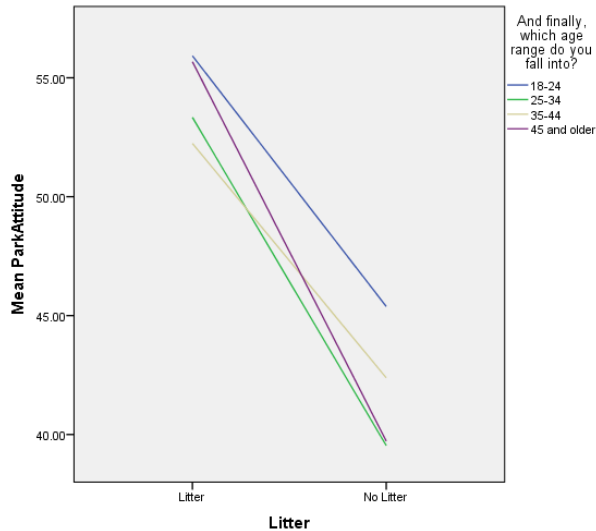


Figure 2: Overall park attitude across age bands; litter and no litter conditions

<b>H4 : Older people will have lower place attitudes, regardless of the presence of litter</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>ρ</b>
Litter	1.33	.210
No litter	2.09	.101

Table 3 : Results of ANOVA for H<sub>4</sub>

As the result of the ANOVA was not significant, we reject H<sub>4</sub>, ‘older people will have more negative place attitudes, regardless of the presence of litter’. There was no significance difference in the place attitudes across the age bands of our respondents, whether they were exposed to litter or not.

Further examination of the differences across the 15 pairs of adjectives, shows some variance in the T statistic (Table 2) with the group that saw litter and the group that did not. Whilst this is not a scale development paper, Table 2 illustrates that some words

are better than others at capturing variance in place attitudes. Not surprisingly, 'clean: dirty' demonstrates the greatest difference in scores between those that saw litter and those that did not, as the semantic differential is clearly linked to the stimulus. However, all of the semantic differentials have a  $p$  value  $\leq 0.001$ .

Semantic differential adjectives	T	$\rho$
clean: dirty	25.389	0.000
pleasant: unpleasant	11.526	0.000
positive: negative	11.478	0.000
nice: awful	10.866	0.000
good: bad	10.163	0.000
reputable: disreputable	9.160	0.000
refreshed: weary	8.074	0.000
heavenly: hellish	7.875	0.000
safe: dangerous	7.523	0.000
flourishing: barren	6.304	0.000
violent: calm	5.553	0.000
free: constrained	4.387	0.000
spacious: constricted	3.847	0.000
sociable: unsociable	3.677	0.000
interesting: boring	3.452	0.001

**Table 2: T statistics and  $\rho$  values across semantic differentials (litter and no litter conditions).**

## Discussion

The findings have demonstrated that litter affects people's perceptions of place in a negative manner, and in this sense rubbish can be seen as a form of anti-place marketing. Place marketing activity, in the form of promotion, is designed to draw additional inputs into a place (i.e. more tourists, visitors, inward investment etc.), but appears to be paying scant regard to any of the outputs that same activity creates. If litter is allowed to build up, this impacts negatively on visitors' and residents' place attitudes, making such place users wary of the very places marketing and promotion is

supposed to be attracting them to. At the very least, this suggests it is irresponsible to look at place marketing without taking into account more basic aspects of place management such as cleaning litter up. At most, it may even suggest that in certain situations a place marketing budget might be better spent employing someone to sweep up. Hankinson (2004) argues that looking at the place brand at a higher level, or from an image perspective, is to under exploit the true meaning of the brand. Instead, we should also be looking at the relationship of the place brand with its stakeholders, including its behaviours rather than just its communications. Hankinson (*ibid*) provides a framework of place branding based upon a series of relationships. His model includes a brand infrastructure relationship that emphasise the importance of 'hygiene facilities' including street cleaning.

Nevertheless, we are not suggesting this janitorial focus will lead to litter-free places that are automatically loved. It may be that we need to consider the factors that cause place satisfaction and dissatisfaction are independent phenomena (see Hertzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman, 1959). In these terms litter may well be a hygiene factor, that is, for many it acts as a dissatisfier i.e. we only notice it when it is there and this reduces our perception of the place. One cause of place dissatisfaction can be avoided by clearing litter up.

As Anholt (2002) notes in relation to place branding, it is "far more about brand management than 'rebranding'. Brand management is often, as we know, something quite humble: the cautious and slow-moving husbandry of existing perceptions; it is a process as unglamorous as it is unscandalous...[sic.]" For places, picking up litter also falls in the unglamorous category of activities, but as the findings in this paper have

demonstrated it can be an important contribution to the attitudes people hold towards a place. Litter is also 'unscandalous' as it is rarely a contested aspect of space. Put another way, it is difficult to imagine anyone objecting to litter being cleared from their area unlike other recognised physical incivilities (e.g. graffiti) where opinion can be divided.

Whilst clearing litter may be perceived as a fairly straight-forward activity, it involves a number of connected functions such as sanitation/street cleaning, environmental protection, highways and, sometimes, even policing. Thus, there is a need for a more joined-up approach between place stakeholders and relevant academic disciplines (operations management, marketing, planning) if places are to be cleaner and therefore marketed more effectively. Where litter is concerned it may also help if there is joined-up thinking between marketing sub-disciplines as well as between marketing and other subjects. Specifically, the dropping of litter is an activity that should engage the interest of *product marketers*, who are involved in the design of packaging, *social marketers*, who might prevent that packaging from being dropped, as well as *place marketers* who should be concerned about packaging once it has been dropped. Put another way, a variety of marketing functions are involved in the litter-supply chain and so it should not simply be places and place marketers that have to deal with the consequences of this.

Another point of discussion concerns the fact that brand of litter was not shown to be a significant moderator in how litter affected people's perceptions of place. Earlier research has shown that seeing litter with a particular brand name does go on to negatively affect people's perceptions of that brand, but there is clearly no such carry-

over brand effect upon the surrounding space in which that litter is found. On the surface it suggests that that brand owners only need to worry about litter in terms of the way it affects an individual's perceptions of their company's brand image, because of the consequences this may have for sales and the bottom line (Roper and Parker, 2013). However, as many businesses are located in space co-occupied by their customers (e.g. retailers, fast-food restaurants), then discarded litter around their outlets, even if not related to an outlet's brand, could still have damaging consequences for such businesses through the more general litter effect. Certainly, as litter negatively affects people's perceptions of place, then it is easy to see how this may have knock-on implications for the footfall and potential custom of any businesses located in littered areas. Consequently, whilst previous research has indicated that it may benefit brand owners to minimise the general propensity of litter with their brand name (Roper and Parker, 2013) this paper suggests that where litter and business premises are spatially coterminous, it is in the interests of those businesses concerned that all litter is removed from around their outlets. In doing this, these businesses would also start to take a more active role in the place marketing effort.

With regards to the relationship between gender and place attitudes, we found that males and females held the same attitudes in littered environments, but in non-littered environments, females have higher attitudes. In the no-litter condition, the relationship ran contrary to the direction we predicted. The literature led us to expect females to have lower attitudes. However, the context chosen for the quasi-experiment (a park), and other details, such as the use of a female actor to play the role of the news reporter,

may have been perceived more positively by the female respondents. What is important is that these preferences or positive 'cues' were eradicated by the presence of litter. Regardless of whatever biological or social processes causing females to have a more positive attitude towards the park, and males a lower attitude, these appear to have been destabilised by litter. In other words, litter is a powerful moderating variable – changing the relationship between gender and place.

Whilst place attitudes, in the no litter condition, were affected by gender, age had no effect in either the littered or non-littered environments. This is interesting as it implies that all age groups can, in certain respects, have a similar attitude towards a place 'product'. Certainly, the 'consumption' of place may be less affected by age, especially when compared to the consumption of more conventional brands, products and services that are usually under investigation in marketing research. Perhaps, because the type of green space that we showed in the experiment is still relatively uncommodified, marketing (and, in particular, advertising) has not had the opportunity to shape or influence people's attitudes in the way it has done for commercial products. If this is the case, then current place promotion activity may be harmful to a very basic human need to engage with places, if it is trying to shape how people perceive place, or position places to meet the needs of some people (and, by default, not others). If your age is not a predictor of your attitude towards a park, then surely this means these places are more likely to be used by a diverse cross-section of ages. However, if a park was to become heavily promoted, would the choice of visual imagery adopted in this promotional effort start to influence attitudes and behaviour towards the park itself?



Such a situation could lead to a scenario in which certain ages (e.g. either the old or young) became the main users/ visitors of a given park (or place).

Despite our concerns about place promotion, we have used other established theories and methods in marketing to add to our understanding of place, and how it is evaluated by people. Although our overall philosophy may be normative ('litter is bad'), our methods of investigation have been positivist. One outcome of this is the identification of a reliable scale of semantic differentials that can be used to measure place attitudes, and even demonstrate the effectiveness of place marketing activity – if it improves peoples' attitudes towards a place.

## **Conclusion**

For the first time, by adopting a quasi-experimental method, this study has provided evidence for a causal relationship between litter and place attitudes, at the level of the individual. This, we hope, is helpful information for local authorities in terms of budgetary decisions. Until other place marketing activities can provide evidence of their effectiveness, we would encourage austerity cut councils to invest in the janitorial elements of keeping their locations litter-free.

Marketing researchers and marketing professionals must get better at working with all the other stakeholders within a place (including those with janitorial and operations management responsibilities), if they are serious about improving attitudes towards a place, and improving the wider consumption experience amongst place consumers.

For place marketing this requires a refocusing of efforts and perspectives away from the strategic and mythical aims of civic boosterism to a more micro-marketing perspective, in which the attitudes of individuals to place, and those factors which may directly affect such attitudes, drive place marketing activity. Kavaratzis (2004) is also critical of the image based approach to city brands and states that the purpose of a city brand should always be to improve the quality of life of residents. His model emphasises the importance of the communicative effect of all the city's actions, both good and bad.

As the title of this paper suggests, not only has going 'back to basics' in the marketing of place allowed us to demonstrate the impact of something very rudimentary on place attitudes, it has also given us the opportunity to revisit elementary marketing theory and demonstrate its relevance to place.

### **Future research**

Our paper has three main limitations, which, we hope, future research will address.

First, we have identified the impact of litter upon place via the use of a quasi-experimental design. This is an improvement on a purely laboratory-based study but it would help our understanding further to conduct research in the field as well, thereby establishing the impact of litter in different physical locations.

Second, it would be useful to extend our work in order to compare and contrast the impact of litter with that of traditional place marketing activity. Does litter reduce (and to what extent) or even negate the impact of positive place communication messages and campaigns? Or, conversely, can the impact of litter be overcome by positive messages and positioning of the place by marketers?

Finally, our research has focussed upon the views of the potential consumers of a place. It would be useful to research the views of place marketers and to consider how such professionals see litter and its impact upon their role. How will they react to our findings and will our research bring action on litter and place marketing closer together?

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