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The Shadowy Perspective of Place Branding: Exploring the Fluid Place Myths of the Wigan Brand

by

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the value of the shadow metaphor as a novel theoretical lens to advance the place branding theory. Previous studies have shown that place branding is a constantly changing concept, adapting to stakeholders' changeable memories and expectations, and shifting political and sociocultural environments. However, what is missing from the place branding literature is a theoretical framework that adequately interprets such fluidity in place branding. This thesis, therefore, introduces the shadow metaphor and argues that it can be used as an ideal theoretical lens to uncover the elusive and ever-changing nature of place branding. Specifically, it utilises myth as a conceptual tool to expand the current understanding of the fluidity of place branding, considering its ambiguous and ephemeral nature. In so doing, this thesis expands the scholarly understanding of the dynamic view of place branding by providing a cohesive theoretical lens that interprets the inherent adaptability and ephemerality of the shifting relationships between different stakeholders, and the ever-changing place branding process. Additionally, it shifts the dominant view that regards myth as simply an outcome of place branding activities towards a more dynamic perspective that treats myth as an ongoing meaning-making process integral to the creation of place brands.

The shadowy perspective of the place brand myth is contextualised through the exploration of an English town, Wigan. It specifically utilises a local music band, The Lathums, as an insightful analytical lens to unveil the various mythmakers and complex mythmaking processes of the Wigan brand. An innovative methodology, namely mediated discourse analysis (MDA) informed grounded theory, is developed to provide a flexible analytical approach to delve into the fluid Wigan myths. Drawing on the shadow metaphor, the resulting analysis reveals the shadowy relationships between three mythmaker groups: creators, persuaders, and discoverers. It also unpacks the transformable Wigan myths, altering between the shadowy patterns of projection, distortion, and illusion.

Dedication

For my parents and partner,

who always love, support, and believe in me.

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I have been fortunate to have received inestimably support from many people during my PhD study. First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents. Without their unfaltering understanding and support, I simply could not have done this. Also, I thank my partner for his belief in me, even during times when I was doubting myself, as well as his tolerance and patience for my frequent bouts of discontent, melancholy and frustration throughout this journey.

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I am incredibly grateful to the individuals who willingly participated in this research and gave me their time, knowledge and energy. I really enjoyed observing and immersing myself in their stories, and I hope I have done justice to their stories in this study.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Four years ago, I attended a concert in Liverpool, seeing an up-and-coming ‘indie’ band called The Lathums. While I initially intended to enjoy the music, something unexpected caught my attention. Throughout the performance, there was a chant coming from the crowd. A fellow concertgoer, who happened to be a football enthusiast, explained to me that the band was from Wigan and the chant was in support of the Wigan football team. Additionally, the crowd’s passionate cries of "Up The Lathums, up Wigan!" resonated throughout the venue at times overwhelming the band’s performance. This experience piqued my curiosity about the band and Wigan – a small town in England that might be unfamiliar to many, including myself. It also marked the beginning of my research journey into exploring the stories of this band The Lathums, and the connection with their hometown Wigan.

As my investigation into The Lathums progressed, I realised that the narratives often inevitably shifted focus from the story of the band to that of their hometown, Wigan. Starting from the conversation of the band, my participants always ended up discussing the stories of the town, such as the heyday and decline of Northern Soul and Wigan Casino, the mysterious stories about Wigan Pier, the local community’s paradoxical relationship with George Orwell and his classic novel *The Road To Wigan Pier*, and the town’s post-industrial dilemmas of unemployment and drug abuse. Based on these discussions and my observations, rather than seeing Wigan as merely a backdrop to the success of the band, my data pointed me to the research direction of viewing The Lathums as one of the representatives of Wigan’s rich and complex history, culture and identity. As my research unfolded over time, my research interest

naturally grew from the story of a Wigan band to a broader exploration of the complex and intriguing stories of Wigan itself, as represented by and in The Lathums.

Wigan's enduring narrative tapestry presented by the band, participants and others fuelled my further investigation into the compelling and powerful stories that define the town and how it is lived, experienced and embodied. Who create the stories about Wigan? What do these stories mean to the storytellers and others? How are these stories formed and negotiated? These inquiries positioned my thesis within the academic fields of place branding and marketplace mythmaking. While place branding allowed me to explore how various stakeholders construct and reconstruct a place's narrative and image (Kavaratzis et al., 2018; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015; Lichrou et al., 2014), marketplace mythmaking provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the resonant and powerful stories that are interwoven with the place's history, identity, culture and people's memories and everyday lives (Brown et al., 2013; Thompson and Tian, 2008).

What I also discovered in the case of Wigan was that, due to its complex political and historical context, the place myths surrounding the Wigan brand were anything but stagnant or singular. They emerged from a tapestry of complex narratives, beliefs and interactions shared by storytellers, which were constantly evolving and open to various interpretations. These multifaceted and ever-shifting stories have played a significant role in shaping the identity of the town and its people, allowing them to be recognised, honoured and remembered. Therefore, in this study I developed and applied a novel theoretical lens using the shadow metaphor to shed light on my data. I argue that, just as shadows are obscure and fluid entities, so too are place brand myths. They are both organically and spontaneously formed and reformed through the interplay of people, objects, actions, narratives and cultures. Applying the shadow metaphor, and combining it with my empirical analysis of the place myths of the Wigan brand, I highlight

the integrated and shifting relationships between various mythmakers, and the fluid and ephemeral nature of the place brand mythmaking process.

In the following sections I will briefly present the scholarly understanding of place branding and marketplace mythmaking, the two theoretical themes that have guided my research inquiry, and justify where my research stands (Section 1.2). Section 1.3 provides a discussion of my arguments within the extant literature, which leads to my research aim and objectives. To conclude the introduction, I will provide an outline of this thesis, summarising the key topics discussed in each chapter (Section 1.4).

1.2 Positioning the research within the current academic debates

1.2.1 Place branding and place myth in marketing studies

Place branding research derives from knowledge in a variety of academic fields, such as urban planning, tourism, geography, sociology, and cultural studies, each with its distinctive ontological stances and analytical frameworks (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorstorm, 2013). These various disciplinary perspectives have enabled marketing researchers to develop a range of approaches for understanding and analysing the concept of place branding. Each analytical lens brings into focus different key stakeholders involved in the place branding process and offers a unique understanding of the power dynamics that guide the production and consumption of place brands.

The most dominant and entrenched approach includes the marketing management approach, which is associated with the early studies on place marketing (Hankinson, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kotler et al., 1993) and place promotion (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Boisen et al., 2018; Ward, 1998). The underlying philosophy of this approach is that place brands can be treated as products or services that can be promoted and branded through marketing mix and

techniques (Hankinson, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2009; Virgo and de Chernatony, 2006). Such a managerial view of place branding, however, has later become problematic. There has been criticism that this top-down approach mutes the voices of other stakeholders also involved in the place branding process (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Later studies have contributed to the emergence of a stakeholder approach wherein place branding is considered a collective activity, constructed through the interaction between a range of stakeholders such as marketers, residents, tourists, investors and other actors (Hudak, 2019; Jacobsen, 2009; Jain et al., 2022; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013). Despite the insight that the stakeholder approach offers, it has still been criticised as market-oriented, that resembles the marketing management approach. This approach overly concentrates on micro- and meso-level marketing activities, and overlooks the macro-level settings in which place brands are produced and consumed (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015; Lichrou et al., 2008). To address these limitations, the sociocultural approach has been brought to light in place branding studies.

The sociocultural approach, as the term implies, emphasises the significance of culture in producing and consuming place brands (Goulart Sztejnberg and Giovanardi, 2017; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015). It is worth noting that although adopting a sociocultural approach, the term 'culture' has been interpreted and applied in various ways by place branding scholars, depending on the context, objectives and nature of the studies. For some, culture is regarded as a collection of tangible, static and manageable artefacts or assets that represent and promote a place brand (e.g. Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis, 2014; Jensen, 2007). In contrast, others consider culture as a complex and multifaceted process of meaning creation, seeing it as a dynamic setting in which various meanings are produced and consumed (Lichrou et al., 2008), or as a reflection of individual and national self-identification (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). Although the latter view on culture remains relatively marginal in place branding literature, it significantly informs my thesis by demonstrating the profound connection and

interactions between culture, people and place brands. For the purposes of this thesis, it specifically adopts the definition of culture as a 'way of life', as suggested by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), that encompasses all manifestations of life expression within a specific temporal and spatial context (Kavaratzis, 2011). This interpretation of culture allows me to consider the wider implication of place culture, blending it with the political, social, and historical narratives of a place that shape and being shaped by the everyday practices, identities and narratives of local communities and beyond (Kerrigan et al., 2012; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). In this way, I am able to not only appreciate the role of place brands in the production and consumption of culture, but also to recognise the 'cultural nature of place brands' that highlights the reciprocal relationship between place culture and place brands (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015).

Regardless of the approaches employed and the stakeholders considered, the concept of place branding has been considered a dynamic process ever since the emergence of the stakeholder approach and, later on, the sociocultural approach. Topics such as 'inclusive place branding' (Braun et al., 2013; Karavatzis et al., 2017; Klijn et al., 2012) and 'participant place branding' (Kavaratzis, 2012; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Zenker et al., 2014) have led academic attention towards understanding place branding as a dialogue between various stakeholders, such as place brand managers, local authorities, residents, tourists, and cultural organisations. As a result, their collective participation and communication have contributed to the view that place branding is dynamically constructed through the interactions and negotiations between different stakeholders (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Rebelo et al., 2020). This means that place brands, along with their related narratives, images and identities, are not the outcome of the place branding process, but are 'the process itself' (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).

While existing literature has undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the dynamics of place branding, it is not without shortcomings. Primarily, the proposed theoretical

interpretation on dynamic place branding is still restricted to a managerial viewpoint of place branding, focusing predominantly on the fixed roles and perspectives of the 'key' stakeholders such as residents and place planners and managers, and on the presumed dichotomous relationships between them. However, previous studies have suggested that the complexity of place branding originates from its dynamic interaction between people's changeable memories and identities, shifting political validity and sociocultural fluidity (Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Lichrou et al., 2008; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). Despite recognising the interconnected relationships between different stakeholders, and the multiplicity of perspectives in place branding, I argue that the current scholar understandings do not adequately conceptualise the complex and fluid nature of the place branding process, and therefore it fails to reflect the rapid changes in stakeholders' perspectives as well as the shifting social, cultural and political environment within the place branding process.

Furthermore, the current theoretical frameworks for understanding the dynamic nature of place branding such as those proposed by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013; 2021), and Sang (2021) tend to be rigid and cyclic. Given the complexity and 'elusivity' (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2021) of place branding, which involves a wide range of stakeholder groups (Jernsand and Kraff, 2017), and the evolving 'democratic' and 'inclusive' relationships between different stakeholders (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2012), it can be questioned whether these frameworks adequately interpret and analyse the uncertainty and change of the place branding activities. Considering the limitations of previous research, therefore, the aim of my thesis is to provide a theoretical understanding to account for the fluidity of place branding. This aim aligns with the call by Kalandides and Kavaratzis (2009) for filling the distinct gap between theory and practice in the field of place branding by moving away from technical analysis towards theoretical development. Specifically, my research aim

is examined through using place myth as a conceptual tool, given its adaptable and ephemeral nature.

The notion of myth originates from the Greek word 'mythos', which literally translates as 'story'. To avoid any misunderstanding in this study, it is worth clarifying that the term 'myth' should be distinguished from its related concept 'narrative'. Narrative is commonly considered a story-telling strategy that outlines the sequence and viewpoints of certain events (Segal, 2004). Myth, in contrast, is the sacred narrative that encompasses broader and deeper meanings as they shape individual and collective beliefs, explain our world's formation, and guide everyday behaviours (Dundes, 1984; Essebo, 2019). Myth, in essence, is made up of a collection of narratives, yet it extends beyond these narratives by providing faiths that unite various social groups and resolve social contradictions. The function of myth is to act as the "sticking plaster for the social structure" (Essebo, 2019:515, 523), in order to create "cosmos out of chaos" (Overing, 1997: 10). Therefore, myth in this study does not simply refer to a storytelling approach used to understand people's narratives about Wigan as a place brand. Rather, it focuses on the meaning making process of the grand and impactful stories related to Wigan, which are created through the interactions between the beliefs, identities and everyday practices of the mythmakers, and the wider sociocultural and geopolitical settings of the place.

The connection between place and myth has been widely acknowledged in various disciplines. Mythologists argue that whether ancient or modern, grand or mundane, powerful myths must be believable and resonate, as they are the representation of people's identities and beliefs (Hall, 2006; Slotkin, 1973; Von Hendy, 2002). Cultural geographers develop this point further by claiming that without the link to a specific location, even the most remarkable myths lose their resonance (Shields, 1991; Soja, 1989). Similarly, in the context of marketing literature, scholars have also recognised the significant role that place plays in mythmaking, as powerful marketplace myths are usually grounded in certain places where the mythologies are

formed and ingrained (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Brown et al., 2013; Thompson and Tian, 2008).

Thompson and Tian (2008) have emphasised the flexibility of place myths by presenting how the regional myth can be reconstructed through shifting the mythmakers' collective memories and identities tied to the place and its culture. Similarly, Coyle and Fairweather (2005) have shown the co-evolution of the entrenched national myths to meet the present need of the social and environmental revolution. Indeed, Brown et al. (2013) also suggest that brand myths become iconic because of their ambiguity and malleability. They operate like a 'blank canvas', allowing individuals to add or mix their imaginations and expectations towards a person, a brand, or a place (Holt, 2004). What these marketing studies suggest is that marketplace myths are not simply the outcome of commercial activities that can be selected and managed. Rather, they are complex and ambiguous entities that continually transform and evolve. They can be, and need to be, 'felicitously adapted' to match the preferences, experiences and observations of heterogenous stakeholders (Brown et al., 2013). Thus, from this perspective, I argue that the concept of place myth is an ideal vehicle to reflect and unpack the inherently ambiguous and fluid nature of place branding, which emerges from complex interactions between people, things and cultures (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Kerrigan et al., 2012; Lichrou et al., 2008).

1.2.2 Place branding and place myth in marketing studies

To provide an in-depth understanding of the complex and fluid processes of place branding, and place mythmaking in particular, I argue that the shadow metaphor can be used as a novel and valuable theoretical lens. Using metaphor as an analytical tool is not new in marketing literature. Previous studies have shown that metaphors can be used as a method to make

complex marketing issues “easier to understand, easier to remember, easier to communicate” (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; 392). However, as warned by Delbaere and Slobodzian (2019), metaphors have been used too literally, potentially stifling creativity and causing limitations on thought processes. Moreover, the application of metaphors tends to focus on specific aspects of a concept while disregarding others. To avoid the limitations identified in the use of metaphors within marketing studies, I have developed a profound comprehension of the shadow concept, by going beyond the scope of marketing, and integrating insights from a range of social science disciplines including mythology, arts, geography and psychology. These fields have notably enriched my understanding of various interpretations of the meaning and use of shadows in society.

Shadows can be found in various contexts, in our living environment, in artistic expression and even in the deeper corners of our consciousness. Although they are understood differently across various disciplines, shadows are universally known for their inherent dark, negative aspects, which are associated with death, the unknown and the paranormal world (Kite, 2017; Stoichita,1997). They have also been used as a metaphor for understanding and comprehending the dark side of one’s mind, characterised by fear, shame and guilt (Jung, 1958). Nevertheless, despite the persuasive dark presence of shadows, their shapes and associated meanings are fluid, given their formless and mutable nature (Gombrich, 2014). Both their shapes and symbolisms can shift, based on a change of the light sources, the perspectives of shadow makers, and the cultural contexts in which they materialise. Because of their transitional and ephemeral nature, we ‘play’ with shadows, forming and reforming them into different things (Gombrich et al., 2014; Stoichita, 1997). In reviewing the extant scholarly work on shadows, I have identified three main ways that shadows are ‘played’ by shadow makers – projection, distortion and illusion.

Projection in this study is based on the idea that shadows are created through the act of casting upon other objects, places or individuals (e.g. Jung, 1958; Kaufmann, 1975; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001). Distortion means that shadows can extend beyond the shapes of the 'real' objects or people they cast upon. The meanings and shapes of shadows can also be altered and transformed from unseen to seen, from dark to light, or from present to absent, depending on the shadow makers' different preferences and expectations (e.g. Edensor and Hughes, 2021; Kite, 2017). The concept of illusion is developed from the idea that shadows can disappear in a flash when we turn the light sources off. Consequently, shadows are fundamentally illusional and void (e.g. Plato, 514a-520a; Trafford, 2008). As pointed out by Sorensen (2008), "shadows are creatures of omission. Shadows are where the inaction is" (75).

I argue that, as mentioned above, the conceptualisation of shadows provides valuable insights into the understanding of place brand myths. By viewing place brand mythmaking as akin to shadow making, we start to consider the ephemeral and shifting process of place myth creation and recreation. During this dynamic mythmaking process, place brand myths can be seen as a projection onto other things, cultures and places. They can also evolve into a distortion of the entrenched images of the place, or an illusory construct, lacking meaning and substantial existence. This perspective aligns with Kavaratzis and Hatch's (2013) statement that "[place] brand management can be understood as an interwoven 'shadow process' that takes place at the same time and resonates with four sub-processes of expressing, impressing, mirroring, and reflecting" (79). The shadow metaphor also reminds us that mythmaking is a 'playful' process in which various mythmakers are involved (e.g. light sources, humans, illuminated objects, culture). These participants collectively and organically create shadows, without any predefined rules or hierarchical structures. This reminds us that we should consider placing brand mythmakers not merely as competitive and manipulative agents. Rather, they can be seen

as ‘playful’ individuals who equally and spontaneously ‘play’ with shadows, utilising their skills and knowledge to contribute to different interpretations of the place myths.

1.3 Research aim, objectives and questions

As discussed above, this study aims to provide a theoretical understanding to account for the fluidity of place branding. This aim is achieved through empirically investigating the obscure and shifting place brand myths of Wigan, formed and reformed by various mythmakers.

Given the research aim discussed above, my research objectives are:

1. To identify and analyse the various mythmakers involved in the formation and evolution of place brand myths
2. To examine the interconnections between these mythmakers, and to investigate how their collaborative interactions contribute to the formation of fluid place brand myths
3. To explore the processes that contribute to the creation, negotiation and reformation of fluid place brand myths

The research objectives lead to the following research questions:

1. Who are the main mythmakers in the formation and transformation of place brand myths
2. How do they demonstrate and impact the fluid nature of place brand myths?
3. What are the processes through which fluid place brand myths are created, negotiated and transformed?

Research questions one and two are tied to objectives one and two that focus on the various mythmakers involved in the construction of place brand myths. While question one aims at identifying the key mythmakers contributing to the place brand myths, question two prioritises the entangled and dynamic interaction between these mythmakers within the mythmaking process. Question three is informed by research objective three, which investigates the ways in which the multifaceted and shifting place brand myths are formed and reformed by various mythmakers.

1.4 Thesis outline

This introduction presents the primary topics discussed in this study and investigates the main academic debates and my arguments surrounding them. I have highlighted the research problems within the place branding literature and the importance of developing and utilising a novel theoretical lens to address them. This approach has subsequently led to my research questions and objectives. **Chapter two** offers a critical review of the various of academic literature and theories concerning the central themes of this study (i.e. place branding, marketplace mythmaking), and provides detail on how the present study is positioned within these earlier studies. Based on the critical review and analysis of the previous literature, I argue that within the place branding literature there is a lack of theoretical understanding of the fluid nature of place branding process. As a response to this academic shortcoming, myth is used as a conceptual tool to expand the current understanding on the fluid nature of place branding considering its ambiguous and ephemeral nature. This phenomenon is further investigated through my development and use of the shadow metaphor as a novel theoretical lens. **Chapter three** begins with the introduction of Wigan as the chosen research context, and the local music band, The Lathums, as the analytical lens, along with a thorough explanation of the rationale

behind such choices. This chapter then moves on to discuss the processes that constitute the methodological framework for this thesis. Specifically, this chapter outlines the research design considered appropriate to this study: it takes into account the philosophical position of social constructionism, and an innovative, Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) informed grounded theory as both a methodological and analytical approach. The rationale behind these choices is also provided throughout the chapter. In addition, this chapter discusses various qualitative data collection methods such as semi-structured interview, participant observation, and secondary research, which are further detailed with the discussion of the techniques and procedures for sampling and recruitment. Significant ethical issues are also considered, accompanied by potential resolutions for these concerns.

Chapters four and **five** are the findings sections that present the most salient narratives and discussions identified in my data. **Chapter four** details the key mythmakers involved in the creation of the Wigan brand, and these are identified through the interviews with my participants, and the observations during my fieldwork. Drawing on the shadow metaphor, these mythmakers are classified into three categories – creators, persuaders and discoverers. Despite initially being analysed individually, the findings also indicate their interconnectedness. Therefore, by continuing to use the shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens, I empirically demonstrate the interactive and dialogical relationship between various mythmakers, as well as how they 'play' with each other and themselves by shifting their roles and perspectives during the mythmaking process. **Chapter five** builds on the insights from chapter four, by further delving into the mythmaking process of the Wigan brand. Consistent with the shadow metaphor, I identify three phases in the mythmaking process of the Wigan brand – projection, distortion and illusion – created and recreated by the previously mentioned mythmakers. As a result, the Wigan brand is mythologised, remythologised and demythologised into various stories, based on the mythmakers' different perspectives, memories and actions. Based on these

findings, I highlight the fluid nature of the process of place brand mythmaking. Much like shadows, these myths organically and ephemerally appear and vanish by playing with light and darkness, absence and presence; their shapes and meanings can shift, and be shifted, based on the position of the mythmaker (shadow maker). **Chapter six** revisits my research questions, providing detailed clarification of how each question has been addressed. It then focuses on the theoretical and methodological contributions my study brings to extant marketing literature on place branding and consumer/brand myth. The broader implications of my findings to other relevant topics such as nostalgic place/site, and cultural place branding are also discussed. Following the discussion of the contributions of this study, I reflect on its research limitations that I was unable to address (and why), leading to suggestions for potential future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.0 Overview of the literature review chapter

This dissertation aims to provide a theoretical understanding to account for the fluidity of place branding. This aim has been achieved through empirically investigating the obscure and shifting place brand myths of Wigan, formed and reformed by various mythmakers. Bearing the aim of the thesis in mind, the literature review section is divided into three sections: Different strategies to the place branding theory; myth/mythmaking in marketing studies; and shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens (also see Figure 2.1.).

Specifically, this chapter firstly examines the key approaches (i.e. marketing management approach, stakeholder approach, sociocultural approach) to understanding and studying the concept of place branding (Section 2.1). By critically reviewing the extant literature, the study identifies the lack of understanding and theoretical interpretation of the fluidity of place branding. Considering the limitations of previous studies, myth is used in this study as a conceptual tool to expand the current understating on the fluid nature of place branding. In Section 2.2, the study provides a comprehensive investigation on the current understanding on the definitions and functions of myth within marketing literature.

To provide a theoretical interpretation on the fluidity of place brand mythmaking, and therefore place branding, in Section 2.3, this thesis develops a shadow metaphor as a novel theoretical and analytical lens. By drawing on the scholarly work from a range of disciplines in social science including mythology, arts, geography and psychology, the meanings and characteristics of shadows are reviewed, followed by the justifications on how the shadow metaphor offers fresh theoretical interpretations for understanding the evolving dynamics of the place branding.

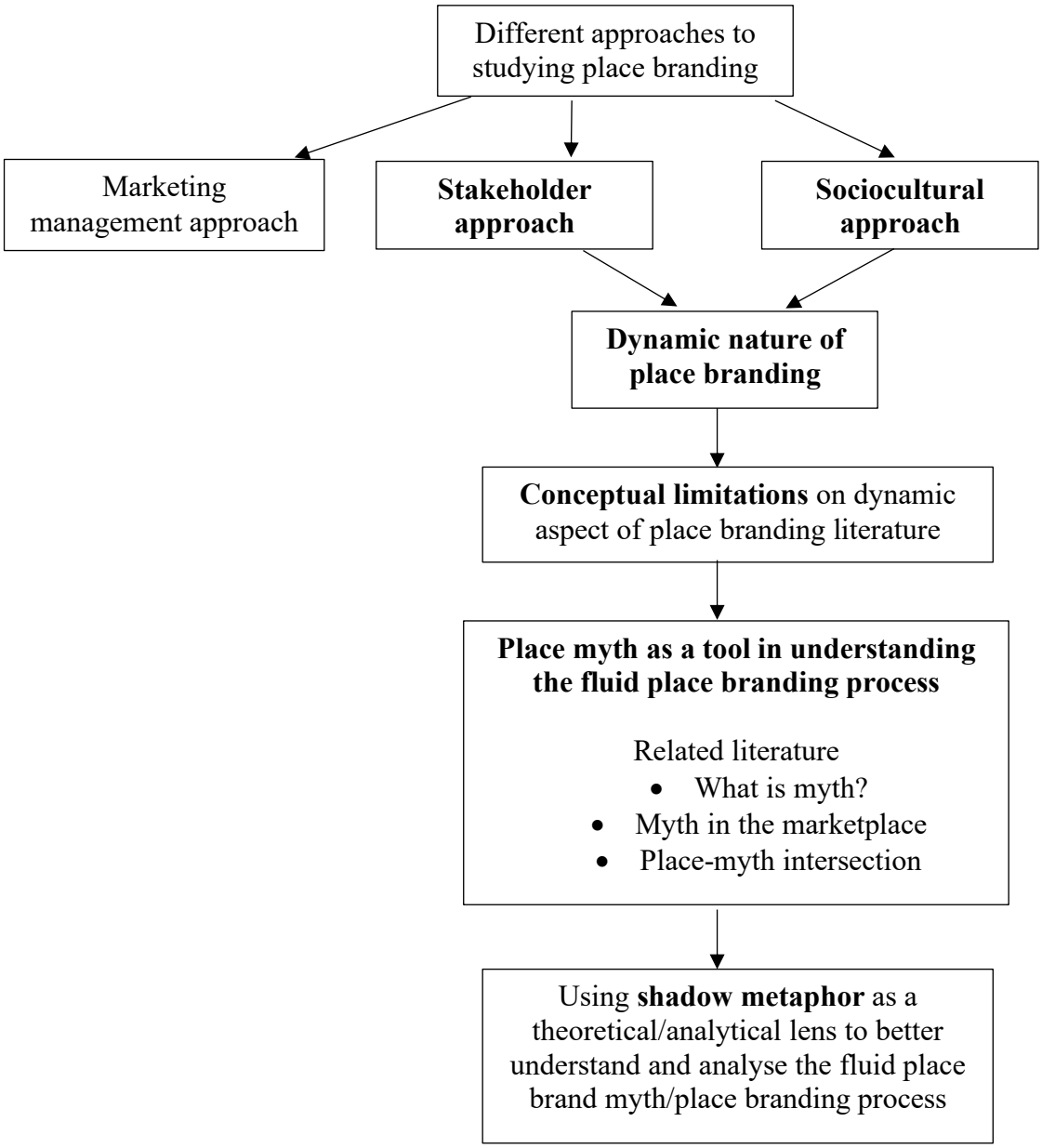


Figure 2.1. Guide for Readers on Literature Review

2.1 Different strategies to the place branding theory

The concept of place branding has gained popularity in both the practical field and academia. This is evident from the increasing number of studies on place branding and the rise

of consulting firms specialising in this area (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Although the term 'place branding' may be relatively new in academia, the practice of place branding has been around for centuries. Countries and cities have traditionally used symbols like slogans, flags and anthems to establish their unique identities and attract investors, tourists and residents (Skinner, 1993). Nevertheless, it is since the last decade that place branding has become more formalised as an academic subject (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Despite its recent emergence, marketing experts recognise that place branding is a complex subject due to its interdisciplinary nature. As such, scholars studying place branding draw insights from disciplines such as marketing, tourism, urban planning, geography, sociology and cultural studies, each with different and sometimes contradictory ontological perspectives (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli & Brorstorm, 2013). By incorporating these different perspectives, marketing scholars have developed multiple approaches to analyse and theorise the concept of place branding. In this section, I will explore the approaches that have significantly shaped my understanding of place branding within the context of marketing, with each of them focusing on different stakeholders involved, and therefore offering diverse insights into the power dynamics that influence the creation and transformation of place branding.

2.1.1 Marketing management approach

Of the various approaches used to study the concept of place branding, the marketing management perspective maintains the predominant one. In this domain, early research focuses on the promotion of place brands. This involves running branding campaigns for promoting the image of a place, such as creating logos, developing slogans and designing marketing materials (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2009). These studies are based on the idea that cities, regions and countries can be treated as consumer products or services that can

be branded and marketed (Hankinson, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2004). From this viewpoint, places are considered as branded goods while place branding involves activities aimed at promoting and marketing them as such. As emphasised by Kemp et al. (2012), "place branding entails using strategies and other marketing techniques to enhance the political and cultural development of cities, regions and countries" (148). However, other studies have criticised the notion that places can only be understood through the same logic of product and service branding. These studies argue that place branding is not merely about promoting products or services (Kavaratzis, 2009; Virgo and de Chernatony, 2006). Instead, it is important to view place branding as a concept intertwined with various marketing elements and involving multiple stakeholders.

To overcome the shortcomings resulting from the oversimplified application of product marketing to place branding, and achieve long-term success of place brand management, many scholars suggest that place branding studies can borrow the branding concepts and strategies from corporate branding (Hankinson, 2007; 2009; Kavaratzis, 2009; Trueman et al., 2004). This idea is based on the similarities between the two forms of brands/branding, such as their interdisciplinary roots, the engagement of complex stakeholder networks, long-term development plans and high level of intangibility and complexity (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). Corporate branding scholars have argued that the foundation of corporate brand management is the interaction between corporate identity and organisational culture, values, image and reputation (Hatchand and Schultz, 2001; Hulberg, 2006). In line with the corporate literature, place branding scholars claim that central to the marketing management approach to studying place branding are the concepts of brand identity and image. According to Boisen et al. (2011): “the identity of a place is sought, identified, extracted and orchestrated to further load the place brand with positive associations. Ultimately, the goal of such practices is to improve the image of the place” (136). Indeed, for scholars holding a managerial perspective,

the primary goal of place branding is to develop and implement a clear and compelling place brand identity in order to differentiate from competitors and resonate with target audiences (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). When an ideal place identity is created, a more positive and desirable place image is likely to be perceived by the key stakeholders such as tourists, investors and residents (Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Kotler et al., 1999; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005).

Partially originating from conventional marketing studies, particularly the Strategic Brand Management (SBM) approach, which emphasises the power and control of governments and marketing agencies, the managerial marketing approach tends to concentrate on marketing strategies and techniques devised by marketers or place brand managers (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Braun, 2011). These studies, as pointed out by Lucarelli and Brostrom (2013), share an "objectivist standpoint informed by a systematic understanding of place branding" (74). For example, Kavaratzis (2004) regards place branding as the process of managing the primary aspect, which refers to its behaviour, the secondary aspect, which involves promoting the place and the tertiary aspect, which includes the media representations and communication used to influence the place image. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015) build on this foundation by redefining the process of place branding as a three-stage process. The Analytical Phase, which involves the analysis on the images and resources of the place as well as understanding the needs and expectations of target audiences. The Strategic Phase, which involves the development of strategic actions and measures to create the place brand such as developing brand positioning and place identity. The Participatory Phase, which involves the consultation with different stakeholder groups to ensure that the place brand aligns with the values and aspirations of the place's stakeholders. It can be seen that the production perspective is an essential element during the process of place branding, and marketers and managers are seen

as the primary strategists and decision makers responsible for building, managing and governing place brands (Lucarelli and Brostrom, 2013).

2.1.2 Stakeholder approach

Despite its dominant position in early place-branding studies, the marketing management approach is also considered problematic. One of the main criticisms on this approach is that it mainly focuses on the top-down tactics led by governments and marketers for tourism or economic goals but it ignores the complexity of place branding, and silences the voices of other stakeholders (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Shifting the primary focus from a managerial perspective, marketing scholars advocate for an emancipatory approach to understanding place branding, which takes into account the intricate and diverse needs, interests and values of social actors (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013). As a result, a stakeholder-centred perspective emerged and has gained interest in place-branding literature. This view challenges the marketing-oriented approach by treating place branding as a collective and collaborative meaning making process, which is constructed through the interactions between various stakeholders such as marketers, residents, visitors, investors and other stakeholders (Hudak, 2019; Jacobsen, 2009; Jain et al., 2022; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013). As defined by Zenker and Braun (2010), place brand should be seen as "a network of associations in the consumers' mind, based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design" (5). Similarly, Björner and Aronsson (2022) conceptualise place branding as a "set of intertwined collective subprocesses, rather than a single managerial process, that allows for interwoven developments to occur simultaneously" (5).

It is believed that different stakeholders are free to embed their own views and attitudes into the meaning of a place brand – place brand managers and marketers have little control over stakeholders' perceptions (Hankinson, 2010; Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Rebelo et al., 2020). In this vein, many marketing studies have recognised the significant and active role the local residents play in place branding. Scholars suggest residents construct place brands through their memories, life stories and identities, rather than being controlled and manipulated by marketers (Jain et al., 2022; Johansson, 2012). They have the right to be engaged in the whole process of place brand building rather than merely in the start phase of a branding campaign (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Zenker and Beckmann, 2013). The co-creation of residents does not merely derive from rejection or resistance of commercial or official decisions. Instead, they are an alternative way of interpreting the meaning of a place (King and Crommelin, 2013). For instance, through the analysis of the 'underprivileged' resident group in a Portuguese city, Rebelo et al. (2020) suggest that it is important to consider the narratives, values and identities of residents in order to effectively create and promote an inclusive perception of a place brand.

Other studies have argued for considering a broader range of stakeholder groups in place branding. Scholars holding this view believe that place branding extends beyond a simple commercial activity between production and consumption. Instead, it should represent diverse interests within a whole society, and arise from interactions within loose social networks (Anholt, 2007; Ooi, 2011). Apart from the widely researched place brand authors such as residents, policy makers and marketing agencies, the voices of other stakeholders such as tourists, non-profit organisations, religious groups, social and academic organisations, cultural and sports bodies and media should all be considered during place-branding process (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Houghton and Stevens, 2011; Stubbs and Warnaby, 2015). This viewpoint on place brand co-creation among diverse social groups has contributed to the discussion on

'participatory' and 'inclusive' place branding, emphasising the inclusion of different and sometimes contradictory voices (Braun et al., 2013; Cassinger and Thelander, 2017; Rebelo et al., 2020). Such multi-stakeholder approach moves away from the traditional view of place branding that focuses on the clarity and coherence of place brand identity and image towards the celebration of a more fragmented and dynamic place brand (Jensen, 2007; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). It has been suggested that a diverse and non-coherent place brand is viewed as more authentic and legitimate than an officially formulated one, as it is negotiated and communicated by the 'grassroots' identities and interests (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).

2.1.3 Socio-cultural approach

Despite offering participatory and inclusive aspects of place branding, marketing scholars have criticised that the stakeholder approach primarily focuses on marketing and management activities. It is grounded in the belief that a place is an outcome of the human-centred marketing and branding efforts (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; 2010). As Rebelo et al. (2020) argue, the normative practice of place branding is market-driven without considering the complexity of the history, culture and knowledge of a place. Other branding scholars also support that the mainstream marketing understanding of place branding highlights the micro branding practices, yet they fail to take the broader geopolitical, ecological and sociocultural contexts into account (Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2014; Olins, 2002). Consequently, the studies adopting a stakeholder approach generally lead to the 'sameness' of places, but overlook the distinctiveness and uniqueness of identity, culture and history in an individual place.

Against this backdrop, the introduction of a less dominant but steadily expanding socio-cultural approach has added an alternative dimension to the place-branding theory. While

previous approaches emphasise place branding as formed and reformed through micro-marketing activities, research adopting a sociocultural approach highlights the frequently overlooked reality that place branding is fundamentally a cultural and social construct (Goulart Sztejnberg and Giovanardi, 2017; Kalandides et al., 2012; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015). Culture has been deemed essential to place branding for various reasons. Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2014) have identified a few key factors: culture can offer consumable cultural experiences that make people want to live and work in a particular place; the increased use of culture can contribute to a vibrant and creative cultural scene, subsequently attracting creative individuals, and tourists; local culture also serves as the foundation for local identity, playing a crucial role in creating a unique sense of place that fosters community bonds.

In place-branding literature, the understanding of the sociocultural approach varies, primarily based on different interpretations and applications of the concept of culture. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015) have classified three distinct cultural dimensions in place branding studies: culture *in* the place, which involves the cultural strategies such as cultural objects or events that are disconnected from the local culture; culture *for* the place, referring to cultural elements specifically developed and promoted to foster local cultural branding (e.g. museums); and culture *of* the place that refers to the unique cultural features that local communities embrace as their identity and sense of belonging. In the realm of place branding, there has been a strong emphasis on culture *in* and culture *for* the place, with many studies emphasising the impactful role of cultural strategies such as artistic and creative works (Björner and Aronsson, 2022) and cultural activities and experiences Jensen (2007) in representing and promoting place brands (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015) as well as in constructing popular tourism destinations (Atkinson et al., 2002; Richards and Wilson, 2004). In these studies, culture is commonly treated as a "burrowed" tool or resource that is selected, utilised and managed by place managers (Scaramanga, 2012).

Despite the dominance of the view, it has been critiqued by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015) as "a simplification of its [culture's] much more complex roles" (156), which does not fully capture the intricate relationship between culture, people and place branding. As a result, this approach leads to a superficial use and understanding of culture that is disconnected from its deeper, broader meanings and impacts. In contrast, an alternative body of literature enriches our understanding of culture by delving into the complex interactions between society, history, people and place brand, or culture *of* the place. According to Kunzmann (2004), "the most popular meaning of culture is that of a 'particular system of art, thought, and customs of a society', or 'the arts, customs, beliefs, and all other products of human thought made by a people at a particular time'" (384). Following this vein, drawing on Yeoman et al.'s (2009) definition of culture as "a mechanism for individual, communal and national self-definition", Rodner and Kerrigan (2018) explore how culture, and particularly visual arts act as a crucial carrier of place meaning, mirroring and influencing changes in national discourses and everyday practices.

For the purposes of this thesis, this study adopts the definition of culture suggested by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) as a 'way of life' - as lived and experienced by the place's inhabitants - providing the social context for the development of place identity and image. Furthermore, such culture encompasses all forms of life expression within a specific time and space context (Kavaratzis, 2011). This interpretation foregrounds culture's broader implications, interweaving political, social, and historical contexts with the lived experiences of local communities and beyond. From this perspective, culture is seen not just as a marketing instrument or an outcome of place campaigns, but as a complex collective meaning system, intertwined with the histories, traditions, narratives, and identities of a place and people (Scaramanga, 2012). This meaning-making system, furthermore, is not static or easily managed; instead, it is complex and dynamic, continually being shaped and reshaped, imagined

and reimaged by individual aspirations and societal ideologies (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Kerrigan et al., 2012; Lichrou et al., 2008; Scaramanga, 2012).

2.1.4 Dynamic nature of place branding

Whether the prominence of the stakeholder approach or the subsequent emergence of the sociocultural approach, these studies consistently highlighted the dynamic nature of place branding. As discussed previously, the emergence of the topics such as 'inclusive place branding' (Braun et al., 2013; Karavatzis et al., 2017; Klijn et al., 2012), and 'participant place branding' (Kavaratzis, 2012; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Zenker et al., 2014) has significantly contributed to the academic attention towards understanding place branding as a dialogical process between various stakeholders, ranging from place brand managers, local authorities, residents and tourists, and broader cultural settings. It has been commonly agreed that place branding is an ongoing co-creation process that is continually shaped and reshaped by various stakeholders interacting with its social and cultural surroundings (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Taking a narrative approach, Lichrou et al. (2017) regard place making as a participative and multifaceted meaning making process. Stakeholders such as local residents actively create, select and organise narratives within the place-making process to make sense of a place. Similarly, through revealing the place-centric stories exchanged between local residents and tourists, Stoica et al. (2021) point out that place branding stems from a co-creative process of storytelling, which is constructed by various stakeholders who are involved in the internal branding activities.

While various place-branding studies have enriched our understanding by regarding 'place' as a dynamic process, rather than a mere product, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) have argued that place brands, along with their related narratives, images and identities, are not only the end-result of the place-branding process, but they are 'the process itself'. In extending their

assertions, the authors have also provided a theoretical framework to interpret and examine how such a dynamic process of place branding works. By utilising the model of the dynamics of the organisational identity presented by Hatch and Schultz (2002), Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) proposed an analytical model that aims to demonstrate the dynamic place branding process through the interrelationship between place identity, place image and place culture. These three essential components of place branding are interacted through four sub-processes:

1) Expressing: place culture eventually becomes part of the residents' identities through their continuous and long-term interactions and experiences with the place. Therefore, it is crucial to empower residents to showcase their authentic interpretations of the place culture;
2) Impressing: the formation of a compelling place image, constructed by the impressions of external stakeholders, is a crucial element of successful place branding. This process can be achieved through the utilisation of effective communication tools and skills (e.g. landscape design, advertising);
3) Mirroring and reflecting: place branding should mirror changes on external place images (as mentioned above) through reflection. Such reflection can be accomplished through sharing and analysing external images internally (e.g. consumer relationships).

In this vein, Sang (2021) argues that although Kavaratzis and Hatch's (2013) identity-driven model demonstrates the dynamic relationship between internal and external consumers and their interactions with place culture, the authors have overly focused on the participation of consumers while muting the voices of planners in the place-branding process. Therefore, Sang (2021) developed the model further by incorporating the planner's planned place image

into the discussion and proposes a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches for analysing the place-making process.

In their more recent conceptual paper, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021) draw on Lefebvre's (1991) triad of the production of space to argue that the construction of place brands is an interwoven process involving individuals' interactions between the conceived, perceived, and lived dimensions of place brands. This perspective views place brands as open-ended and elusive, rather than being static and finite. They highlight that While the elusivity of place brands is created by consumers, it is the responsibility and role of managers to effectively communicate, manage and respond to these elusive place images.

While the previous studies certainly have brought insights into the dynamic view of place branding, they have mainly focused on the multiplicity of perspectives within the place-branding process, and the interconnected relationships among key stakeholders such as residents, visitors and managers and officials. Arguably, these are overly simplified interpretations of the complex and dynamic process of place branding. This is because the complexity of place branding also originated from the dynamic interaction between people's changeable memories and identities, shifting political validity, and sociocultural fluidity (Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Lichrou et al., 2008; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). Although the conceptual work of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021) has deepened the theoretical understanding of the elusive nature of place brands, as mentioned above, it has primarily focused on the ambiguity and multiplicity of place images (as mainly interpreted by consumers). However, it does not directly or adequately address the fluidity and transience of place brands shaped by individual, political, social and cultural changes. Therefore, this study argues that previous studies have not sufficiently acknowledged the dynamism and adaptability of the place-branding process, which needs to accommodate the mutable and ephemeral needs and expectations of individuals, as well as to reflect sociocultural and historical changes.

Furthermore, while the majority of the studies on the dynamic view of place branding concentrate on empirical work, there is a lack of a theoretical framework for understanding and analysing the complex and dynamic process of place branding. As such, current studies tend to address the surface of the place branding – essentially the 'how', without sufficiently delving into the deeper essence and underlying rationale of the phenomenon – the 'what' we are dealing with. This assertion aligns with Kalandides and Kavaratzis's (2009) assertion, published on the special issue of the *Journal of Place Management and Development*, that "the past 20 years have seen the abundant production of literature on place marketing and branding, which has elaborated the field in many directions. However, for the most part, the literature concentrates on the technical analysis of case studies or the development of toolkits, with only the occasional attempt at theoretical approaches."

Mindful of the limitations of previous literature, in the next section, this study will elaborate on how the concept of myth can be a useful conceptual tool to illustrate the ever-changing nature of place branding. This is followed by the subsequent discussion where the study develops the shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens to understand and unpack the fluid and ephemeral mythmaking process, which enhances our understanding on the dynamic nature of place branding.

2.2 Myth/mythmaking in marketing studies

2.2.1 What is myth?

The notion of myth originates from the Greek word *mythos*, which literally means stories (Overing, 1997; Segal, 2004; Von Hendy, 2002). As an age-old concept, myth has continuously undergone transformations, fitting in various temporal and spatial contexts. The

conventional view focuses on the origin of myth, calming that myth is a primitive way of telling grand and sacred stories about the world that people cannot control or understand, such as the origin of human beings and natural hazards (Malinowski, 1954). In this vein, myths are also interpreted as legends and folk tales that focus on archetypal characters with superpowers who represent outstanding personal qualities such as persistence, courage and determination (e.g. Jakob Grimm, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye). In comparison, a later trend is to look at the subject and function of myth as a literal explanation of the physical world. As such, myth is taken from a primitive counterpart to a modern concept (e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes). Rather than speculating about the potential origins of human beings or grand stories featuring fictitious figures, these theorists advocate that myths are not exclusive to societies distant in time and space. Rather, they also surround us in modern life. Through investigating the process of myth creation in everyday life, the studies in this stream claim that myths are socially constructed by people's emotions, beliefs and daily experiences. They serve as ideological antidotes for social and cultural contradictions, as well as providing a sense of personal salvation (Slotkin, 1973; Von Hendy, 2002).

For many, the concept of myth has long been synonymous with falsity or lie (Segal, 2004). However, modern theorists contend that myth is not limited to primitive fictional stories passed on through oral tradition, nor the falsehoods propagated from bourgeois culture. Instead, they argue that myth is also a 'reality' that can be observed, felt and experienced in the real society (Von Hendy, 2002). While there is a long-lasting debate about whether myth is true, it is suggested by Lando (1996) that the investigation on the absolute truth of myth is unnecessary, as the concept of 'truth' can also be speculative and subjective. There are convincible false tales that may be considered firm and also worthless true stories that can be seen as unreal and meaningless. In this sense, myths can be either true or false, or half true, half false. The author also highlights that the power of myth is not based on its connection to

"reality", but whether it is believed to be "true". Schorer (1959) has also made a similar proposition that myth includes varying manifestations that can be imaginative symbolism and delusion, or a representation of a visible universe. However, the author adds that different formats of myth are indispensable for myth to operate universally and diversely. As defined by Hall (2006):

"A myth is a story which is believed to be true by a group of people and which in general terms provides building blocks for this group's efforts in defining meaning, a purpose, and a collective identity. Myths, then, serve as the frame into which other phenomena are fitted and then interpreted" (2).

This proposition is supported by Schopflin and Hosking (1997), who assert that myths are dependent on people's beliefs and that powerful myths are believable stories. To quote their words:

"[People] establish and determine their own being, their own system of morality and values. In this sense, therefore, myth is a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself" (19).

2.2.2 Myths in the marketplace

The previous section demonstrates that the concept of myth has been extensively examined by a wide range of theorists, folklorists and mythologists. Equally, marketing scholars have found the concept of myth useful in theorising a variety of marketing theories, and especially branding. Cultural myths are considered a crucial tool in creating desirable and resonating brands. Marketing executives, such as advertisers, brand managers and tourist

marketers, adopt and adapt the pre-existing cultural myths to reinvent commercial myths that resonate with consumers' individual or collective identities (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Brown and Patterson, 2010; Crockett and Davis, 2016; Holt, 2004, 2006; Thompson, 2004). As Thompson and Tian (2008) point out, "commercial myths most commonly provide identity value by leveraging and updating existing cultural myths, but they can also convey new mythic ideals through the syncretic blending of narrative and imagistic elements that hail from multiple cultural myths" (596). In this vein, several works have specifically suggested that such identity value is constructed and experienced by consumers through myth-imbued brands. The most prominent work includes Holt's (2004) highly cited book, *How Brands Become Icons*. Through analysing the symbolic meanings and social functions of several influential American brands (e.g. Coca-Cola, Jack Daniels), Holt (2004) argues that brands become 'iconic' as they create myths that consumers resonate with. The author adds that the myths of iconic brands are generally rooted in a particular social and historical background. Such discourse was further developed in the author's later work on the whisky-drinking culture in the US. By investigating a renowned American brand, Jack Daniels, Holt (2006) demonstrates how the culture of the whiskey brand such as heavy drinking and hard fighting is embedded in the American myth of masculinity, equality and rebellious spirit. Holt (2006) adds that brands are 'parasitic' as they rarely generate original myths; instead, they ride on pre-existing cultural myths (that normally derive from political issues and cultural conflicts) and then utilise their marketing power to 'proselytize' their consumers. Holt's discourse is also evident from Crockett and Davis's (2016) investigation on the Holy Land Experience that marketers draw on the powerful myths of Christianity and its relevant rituals to create an iconic religious theme park brand.

The value of myths in the marketplace is not limited to the development of iconic brands. Marketing researchers also remind us of the ideological significance of myths in addressing personal and social contradictions for consumers (Belk and Costa, 1998; Holt and

Thompson, 2004; Thompson and Tian, 2008; Levy, 1981). Particularly influential work is Barbara Stern's (1995) observation on 'consumer myths'. Drawing on Northrup Frye's taxonomy of mythoi – romance, comedy, tragedy and irony – the author provides an analytical tool to unpack how consumers construct different types of Thanksgiving myths in relation to their personal interpretations and experiences. These stories, according to Stern, are also reflections on the ideology and cultural beliefs of consumers. Similarly, Holt and Thompson (2004) present how their male participants draw on the American myth of heroic masculinity to construct themselves as 'man-of-action heroes' in order to resolve their real-life identity struggles. Such "lived myth" that "bridges one's personal story to dimensions of experience that reach beyond the personal" (Chalquist, 2009:3) not only helps consumers shape and reshape their identities and make sense of the world they inhabit but also makes brands iconic and powerful. Ultimately, as pointed out by Chalquist (2009), the most resonating myths are the ones that represent the heights and depths of people's everyday experiences.

The ideological value of marketplace myths possesses a socialising impact on consumer groups, thereby contributing to the formation of cohesive brand communities. Brands such as the Mountain Man festival (Belk and Costa, 1998), Harley Davidson (McAlexander and Schouten, 1998), and Apple Newton (Muniz and Schau, 2005) are only a few examples of how the powerful myths around a brand are constructed and negotiated by certain consumer groups based on their collective identities, beliefs and lifestyles. In a more recent study, Närvänen and Goulding (2016) explore the ways in which diverse consumption groups, together with brand marketers, reshape the myths of a traditional Finnish slipper brand in order to preserve and rejuvenate Finnish heritage and custom. The brand myths created by these consumer groups are beyond mere marketing narratives; instead, they serve as the representations of consumers' knowledge, experiences and fantasy in relation to the world. As Essebo (2019) argues, myths

represent common needs or mutual experiences that are shared and communicated through social fantasies.

Marketing scholars have suggested that the reason why some marketplace myths can become resonant and powerful is due to their adaptability. Brown et al. (2013) argue that consumers resonate with the myths of iconic brands because of their ambiguity and malleability. These myths "can be felicitously adapted to consumers' individual and collective preferences, aspirations, imaginings" (597). In contrast, overly relying on structured and coherent narratives can limit the possibility and malleability of the stories that a brand can tell (Brown, 2015). Preece et al. (2018) support that myths are central elements for enduring brands because of their ambiguous nature. They can be easily adjusted to match what consumers want to see and become. The mythical stories of a serial brand can move forward and backward and continue evolving to meet consumers' preferences and expectations towards the brand. Powerful marketplace myths are also temporal. Kristensen et al. (2011) reveal how the national myth of milk as the representation of healthy life has been reinterpreted and resisted by consumer communities. Zanette et al. (2022) have investigated ambiguous and shifting interpretations of the witch myth. The study illustrates how the mythical stories around witches evolve and transform across time and space, reflecting different cultural perspectives on the meaning and symbolism of witches. These studies show that marketplace myths transfer and transform over time; they influence and are influenced by the choices and abandonment of consumers (Belk and Costa, 1998; Brown et al., 2013; Thompson, 2004) and history and culture (Holt, 2006; Holt and Thompson 2004).

As Barthes (2009) claims, myth is "not at all an abstract, purified essence, it is formless, unstable, nebulous condensation […]" (143). By recognising the ambiguous and ever-changing nature of (marketplace) myth, this study argues that (marketplace) myth is a useful conceptual tool to understand and interpret the complex and fluid place-branding process, which is freely

and ephemerally formed with no formulas or restrictions from people, institutions, time or space (Derrida, 1974).

2.2.3 Place-myth intersection

In fact, the marriage between place and myth is certainly not a new proposition. Throughout ancient and modern mythologies, ranging from Egypt's pharaonic myths and Chinese Dragon myths to American superhero myths, myths have been consistently ingrained in specific places in which the mythological traditions originate (Von Hendy, 2002). Without the link to a particular place, even the most extraordinary myths lose their resonance and the powerful context that creates and deifies them (Morrison and Schutlz, 2015). In the realm of cultural geography, the close link between geography and myth has been persistently demonstrated. The prime contributor includes the cultural geographer Rob Shields, who provided great insight on place-myth interconnections. Shields (1991) asserts that place-myths are "everyday conceptions of ourselves and of the world we live in" (48). The author also examined the formation of 'place-myths' through the collective construction of 'place-images'. Complex social interactions within a place lead to discrete place meanings that form 'place-images'. These images are always partial, either imagined, or real, or may be accurate or inaccurate representations of everyday experiences, but they generally result from stereotyping, or over-simplified interpretation of a place and its inhabitants. A conglomeration of these different but interrelated 'place-images' eventually contribute to 'place-myths'. Since the 'place images' are based on bias and prejudice, 'place myths' are also formed and communicated through spatial divisions and differentiations. For Shields, such territorial discrimination creates spatialised identities, and furthermore, a spatialised mythology that is used by people to distinguish themselves from other social groups (Shields, 1991). By using

the examples such as the national myth of Canada as 'the True North Strong and Free', and Niagara Falls myth as 'Honeymoon Capital of the World', the author shows how cities, regions and nations are dominated by these spatial myths. Based on Shields' discourse, the difference between place image and place myth, the two concepts that are often confused, was highlighted. Such distinction can also be seen in Schorer's (1959) work, which defines myth as a large and controlling belief system that is made up of a set of images. Myth is a pantheon that gives images philosophical meaning and value, whereas image is merely a phenomenon.

Another cultural geographer, Edward Soja, also highlights the geographical aspect of myth and mythmaking. Nevertheless, unlike Shields, who adopts a geopolitical perspective to understand the relationship between place, space and myth, Soja takes a postmodernist view by focusing on the locality of 'lived' spaces and stories (stemmed from Lefebvre's seminal work on *The Production of Space*). To quote the author's words, "'life-stories' have a geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements that affect thought and action. The historical imagination is never completely spaceless […]" (Soja, 1989:10). Although adopting different approaches and theories, both authors suggest that people make sense of the world they imagine or inhabit through telling stories, which makes myths intrinsically and inevitably geographical. These mythical stories are more than representations of a place. Rather, the place we dwell and experience is created in shaping and reshaping the plots by which we live (Bieger and Maruo-Schröder, 2016).

The more recent geographical studies focus on how myths and their related culture and symbolism contribute to place meanings and social beliefs. For example, Lando (1996) suggests that the essence of a place is represented through sacred narratives such as myths. Similarly, Essebo (2019) supports the idea of a mutually advantageous connection between place and myth: while myth is ingrained in a place, mirroring the place's culture and ideology, the behaviours and identities of people living in the place are shaped by the place myth they

believe. Myth does not simply create meaning to a place; it stands for 'something more' (Light, 2008). As Light (2008) asserts, place myth certainly indicates how a place is, yet it is also a representation of a strong set of people's shared beliefs, memories and imaginations in relation to a place. In this vein, cultural geographers have analysed the interaction between myth, collective memory, and place history and culture. For instance, Harding (2014) claims that the collective belief of the 'emptiness' of American culture leads to the formation and reformation of the so-called 'empty space' in the US. McDonald and Veth (2013) reveal the construction of Europe as a 'memoryland', based on a collective memory work on the remembrance and amnesia of the mythical European history.

Inspired by cultural geographers, the discussion on the intersection between place and myth has also become attuned to tourism studies. There have been many examples within tourism literature that have investigated the significant role that mythical discourses play in constructing tourism destinations, such as the phantasmal Shangri-La (Gao et al., 2012), the idyllic Lake District (Urry, 1995), and the paradisal Hawaii (Costa, 1997). Through unpacking the myth and mythmaking process of the 'Other' tourist destination, Selwyn (1996) asserts that tourists' imagination constructs myths of a place. The mythical meanings of a place summon up tourists' dreams and desires, which leads to a romantic and emotional attachment to the destination. This discourse is supported by Lichrou et al. (2008), claiming that mythical discourse is unavoidably embedded in popular tourism destinations, both from a consumption and marketing perspective. Ancient or modern mythologies are used as sources of imaginaries towards places.

The examination of destination myths within tourism studies undoubtedly offers valuable insights for marketing studies. A number of marketing scholars have emphasised the role of pre-existing place myths in creating resonating and believable commercial and consumer myths. Warren and Dinnie (2018) provide a definition of the term 'place myth' as a

story with “combined imagery, narratives, cliches and messages that circulate within society” (304). It is suggested that more often than not, such circulated stories become powerful when they are grounded in certain spatial settings, such as a country (Närvänen and Goulding, 2016; Preece et al., 2018), a region (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008; Andersen et al., 2019), or a place-based community (Belk and Costa, 1998; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Through analysing the iconic and long-lasting Titanic myth and its different interpretations in relation to different understandings on English and Irish culture and identity, Brown et al. (2013) conclude that geography is significant in mythmaking, as powerful marketplace myths are usually grounded in certain places where the mythologies are formed and ingrained in. The authors argue that the myths that consumers connect to the most are the ones grounded in the spatial contexts, either in an ‘imaginary’ or a ‘real’ place.

Marketers, tourists, consumers and other stakeholders do not merely utilise and appropriate pre-existing myths as cultural references for marketing practices; they also recreate and reshape the meaning of place myths. For instance, Peñaloza (2001) conducted ethnographic research investigating how consumers reproduce the memory and myth of the American ‘West’ through reintroducing the cattle trade and rodeo culture. Similarly, Thompson and Tian (2008) note how the two magazines shifted the image of the stigmatised myth of the American ‘South’ by adopting different and sometimes contradictory storytelling strategies. To take this argument even further, some scholars identified the disruption and subversion that marketing activities can cause to a place myth (Arsel and Thompson, 2011). Kristensen et al. (2011) have investigated an evolution driven by a consumer community in order to resist a national mythology of milk as a national drink of Denmark. Consequently, it reshaped the collective image of Denmark as a place emphasising healthy and natural lifestyle and family life into an overly commercialised and capitalised world.

While the place-myth intersection has been highlighted in various disciplines (e.g. geography, tourism, marketing), it is surprising that this topic remains under-researched within the field of place branding, apart from a few exceptions. Coyle and Fairweather (2005) have investigated the complexity of the concept of place myth within the place-branding context. Drawing on Shields' (1991) conceptualisation of 'place myth' (as explained previously), the authors provide an illustrative example of the disagreements between the government's aspirations to reform the national myth by transitioning from the long-standing 'clean, green image' to a biotechnological hub, and the subsequent scepticism and apprehension expressed by the public. In the context of international place branding, Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) investigate the ways in which place brand managers redefine the meaning and identity of Asian brands by embracing multi-regional and multi-cultural place myths. The authors conclude that the international place brands that are deeply embedded in the place myths in diverse nations and regions tend to be more resonate and powerful for consumers.

A few Nordic scholars have also highlighted the significance of place myth in developing Nordic brand practices and Nordic consumer culture (Østergaard et al., 2014). Cassinger et al. (2019) propose that 'The Nordic' should be treated as a mythology that involves "themes of superiority and the obligation to act" (5). Such regional myth can be used as a place-branding model for other countries to imitate. Anderson et al. (2019) have developed the idea of the 'Nordic myth' further by unpacking the use and meaning of the place myth in branding activities. Based on their analysis on the 'Nordic value' through the journey from southern Denmark to northern Norway, the authors identified a range of cultural tensions that form the myth of 'The Nordic'. By using various branding strategies to amend and compromise these cultural tensions, brands offer a sanitised Nordic mythology to consumers.

While previous studies certainly emphasise the significance of myth within the context of place branding, this study argues that their understanding of place myth is still static. These

studies mainly consider place myth as an outcome of commercial or political place branding activities, which can be defined, selected and organised (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Furthermore, place myths are expected to be explicit, coherent and ideally positive with which audiences can easily resonate (Hansen, 2010). On the contrary, passive, incoherent, arbitrary narratives are believed to lead to an unattractive and unsuccessful place brand image (Anderson et al., 2019; Coyle and Fairweather, 2005). However, as discussed previously, marketplace myth is an ambiguous, adaptable and temporal meaning-making process that organically and naturally emerges through the dynamic interactions between stakeholders and sociocultural environment (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). From this perspective, this study challenges the dominant view on considering place myths as a constellation of a set of well-organised and pre-planned narrative vehicles, created for the purposes of place brand promotion and communication. Rather, it calls upon place-branding scholars to adopt a more dynamic and organic view on place myths. This assertion is in line with Essebo's (2019) observation that place myths should be seen as a "natural state of things" (: 521), formed and transformed through the constantly shifting social interactions and cultural discourses (Hankinson, 2004). To provide an in-depth understanding and examination of this fluid view of place mythmaking, and therefore place branding, this study develops and introduces the shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens for the study.

2.3 Shadow metaphor: a theoretical lens

A metaphor is, according to the definition of Sackmann (1989), "a figure of speech in which a term or phrase with a literal meaning is applied in a different context in order to suggest a resemblance" (465). Using metaphor as an analytical tool is not new in marketing literature. Various metaphors are used by marketing scholars to analyse marketing phenomena and

concepts. Taking a few recent studies as examples, for highlighting the significance of exchange value rather than competition in marketing strategies, Delbaere and Slobodzian (2019) use the metaphor of 'marketing as dance' to replace the traditional metaphor of 'marketing as war'. Hede et al. (2022) develop a metaphor of 'brand for rent' to conceptualise the contractual and distant relationship between original and extended brands. Cheetham et al. (2018) adopt the concept of kaleidoscope as a metaphor to understand and analyse the collectively and relationally constructed consumption place and various territorialising consumption practices. Previous studies have shown that metaphors can be used as a method to make complex marketing issues "easier to understand, easier to remember, easier to communicate" (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; 392).

In line with previous marketing literature, this study sees potential in using shadow as a metaphor to understand the concept of place brand myth and the process of place brand mythmaking. However, as warned by marketing scholars, using metaphors in marketing studies is not without its 'dark side' (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; Hede et al., 2022). Metaphors can be taken too literally, which can inhibit creativity and create barriers to thinking (ibid). In addition, metaphors often focus on certain aspects of a concept, but ignore the other aspects (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019). To address the limitations associated with utilising metaphors as a conceptual lens, this research delves into a more in-depth examination of the concept of shadow. It draws upon research on shadows from various disciplines within the social sciences, including mythology, arts, geography and psychology. Arguably, these disciplines have significantly contributed to my theoretical interpretations of the significance of shadows and their meanings within the society. Additionally, rather than merely considering shadow as a conceptual metaphor for understanding abstract marketing concepts, the study also considers shadow as a methodological framework for empirically analysing marketing activities.

	Main definitions of shadows in the field	Cultural and social symbolisms of shadows
Mythology	• The projection of deception (Plato's allegory of the cave) • The embodiment of ghosts and other evil spirits, or the spirit of a dead person residing in the underworld (Ancient Greece's Erebus, Ancient Rome's the Land of the Shades, Victorian gothic stories)	The representation of darkness, demonisation, and fear, that are in contrast to the positive qualities such as glory and integrity embedded in lights (Koslofsky, 2011; Palmer, 2000; Perera, 1986; Stoichita, 1997)
Arts	• One of the most crucial tools for adding depth, dimension and drama to a painting or an artwork – In arts, shadows are usually drawn as darker than the surrounding areas in order to show its absence of light. The darkest parts on the image, which are the opposite to the "highlights" – the brightest parts (e.g. Gombrich, 2014) • The reflected image that can be adjusted and distorted into different shapes, colours and atmospheres by changing the position of the light sources (Gombrich, 2014; Stoichita, 1997)	Shadows can be gloomy and elegant, dark and bright at the same time. The views on them can be manipulated and inversed through the imaginations of 'shadow makers' (Kite, 2017; Tanizaki, 2001)
Geography	• A dark and obscure spot that is formed when an opaque object blocks a source of light. The colour, tone, shape and dimension can be affected by various geographical elements such as mist, dust, sunlight (Edensor and Hughes, 2021; Shaw, 2014) • People or places exist outside of the mainstream society due to forced reasons such as geopolitical conflict and cultural invasion (Hale et al., 2013; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001; Wulf, 2006)	• Mark the passage of time and landscape, that affect the sensory apprehension of the everyday life, which represents the dynamic and fluid process of making (Edensor, 2013; Edensor and Hughes, 2021) • Suffering and powerlessness caused by historical incidents and events, which

		demonstrate the connection between past and present (Hale et al., 2013; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001; Wulf, 2006)
Psychoanalysis	• The reflection of the unconscious (generally the dark and negative) side of the personality • Shadow leads to 'psychological projection' (Jung, 1958)	The rejection of one's ego-consciousness, or protection of one's fear and anxiety, normally caused by one's unpleasant memory and immoral desire and intention (Perera, 1986)

Table 2.1. Interpretations of Shadows in Different Disciplines.

2.3.1 Characteristics and symbolisms of shadows

2.3.1.1 The uncanny shadows

Shadows surround us. They are part of our living environment and also of ourselves. Consciously or unconsciously, we use shadows to understand ourselves and the world around us. The ways shadows are perceived and interpreted vary enormously across time, place, intention and subject. It is difficult to find a universal and definite answer to what shadow is and means. However, there are consistent understandings of shadows across different disciplines. Central to the concept of shadow is its inherent negative characteristics in association with darkness, death and the unknown. Shadows are dark areas where an opaque object blocks the light; they exist behind the light, in a gloomy and unseen space. In ancient mythology and religious stories, shadows are closely associated with evil in the supernatural and paranormal world. They have long been considered as the representations of ominous spiritual beings or entities residing in the underworld, in opposition to positive figures such as

God and angels, which commonly symbolise the Holy Spirit, brilliance and glory (Koslofsky, 2011; Palmer, 2000). In the context of the arts, shadow has been used as a painting technique to reveal the sublime thrill brought by the spooky and mysterious ghostly figures lingering in churches, prisons, abandoned mental hospitals, and children's bedrooms (Kite, 2017; Stoichita,1997).

While shadows can be the physical representation of certain creepy phantom figures such as ghosts and demons, they can also be metaphorically dark and spectral. Cultural geographers use the metaphorical attributes of shadows to refer to the liminal and shadowy status of a place. The present of these places is 'haunted' by the dark and stigmatised past, generally caused by forced political, social or cultural conflicts (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001; Wulf, 2006). For instance, Wulf (2016) defines Estonia as a 'shadowland' in which the historic influences of its spectral 'landlords' – Germany and Russia – still linger in the country even today. Extensive German heritage can still be found today in the food, architecture, culture and customs of modern Estonia. Similarly, Estonia still retains the Soviet legacy, characterised by the large Russian-speaking community in the country.

Likewise, in the field of psychology, the concept of shadow has also been extensively used as a metaphor for understanding the human personality and mind, and the paramount contributor includes Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. According to Jung's (1958) definition, "shadow is that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors". Shadow is everything outside the light of one's consciousness; it symbolises the unknown, wild and dark side of one's mind (e.g. fear, shame, guilt). Shadow, considered as a negative side of ourselves, is usually resisted, repressed and rejected by our ego-ideal in the daytime. However, this often rejected 'dark guest' haunts and disturbs us in the night-time, represented by the spectral or fearsome figures that appear in our dreams (Jung, 1958).

2.3.1.2 Formless and impermanent nature of shadows

Whether literally or metaphorically, shadows are spectral and uncanny by nature. Through haunting, the ghost moves out of the shadows and is felt as a presence (Van Wagenen, 2004). Crucially, “the epistemology of haunting is about conjuring subjects who have been excluded, their histories and subjectivities repressed" (Van Wegenen 2004:290). Shadows and their close connection with evil spirits mark the departure from the 'real' and concrete world to an elusive dark place infused with fear, wonder and unknowing. “Shadows are metaphysical amphibians with one foot on terra firma of common sense and the other in the murky waters of nonbeing” (Sorensen, 2008). In this sense, shadows are an 'unreal' and amorphous form, as they do not have a concrete form that we can grasp or touch. By drawing on American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead’s concept of ‘Penumbral Shadow’, Odin (1985) describes shadow as “the image of faint darkness or dim obscurity” that expresses a “sense of hidden or veiled depths ordinarily concealed in the background of perceptual experience” (74). The author shows that shadow signifies the hidden depths by manifesting the darkness and vagueness of the world, in contrast to the clearly illuminated objects on the ground. Compared to the objects that they are cast on, shadows lack rigidly defined shapes and structures and are often unruly. On the one hand, the existence of shapeless shadows questions the tangibility and solidity of the world (Gombrich, 2014). On the other hand, the obscurity of a shadow also allows it to form into something nobody would have thought of (Ruskin, n.d.).

We tend to see the world as stable and unchanged; although we are aware of the changing patterns in certain circumstances, we attribute them to the fugitive surfaces. However, shadows are different as they are naturally impermanent and contingent (Hefner, 2015; Tanizaki, 2001). They change in colour, shape and tone. Like spectres, shadows are transient

in a physical world, disrupting the consistency and linearity of time, complicating the relationship between past and present (Derrida, 1974). They emerge, mutate and decay in a continually changing condition. Drawing on the traditional arts' aesthetics and philosophy in Japan, Tanizaki (2001) describes shadow as an 'art of impermanence' – a state of becoming and changing. Inspired by the "imperfect, impermanent and incomplete" doctrines of shadows, the author asserts that all we can capture from shadows is the temporary and contingent moments when they appear. They are not permanent; they come into being and then dissolve until they come back again. Rather than looking for stability and reliability, it is also crucial to accept transience and incompletion in life.

2.3.2 'Playing' with shadows

Despite their entrenched association with ominousness and uncanniness, shadows are also playful and diverting by nature. They appear then disappear from our sight, and emerge and remerge in different forms. Nature plays with shadows by changing the angle and the presence of sunlight. While shadows are at their longest in the morning and late afternoon when the sun's position is the lowest, they are at their shortest and almost completely absent when the sun is overhead at noon. On a bright day in the fierce summer, the tone and hue of shadows become deeper and stronger, whereas in January, or the evening, when the sunlight is too faint to create dramatic contrasts between light and shade, shadows become unnoticeable and faded (Edensor and Hughes, 2021).

Inspired by the natural world, humans also have learnt how to play with shadows, as with artists bringing drama and realism to their paintings. They also adjust human-added light depending on where artworks are displayed. These artists remind us that, by changing the position and angle of candles, firelights and lamps, the shapes, colours and even atmosphere of

shadows can be manipulated to a certain degree (Stoichita, 1997). Gombrich et al., (2014) point out that to paint is to 'play' a game with light, illuminated objects, shadows and human eyes. By developing compassionate eyes for the modifications of light sources, artists produce and reproduce various shapes and shades of shadows.

Besides adjusting light sources, we also play with shadows through our imaginations. Shadow puppetry (also known as shadow play), an ancient art and entertainment, is a predominant example of how we create different meanings of shadows in our minds. Puppet masters hold the flat, cut-out puppets behind a scrim screen and make the figure appear to walk, dance and fight by moving the light sources and puppets. The audiences sit in front of the screen, watching the shadows of the puppets and imagining the stories told by puppet masters through the manipulation of illuminated puppets. By playing with light sources, puppets, projection screen, and human imagination, along with other atmospheric elements such as wind, sound and music, various fictional figures and stories are created (Kite, 2017).

It can be seen that both nature and humans play with the obscure and formless nature of shadow and make it into different shapes, colours and meanings. Through the analysis of relevant literature, this study has identified three predominant ways in which shadows are 'played' by shadow makers, namely, projection, distortion and illusion. This echoes Kaufmann's (1975) observation of the different forms of shadows that "some observers will notice the differences in illumination within a scene, and perceive the shadow as a dark object, something solid and opaque within the visual field; others will look into a shadow, as if at an object through some liquid, and notice the qualities of the objects in more detail; others will concentrate on focusing attention on the object within the shadow to the extent that the shadow disappear" (259).

2.3.2.1 Projection

In ancient mythologies, evil and ghosts cast no shadow as they form without substance in the real world. This assertion shows that shadow, despite its obscure and shapeless characteristics, must have some kind of connection with the 'reality'. Shadows can be seen as they cast their presence on the landscape and in the atmosphere. When we see shadows, we see the projections of the objects creating them: a shadow is formed based on the object it projects on, and it also shows the viewer the shape and characteristics of the objects and its distance to the light source (Johansson, 2012). From this perspective, shadows are relational as they would not exist without the solid and opaque objects they are cast on. Artists showed great interest in using shadows to create an emulation of the 'real' world (Kaufmann, 1975). In paintings, especially during the Renaissance, it is common to see those artists adding shadows to a transparent glass, a candle, or a person to make the paintings of still life vivid and alive. The shades and shadows that the painters add to the objects tell us their size, shape and texture, as well as their material and substantial existence in real life (Gombrich, 2014).

Shadows do not merely transfer the original shapes and patterns of the object onto another surface. They also reinforce the illuminated object. Through their observations of shade and shadow in Melbourne, Edensor and Hughes (2021) claim that the dark shadows make the elements and details of ordinary and sometimes unnoticeable objects (e.g. waste bins, lamps, trees) more hyper-visible and extraordinary than usual. Objects that are reinforced by shadows temporarily escape from their utilitarian functions into a marvellous piece of art.

On a psychological level, Jungian studies also shed light onto the relationship between shadow and projection. Jung (1958) believes that shadow, as an unacceptable part of one's mind, is likely to lead to psychological projection, which is a process of interpreting and attributing one's (shadow-side) feelings or desires to another person, group, or object.

Projection often happens because people attempt to understand their own feelings and thoughts – generally unpleasant memories and emotions such as shame and jealousy – by projecting them onto others (Jung, 1958). In this sense, shadow projection is made up of two layers: the top layer is the manifestation of an individual's mind and experience that typically appears in a person's dream; underneath this layer is the reflection on the social and collective experiences. Through the interaction between one's shadowed self and its projection on others, people are able to see and understand themselves, as there is no longer a distinction between 'shadow' and 'projection on others', but they become one – I am them, and they are me.

Shadows always reside in and attach to other objects, yet such close connection is not always welcomed. In the field of geography, the concept of shadow is used to demonstrate a 'place', a 'space', or a 'land' that is forgotten or neglected as a result of geopolitical conflicts, or geographical marginality (Hefner, 2015; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001; Potter et al., 2022). For instance, in his book, *Shadowlands*, Wulf (2006) examines the national identity of modern Estonia that is significantly influenced by German and Russian occupation. Through studying the case of Estonia, the author defines shadowland as "a land marked by the experience of double occupation, and overshadowed still by unresolved memories of subordination and collaboration resulting in conflicted identities" (36). Places with such 'shadowy' status are recognised and defined through collective memory and national identity about the external or internal 'Other' (Wulf, 2016). People from such places are often considered to be living in the shadow of their 'mother' countries. However, such close association is usually seen as an obstacle in defining their own identities. Many places that are seen as 'shadowlands' are keen to erase the marks of the 'Other' by establishing the opposite psychic and mythic 'self' (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001). Potter et al. (2022) consider places with shadowy status as the marginality of capitalism as they usually lack financial and political support from the more dominant culture. However, the neglect of and disregard towards shadow places perpetuates

the fantasy of the untouched power and authority of the dominant culture. They mark them and they are entangled.

Shadows are formed through the projection onto others (e.g. an object, a place, a person/group). In the meantime, the existence of shadows also makes the shapes, characteristics, and identities of the things they cast on more noticeable and magnificent. It can be seen that shadows and objects complete each other and are inseparable. Although such affinity is sometimes considered a catastrophe, it is undeniable that a shadow cannot exist alone; its form, mentality and ideology are pre-defined and constrained by what they are cast on.

2.3.2.2 Distortion

Although shadows reflect the shape and form of a 'real' object, person or thing, they are not merely appendages to them. Shadows can also be distorted and sometimes reversed, mutating into something different from the object or person that 'creates' them (Kite, 2017). Artists, especially painters, have long paid great attention to the relationship between different light effects and shadows. The angle of the light source, the shape of the object creating the shadow and the topography of the surface where the shadow is cast can all affect the shapes of shadows: casting a shadow on an uneven surface can create distortion of the image; the further shadows fall from the object creating them, the lighter and longer the shadows get; taking a close look at a painting, the shadows of trees that you thought were dark green become purple. Shadows have also been used as an important element by painters to manipulate the complex pictorial representation of mood in their paintings. For example, through enhancing the effects of shadows, painters are able to create a mood of mystery in their artworks. In contrast, by reducing the effects of shadows, the spooky atmosphere of the paintings is less pronounced, and becomes more realistic (Kite, 2017).

Geographers have also identified the distorted shadows caused by sunlight in urban landscapes. Edensor and Hughes (2021) show how shadows cast in a city can also be distorted, which diminishes the presence of the object they are cast on – the original shapes and patterns of walls, pavements, trees, traffic lights and buildings are enlarged and elongated when the angle and position of sunbeams change. The distorted shadows show that they are fluid and constantly changing, shifting into various forms and possibilities. Edensor and Hughes's (2021) observation on the distorted shadows in a city echo with art critic Ruskin's (n.d.) assertion on the mystery and curiosity of shadows in paintings. According to the author, "the strange shapes it [shadow] gets into—the manner in which it stumbles over everything that comes in its way, and frets itself into all manner of fantastic schism, taking neither the shape of the thing that casts it, nor of that it is cast upon, but an extraordinary, stretched, flattened, fractured, ill-jointed anatomy of its own." To the author, shadows sometimes gain supremacy over the things that they are cast on and they follow invented philosophies that cater for shadows. They can constantly change the shapes and colours of objects that people faithfully and profoundly remember. However, such broken and distorted pieces of shade can also be unintelligent, embarrassing and shoddy because of their inaccurately and artificially formed 'truth'.

Not only the visual representation, but also the aesthetics of shadows can be 'distorted' based on the viewer's emotion, taste and culture. While, for many, shadows are associated with ghosts, death and the negativity in human minds, others, by contrast, think they can be delightful and positive. For example, following the traditional Japanese art aesthetics, there is a stream of art theorists who believe that shadowy darkness signifies beauty and depth (Mayeda, 1991; Odin, 1985). The most influential work includes Tanizaki's (2001) *In Praise of Shadows*. In this book, the author demonstrates opposing views on the concept of shadow based on the difference between western and eastern (especially Japanese) culture. The author argues that due to the pursuit of progression, western society is continuously chasing light and clarity, and

shadow (with its symbolism of darkness and ambiguity) is perceived as gloomy and vicious in western culture. In contrast, drawing on traditional Japanese aesthetics, the author offers an alternative view of appreciating the subtlety and elegance of dark shadows that can be glimpsed in traditional Japanese rooms, such as temples, bathrooms and brothels. The author sees brightness and light as artificial and pretentious, whereas darkness and shadow are natural and elegant. Such appreciation of the beauty of shadows is redolent of Edensor and Hughes (2021), who praise the vibrant, joyful atmosphere and views that shadows bring to Melbourne and that are in radiant contrast to harsh summer sunlight. These studies show that by changing our aesthetics and viewpoints, shadows can be viewed and interpreted in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways.

Similarly, although shadow is seen by many as human darkness, Jung warns that shadow can have different meanings to people depending on their viewpoint. To quote Jung's (1958) words:

> "It has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is, his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic in -sights, creative impulses, etc. On this level, evil appears more as a distortion, a deformation, a misinterpretation and misapplication of facts that in themselves are natural" (266).

A person's 'good qualities' are hidden underneath the uncanny surface of shadows. When one overlooks the shadow side of self, the person also disregards the positive and good traits. Therefore, although shadow can be frightening, recognising and embracing shadow can lead to possibilities of healing and renewing self. Distorted shadows challenge the dualism of

real and fake, absent and present, dark and light, good and bad. They create new dimensions of ‘reality’, subverting our entrenched attitudes and beliefs (Ricoeur, 2004).

2.3.4.3 Illusion

Shadows can also disappear in a flash: as soon as the reflector is turned off, shadows become invisible. This interpretation of shadow is evident in Plato’s allegory of the cave. The story is about a group of primitive men imprisoned in a dark cave all their lives who can do nothing but stare at shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them. The projected shadows are the prisoners’ “reality”, even though it can be questioned if these shadowed images are the representations of what happens in the ‘real’ world. As Plato claims, “To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images” (translated by Jowett, 2018). The projected shadows symbolise the fragmented fact that people perceive through their senses, while the objects under the sun represent the ‘real’ world or knowledge. In the story, shadows are used as the optical illusion that makes people believe shadows are the ‘things themselves’. However, these ‘things’ are artificial and created in people’s imagination. Compared to concrete objects, shadows have no substance and are devoid of reality.

By drawing on Plato’s allegory, psychiatrists have further demonstrated the illusional nature of shadows. For example, shadows are seen as low-dimensional as there is nothing actual in our hands – it is only a dance in our minds and consciousness. As in the story of Plato, the shadow is a puppet show dancing on the wall of prisoners’ psychological and mental space. It is an illusion of selfhood, as no one is in the cave apart from a person’s imagination of himself and the world. Trafford (2008) adopts the concept of transparency to further explain the ‘nothingness’ of shadows, claiming that transparency is a special form of shadows’ darkness.

Both concepts signify a person's 'pure' experience – something inaccessible to subjective experience, but it is a pure cognitive hallucination of human consciousness.

To Plato (514a-520a), making shadows is like making magic – no matter how well magicians can trick people's minds, in the end, what they create is merely an appearance. Like the specular reflections in the water, they are viewed as *phantasmata*, a kind of make-believe 'reality', a semblance, an appearance, representing mimesis and nothingness (Stoichita, 1997). They deceive us with their obscure and temporal magical image, tricking us with their simulacra. If we could accept Plato's analogy between shadow and magic, then projection can be understood as a 'magic of resemblance', illusion is a 'magic of semblance' (Stoichita, 1997). The former refers to the shadow emanating from a concrete object or an actual person. In this context, shadow is present and substantial and is part of the 'real' world. In contrast, the latter regards shadow as synonymous with absence; it is the representation of a simulacrum that has no concrete existence or meaning. As Sorensen (2008) states, unlike a material object, shadows are completely hollow. Although sometimes a material object can be hollow (e.g. brick), there is a limit about how thin it can be. Shadows, on the other hand, do not have such limitations and can be hollowed out until they become abstract. As pointed out by the author, "shadows are creatures of omission. Shadows are where the inaction is" (2008:75). From this perspective, shadows are 'nothing'; they are a pure illusion, temporarily appearing and residing in photos, architecture and our minds, and then vanishing into thin air. It is people who bring them into existence and endow them with meanings (Kite, 2017; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001).

2.3.3 Summary

What these studies suggest is that shadows are vague and fluid entities. Shadows have blurred boundaries of pre-existing dualism such as dark and light, real and invented, gloomy

and bright, present and absent. The shapes and meanings of shadows are constantly changing based on the angles of the light sources, or the viewers' emotions and viewpoint. Shadows can be considered as projection of an illuminated object, distortion of a stereotypical image, or illusion of the 'reality' at the same time, depending on how they are viewed, experienced and imagined. Such characteristics of shadows remind us that instead of seeking for or creating consistent and coherent stories of place brands (Castilhos, 2017; Coyle and Fairweather, 2005), we also should embrace the ever-changing essence of place brand myth. The myths of a place brand are also shapeless and fluid as they are viewed, experienced and formed by various mythmakers with different and sometimes contradictory perspectives of the place.

Furthermore, seeing how shadows are created through unintentional and spontaneous 'play' reminds us that place mythmaking can also be 'playful'. This is to say that people play with shadows for no particular reason; sometimes it can just be for fun. Shadow making is absolutely inclusive – it allows different interpretations of the concept to blend and permeate. In the shadow-making process, both human and nonhuman shadow makers can play with and appreciate shadows in their own ways. What shadow reveals is a 'fair play' in which every shadow maker is treated 'equally'. There are neither gatekeepers to the play, nor opinion leaders who are treated as more authoritative than and superior to the others. Similar to the process of shadow making, place myth can be organically 'played', rather than being calculated or manipulated by certain stakeholders. By understanding the relationship between different shadow players, we can also develop a better understanding on the complex and dynamic interactions between different mythmakers in the place brand process.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.0 Overview of the methodology chapter

This chapter discusses the methodological choices of this study and how they help answer the research questions, which are also in accordance with the research aim. This chapter contains six sections. Section 3.1 demonstrates the empirical context of this thesis. It provides a brief introduction to the research context of Wigan, followed by why and how the place myth of the town can be analysed through the lens of a local band, The Lathums. Section 3.2 introduces the philosophical stance underpinning the study. For providing an in-depth understanding of the place myth of Wigan, the study adopts a relative ontology, along with a social constructionistic epistemology and a qualitative methodology (See Figure 3.1) (Cresswell, 2007). The study's philosophical stance directly affects the choice of the research's methodological approach and data collection and analysis methods (Carson et al., 2001). In Section 3.3, the study introduces the development of a novel methodological approach, the mediated discourse analysis (MDA) informed grounded theory, for the understanding and examination of the fluid place brand myth of Wigan. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 introduce how a wide range of data sources are collected and analysed in line with the MDA-informed grounded theory approach (See Table 3.2). In Section 3.6, some key ethical considerations that emerged from the research process are discussed, along with the ways to alleviate and resolve the ethical concerns. The last section concludes with the summary of the key points of this chapter.

3.1 Empirical context

3.1.1 Wigan in The Lathums, The Lathums in Wigan

The context of this study is Wigan, a town located in the northwest of England, UK, with a population of roughly 110,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Wigan used to belong to the historic county of Lancashire, and is now part of the county of Greater Manchester, UK. Geographically, it lies in the middle between two big cities, Liverpool and Manchester. Wigan can generally refer to the town of Wigan, or the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan, which covers numerous towns and villages in the northwest of England, of which Wigan is its largest settlement and administrative centre. To avoid any confusion on definition, in the context of this study, Wigan refers to the town of Wigan. Despite being a relatively unknown place, this small town has its distinct 'place brand', characterised by its iconic cultural heritages (e.g. Wigan Casino, Wigan Pier), acclaimed sports teams and music bands, legendary Northern Soul music scene, and exotic food culture (e.g. Wigan Kebab) of the town. In the meantime, its close connections with the England North and its neighbouring city of Manchester lead to the distinctive identity of the place and people who are considered 'Wiganers'. These distinct yet intertwined history, culture, custom, people and things of the town make it an interesting context to examine how the town is mythologised by different mythmakers over time and space. Additionally, a small town like Wigan generally struggles to receive ample financial resources from major organisations or authorities for developing strategic place branding campaigns. Rather, they are usually constructed by multiple place narrative authors in mundane life (Björner and Aronsson, 2022). For this reason, Wigan provides an ideal setting to understand and analyse a more 'organically' formed place brand and place myth.

Specifically, a music band, The Lathums, were selected as an analytical lens to understand and unpack the complex place brand myths of Wigan. The Lathums were originally formed in 2018 by four 20-year-old college friends – frontman and guitarist Alex Moore, guitarist Scott Conception, bassist Johnny Cunliffe, and drummer Ryan Durrans – who was born and bred in Wigan. However, the band has become a three-piece following the bassist's departure in 2022. After releasing only a few EPs, the band signed a million-pound deal with Universal Music Group, one of the most influential record labels in the world. The band has proved a significant financial and commercial success in the last few years, evident in their sold-out UK and US tours, supporting legendary music bands such as The Killers on their tours and music festivals, and reaching number one on the Official Album Chart with their debut album (BBC, 2021). Despite the national and even global fame and reputation the band has received, they have always been closely associated with their hometown of Wigan.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I emphasised that the initial focus of my thesis was the mythical stories of The Lathums which are related to their hometown Wigan, rather than Wigan as a place brand. However, as my research evolved, it became clear that viewing Wigan merely as the band's backdrop did not fully capture its role. Instead, it proved more insightful to consider The Lathums as an embodiment of the Wigan myths, one that echoes and gives new dimensions to the town's enduring and mythical narratives. This realisation steered my research towards understanding the place myth of the Wigan brand through the lens of The Lathums. Notably, while my research interest shifted towards the place myths of Wigan, it was undeniable that the band appears to be one of the most crucial mythmakers of Wigan - While there have been many bands coming from Wigan (e.g. The Verve, Stanleys), The Lathums are the only ones titled as the 'Wigan heroes' because of their strong attachment to their birthplace (Jones, 2020). From the band's perspective, Wigan has always been used as a crucial, if not the most crucial, cultural reference in their works - from documentaries and music videos to marketing

campaigns. Therefore, I believed that through the band's music, lyrics, videos, identity, and everyday life, the place myths of Wigan could be seen and decoded.

3.1.2 Understanding place brands through music

Cultural products have long been used as crucial tools in marketing studies to unpack the meaning, image and story of a place, ranging from film (Ooi and Pedersen, 2010), visual arts (Giovanardi, 2011; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018), advertisement (Kokosalaski et al., 2006) and football (Edensor and Millington, 2008). Marketing scholars have suggested that through the analysis of cultural artefacts and their connections with certain places, we are able to unpack the place identity, culture and image. For instance, Giovanardi et al. (2014) indicate that by examining the works created by film makers, advertisers, artists and musicians, we can see the place-related stories and cultures that are otherwise hidden, invisible or forgotten. Following this vein, this study also aims to unpack the myth of a place brand (Wigan) through the lens of a cultural product (the music band in the case of this study).

Although being relatively underrepresented, music is also seen as an essential cultural representation of place brands. Kemp et al. (2012) have shown the place brand-resident connection of Texas through fostering musical heritage. Madichie (2011) highlights the contribution of hip-hop, or pop music and its sociocultural meanings on understanding cross-cultural place brand discourse. Indeed, it is common to see the significant role that music and music bands play in creating popular tourism destinations, especially in the US and UK (e.g. The Beatles and Liverpool, Bob Dylan and Hibbing, Elvis Presley and Tupelo). Due to their well-known musical heritage, some places, such as Austin, brand themselves as the 'Live Music Capital of the World' (Kemp et al., 2012). Music is also used as an alternative place branding approach by rural places in order to improve the uniqueness and attractiveness to

residents, visitors and consumers (Gulisova, 2021). Music acts as a stimulus that triggers people's feelings of nostalgia and evoking memories, which provides towns and cities opportunities to promote emotion-driven tourism, musical heritage and music-based place identity (Leaver and Schmidt, 2009; Oakes and Warnaby, 2014). Therefore, the place image embedded in cultural products such as music can be more long-lasting (Dinnie, 2004).

Additionally, and more importantly, as pointed out by Rodner and Kerrigan (2018), cultural artefacts such as film, arts and music also contribute to studying the dynamics between discourses and 'organic' place branding, as cultural products are not deliberately created and selected by authorities and tourism campaigns, but on the contrary, cultural policies and marketing and branding activities "inadvertently trickle down into" cultural works (883). From this perspective, using music as a lens helps identify the place myth of Wigan that is not deliberately mediated and controlled by political and commercial forces, but is organically constructed through people, places and things in relation to the town. The band acts as a discourse container where the unorganised and fluid thoughts and narratives towards the town naturally fall into and blend.

Notably, despite the fame and attention that The Lathums have brought to Wigan, the band is not and should not be treated merely as a promotional tool of the Wigan brand in this study, but they are viewed as 'real' Wiganers who dwell and settle in the town. Just like other locals, Wigan is part of them and they are part of Wigan. Whilst different stories of The Lathums are told and retold, different place myths of the Wigan brand are also formed and reformed.

3.2 Philosophical position

3.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

It is crucial to address my ontological and epistemological positions as they are fundamental guilds to my research (Bryman, 2016). Ontology is concerned with philosophical assumptions that reveal how researchers perceive 'reality' (Cassell et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Ontological stance can be commonly classified along a spectrum that ranges from realism to relativism. Realists believe that only one single reality can be understood, studied and experienced as 'truth', which exists independent from human experience. In contrast, relativists hold a view that the notion of 'reality' varies from person to person. Therefore multiple versions of reality coexist in the world (Moon and Blackman, 2014). Given my research aim, which is empirically investigating the obscure and shifting place brand myths of Wigan exploring the fluidity of place branding created by various, relativism is considered more relevant.

For relativists, there are multiple realities and none of them can be known for definite, but only relative to a certain assessment framework (e.g. social norm, local culture) (Bryman, 2016). Drawing on a relativistic ontology, this study focused on the construction, negotiation and appropriation of the myths of Wigan represented by The Lathums. As such, this study argues that there is no single definition of the myth of a place brand; instead, multiple interpretations from different participants interweave various 'truths' of the place brand myth. My relativist ontological perspective underpins the aim and objectives of this study and it also guides my epistemological choice.

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge encompassing aspects and perspectives on comprehending the essence of the world (Bryman, 2016). Different ontological stances can lead to various epistemological positions. As discussed above, relativists believe that nothing can ever be known for definite as there are multiple realities, and they all are meaningful. These

arguments lead to the rise of my epistemological choice of social constructionism. In accordance with a relativist perspective of 'reality', social constructionists highlight that there is no definite answer for knowledge but different interpretations of knowledge (Andrews, 2012). The essential principle of social constructionism is to understand the process by which meanings are created, negotiated and modified within the society. It believes that knowledge is not 'created', but 'constructed' through the interactions between various social actors in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; 2018). Additionally, social constructionists view knowledge as historically and culturally relative; the way we understand and construct knowledge depends on where and when we live. What we should bear in mind is that all ways of understanding knowledge are culturally and historically specific, and one should not consider a certain way any better, or nearer the truth than the other (Burr, 2018).

In line with social constructionists, this thesis views the place-brand myth as collectively constructed by multiple mythmakers. This means that instead of emphasising the stories of a place brand predominantly generated by marketers (Crockett and Davis, 2016; Thompson and Tian, 2008), or consumers (Belk and Costa, 1998; Muniz and Schau, 2005), I focused on a dialogical relationship between authors and readers during the process of mythmaking. I also equalised different voices from my participants when unpacking brand myths, which means that neither the managerial perspective nor the consumers' interpretations were prioritised. Furthermore, following the cultural and historical perspective of social constructionism, I looked at the specific contextual conditions in which the meaning of brand myth is constructed and experienced by band, consumers and marketers.

It is worth mentioning that the interpretation of social constructionism has also been expended to accommodate non-human entities into the meaning making process (Michael, 1996). This allows me to bring the 'voice' of non-human mythmakers into the centre stage of place brand mythmaking. Rather than treating place as a product of mediated marketing

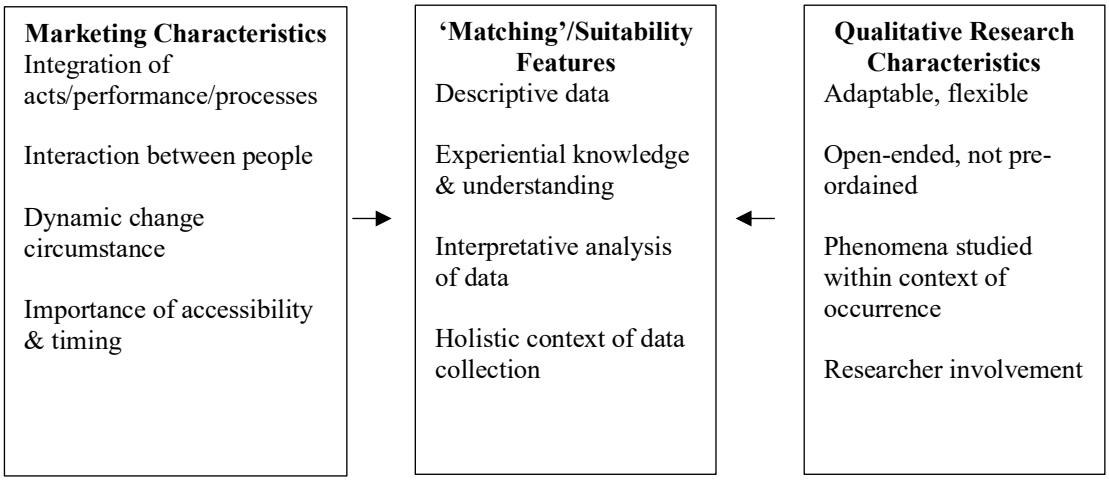
activities, as many marketing studies do (Castilhos et al., 2017), this study acknowledges the active and significant role those non-human elements (e.g. culture, history) play in forming and reforming the meaning and story of a place brand. The underlying assumption here is that place can be regarded as a cultural product that is socially constructed and reconstructed, but more importantly, place can also be seen as a social actor who actively shapes and reshapes social actions and practices (see, for example, Lefebvre, 1991).

3.2.2 Choice of qualitative methodology

Methodology is a set of techniques that researchers use to inquire into a specific situation (i.e. quantitative, qualitative research method). Social constructionism as an epistemological framework is believed to be more compatible with qualitative studies, considering the creative activities and rich interpretations of the phenomenon that the approach seeks to reveal (Hackley, 1998). The aim of qualitative methodology is to explore and observe complex social phenomena by asking how and why questions in addition to what. This approach is adaptable, open-ended and non-pre-ordained, which provides researchers with the flexibility to experience and explore the phenomenon in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic of interest (Cassell et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Given the aim of this thesis, which is to 'explore' the theoretical interpretation of the fluidity of place branding, a qualitative research design was adopted.

Carson et al. (2001) have pointed out the suitability of using qualitative methods for analysing marketing phenomena. As demonstrated in Figure 3.1., the authors identified the main matching features between qualitative research characteristics and marketing characteristics. These suitability features help demonstrate the advantages of the application of qualitative research method in this thesis: First, qualitative data is detailed, reflexive and

longitudinal, which provides me with sufficient time to develop an in-depth understanding and generate a thick explanation on the complex and ambiguous brand myths; second, a qualitative research approach allows me to build and develop my understanding on the phenomenon by directly experiencing the world. This trait was especially crucial for analysing the place-brand myth that is experienced and lived by people in real-life settings. Finally, a qualitative method offers a holistic and comprehensive view of the context in which the phenomenon occurs. As such, I was able to unpack the multi-layered and multi-voice place myths of Wigan across different social, cultural and geographical contexts.



Source: Carson et al. (2001:205)

Figure 3.1. Suitability of Qualitative Methods for Marketing

3.3 Research approach: Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) informed grounded theory

As discussed in the introduction chapter, my research aim is to investigate and construct a theoretical understanding of the fluidity in place branding by delving into the obscure and continuously evolving mythmaking process of a place brand. This research aim is examined

through a qualitative study on the mythical stories of Wigan, UK. While Wigan was selected as the empirical context, I had specifically chosen a local music band – The Lathums – as a lens for developing an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the Wigan myths. As such, I began to search for a methodological approach that would allow me to comprehend, analyse and theorise the complex mythmaking process of Wigan, that is interwoven into the everyday practices of the band and others involved.

In the realm of place branding literature, the commonly used methodological toolkits for qualitative studies include content analysis (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Ooi and Pedersen, 2010), discourse analysis (Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2014; Shoaib and Keivani, 2015), narrative analysis (Lichrou et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2020) and ethnography (Jain et al., 2022; Johansson, 2012). However, these approaches predominantly concentrate on the use of language and text by participants or researchers, neglecting other crucial factors that also have significant contributions to place branding such as objects, interactions, practices and surrounding environment (Fairclough, 2003). As a result, these methods are likely to be influenced and governed by the researcher's own beliefs and knowledge, potentially overshadowing the interpretive and interactive process of the participants (Shotter, 1993).

As discussed previously, my social constructionist epistemological stance also informs my understanding that meanings are co-constructed through social interactions in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In line with my epistemological stance, I assert that myth, which serves in our "meaning making of the world around us and of each other" (Battaglia, 2014:123) cannot solely be identified *in* the texts identified and interpreted by researchers; rather, they are created and constructed *during* the dynamic interactions between diverse social actors in daily life. In the context of my research, I believe that in order to reveal socially constructed myths of the Wigan brand, and to understand how the myths are constructed, negotiated and transformed over time and space, it is crucial to consider the connection between everyday

practices, discourses, and interactions between various mythmakers (e.g. the band, local residents, tourists, authorities), and their interconnections with a broader sociocultural setting of the town.

Given my social constructionist epistemological stance and the aim of my research, I found that the prevalent methodological approaches in place branding did not adequately address my research inquiry. Therefore, I decided to adopt a less commonly used methodological approach in marketing studies – mediated discourse analysis (MDA). Compared to the more traditional text-dependent approaches, I argue that MDA offers an alternative way of understanding and unpacking the intricate and dynamic place brand mythmaking process. However, while MDA was used to guide the research methods of my thesis such as data collection and sampling, I was also aware of the methodological limitations of utilising the approach. MDA involves an intricate and multifaceted analysis of social interactions as well as cultural and historical elements, which can be challenging for researchers to navigate and analyse. Nevertheless, MDA scholars have not yet provided a clearly delineated set of stages to systematically analyse, interpret and theorise the rich data it generates. Considering the absence of the well-designed analytical framework, I therefore integrated a grounded theory approach into MDA in order to provide a more systematic process of data analysis and theory development (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). By combing these two approaches together, I developed an innovative methodological toolkit that can facilitate my understanding and analysis on the fluidity of place brand myths and mythmaking. In the following sections, this novel methodological approach and how it helps understand the research inquiry will be discussed in detail.

3.3.1 Mediated discourse analysis (MDA)

Mediated discourse analysis, also known as MDA, is a theoretical position that was first articulated and developed by Ron Scollon (1998;1999) to understand the interaction between discourses and social actions and how such interplay acts in complex social contexts. MDA is a multidisciplinary methodology, articulating the theories and methods in discourse analysis, anthropology, psychology, and socio-linguistics (Norris and Jones, 2005). The approach has been adopted and discussed in a wide range of social science subjects such as linguistics, education, literature, political science, and journalism, but the methodology still remains relatively alien in marketing literature. The exemption includes the recent national branding study published by Rodner and Kerrigan (2018). By applying mediated discourse analysis, the authors investigated the production and consumption of the visual arts movements in Venezuela, thus reflecting the transitional national brand discourses.

The main goal of MDA is to equalise the role of discourse and action when analysing a social phenomenon. Just as its name implies, mediated discourse analysis does not focus on discourse *per se*, but it analyses the 'nexus of practice' where social practices, language and other semiotic resources encounter and entangle (Scollon, 1999 or Scollon, 2001; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2004). In other words, MDA focuses on the dynamic relationship between discourse and social practice, highlighting the view of "discourse 'cycling' around social action" (Norris and Jones, 2005: 9). This approach challenges the traditional view proposed by discourse analysis that one can always 'read' the meaning of a text through studying the text alone. Rather, MDA scholars argue that discourses are created, communicated and negotiated through social actions in real time (Norris and Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001). Scollon and Wong Scollon (2004) further clarify that the term 'discourse' in MDA refers to everything that "entail the use of language to accomplish some action in the social world". In MDA, discourse is not limited to verbal components such as words and texts, but also non-verbal elements such as gestures and objects. From this perspective, MDA scholars view discourses as intricate social

interactions interwoven with everyday practices, material objects, and built environment in which they occur (Norris and Jones, 2005; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018; Scollon,1999).

Although MDA is considered to share the same notion with critical discourse analysis (CDA) for investigating the relationship between discourses and actions, they are two distinct approaches. As pointed out by Scollon and Wong Scollon (2004), "the difference between MDA and any other discourse analysis is the focus on the actions of social actors who may use texts in communication, not on the texts themselves". Scollon's students Norris and Jones (2005) further explain this point that the main concept that differs MDA from CDA and other discourse analysis approaches is the shift from discourse *as* action to discourse *in* action. This means that rather than treating discourse as merely a component of action, MDA sees a more dynamic and contingent relationship between discourse and action. Therefore, it is believed that MDA has a greater capacity than CDA, by combining with other related methods (Scollon, 2001; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2007). From this perspective, rather than solely looking at the stories identified in text and language, MDA allows me to focus on a more balanced relationship between everyday practice and discourse in creating and negotiating myths of a place brand.

To understand the discourse-action intersection, MDA generally, according to Wong Scollon and de Saint-George (2012), begins with asking two broad questions in relation to action and discourse: "What part do texts play in actions undertaken by social actors?" And "How do texts arise as the outcomes of social interactive processes of production?" These two broad questions can be broken down into two clusters of more specific questions; first: What are the actions going on here? What are people doing here and why? Second: What is the role of discourse in these actions? Why and how is the discourse used and what are the motivations behind it? By repeatedly asking these questions, they allowed me to identify the difference between what people say and what they do in a real-life setting. As Jensen and Richardson

(2004) point out, "discourses produce lived spaces and actions within lived spaces in turn shape discourses" (43). This was particularly important for this study, as the concept of myth is commonly considered as ambiguous and complicated. How people describe a place myth may not fully reflect their thoughts or what happens in everyday life. Therefore, consistently comparing participants' actions and discourses is a useful strategy for me as a researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

In MDA, the unit of analysis is mediated action, or social action, which refers to any activity or practice that is conducted utilising semiotic tools such as words, images, or gestures occur as *sites of engagement*, the sociocultural and historical locations or context where social actors engage with one another (Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2007). MDA researchers believe that social actions are mediated through the use of *mediational means* (Norris and Jones, 2005; Wertsch, 1991). *Mediational means* are not restricted to book, television or computer, but they refer to all non-linguistic objects and things that carry history and culture, and therefore can mediate people's actions and interactions, ranging from physical tools such as drills and can openers to intangible elements such as gestures, sounds and surrounding environment (Wong Scollon and de Saint-George, 2012). In other words, everything can be mediated through *mediational means (*Scollon, 1999). Such broad use of *mediational means* in MDA allows me to focus on the subtle details in the phenomenon. The aspects such as people's accent, body language, facial expressions and dress style, as well as non-human elements such as weather and atmosphere that are often overlooked by place branding scholars, all become contributors to the understanding of place brand myths.

MDA scholars refer the method as a 'social cultural approach to mind' (Wertsch, 1998). According to Scollon and Wong Scollon (2004), "micro-actions of social interaction and, conversely, the most mundane of micro-actions are nexus through which the largest cycles of social organisation and activity circulate" (8). This discourse shows that to understand micro

actions in mundane life, it is crucial to take the complexity of a macro-sociocultural setting in which the everyday actions are undertaken into account (Wertsch, 1998). As such, MDA as an analytical tool emphasises the impacts of individual practices on broad political and social discourses, highlighting the nexus of micro-level activities and macro-level social environment. Such a sociocultural view of MDA inspires my investigation on how the everyday practices and actions (e.g. what people do, and what happens in everyday life) contribute to the understanding of the social and cultural settings of Wigan as a place. This viewpoint aligns with my social constructionist epistemological stance and provides me with a deeper understanding of how Wigan myths are continuously formed and reformed alongside the evolving history and culture of the place.

Understanding mediated actions is not merely about identifying the *mediational means* with cultural and historical meanings, but more importantly, how they are mediated through *voices* (Wertsch, 1991). *Voices* are understood as "the words, phrases and narratives… that we borrow from the sociocultural environment to interact with others and construct our accounts of these interactions" (Norris and Jones, 2005:5). Inspired by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Wertsch (1991) sees *voices* as being 'borrowed' from others, as all practices, narratives and identities are half others and half our own. We then reform the voices based on our own experiences and intentions and resell them to others as our 'own' voices. These voices are heteroglossic and dialogic: each voice incorporates many different voices and is in response to another voice (Wertsch, 1991). Following Wertsch's observation, MDA emphasises that each mediated action contains multiple *voices*; different *voices* interact in an interdiscursive and dialogical nature (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2007). This point has brought significant insight to my understanding of the relational and flexible *voices* of place mythmakers. MDA approach allows me to recognise that each mythmaker is not only affected by their own experiences, but also by the views of others. Thus, it is crucial to treat these *voices* on place brand myths as

dialogical rather than monological. This point is particularly discussed in Chapter 4 on how the perspective of each place mythmaker is 'burrowed' from and affected by other mythmakers.

3.3.2 Grounded theory

As mentioned previously, while MDA was used as a methodological approach that has guided my understanding of the interplay between social interactions and discourses of various place mythmakers, and sociocultural contexts of Wigan (Scollon and de Saint-Georges, 2005), grounded theory was integrated into the approach for a more systematic data analysis and theoretical development. Grounded theory was firstly introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a response to the limitations of extreme empiricism, which placed excessive emphasis on testing and measuring hypotheses before they were fully developed. The key principle of the approach is to systematically develop theories grounded in empirical data, rather than beginning with preconceived hypotheses or theories (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In the context of marketing, grounded theory has been a widely used qualitative research methodology for analysing social processes, and developing new theoretical insights from marketing phenomena (Goulding, 2001; 2005; Gray et al., 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2012).

Over time, various permutations of grounded theory emerged, based on factors such as researcher's epistemological underpinnings, and the nature of the relationship between researchers and participants (Mills et al., 2006). Here, I shall compare the differences between two prevalent grounded theory approaches (Objectivist grounded theory and constructionist grounded theory) that represent opposite ends of the methodological spectrum (Charmaz, 2008), and then clarify my position. Objectivist grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992) is rooted in mid-20th century positivism that believes reality is objective and exists individually of human participants. Methodologically, this approach follows the rigidly structured data collection and analysis process that is designed for accurately reflecting the

objective reality of the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2000; Mills et al., 2006). Constructionist grounded theory, which was proposed by sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2006; 2008), in contrast, roots in the philosophical assumption that reality is socially constructed, and there is no single objective reality. This approach is considered methodologically more flexible and innovative, encouraging researchers to explore multiple realities embedded in the empirical data (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, the approach requires researchers to pay attention to the complex and sometimes contradictory language and action of participants (Charmaz, 2008).

Considering my relativist ontological position and social constructionist epistemological stance, I adopted a constructionist grounded theory approach. Also, the constructionist grounded theory emphasises action as a central focus and sees it as "socially created situations and social structures" (Charmaz, 2008:398), which aligns with the key principle of MDA – the nexus of discourses, social actions and built sociocultural environment (Norris and Jones, 2005). On the one hand, the constructionist grounded theory approach provided me with a more structured and practical guidance for my qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2002; 2006), effectively addressing the methodological shortcomings of MDA. On the other hand, it offered increased adaptability and flexibility, enabling me to explore the fluid and multifaceted nature of place brand myths, which inspired the development of my novel theoretical lens – the metaphor of shadow.

Grounded theory, as a methodological approach, is interested in discovering inherent meanings within a process (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019). Accordingly, I incorporated its principles into my study by applying the theoretical sampling procedure. This means my data was collected, coded and analysed simultaneously (Charmaz, 2000). As I analysed my data, I began to form tentative and abstract ideas about what happened in the field. These emerging theories subsequently guided my ongoing participant recruitment and data collection. They repeated until theoretical saturation was reached – when no new data ceased providing new

theoretical insights (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In the next sections, I will discuss how grounded theory informed my data collection, analysis and theory development processes in greater depth.

3.4 Data collection

Ontology, epistemology, and methodology, as well as methods (the tools used by researchers to conduct the research), do not exist independently; rather, they are interconnected with inner consistency (Easterby et al., 2015). The qualitative data collection methods I adopted in this thesis are consistent with my MDA informed grounded theory methodological approach (Mackenzie, 2023), and my relativist ontological position and social constructionist epistemological stance (Burr, 2018; Charmaz, 2006). There are numerous data collection methods suitable for conducting MDA research (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018; Scollon, 2001; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2007). In order to deeply and thoroughly account for different interpretations of the place myths of Wigan, multiple sources of primary and secondary data were used in this thesis (see Table 3.1). Such integrative use of various data collection methods helped provide different perspectives of the phenomenon that may otherwise be overlooked by using only one source of data, improving the finding's validity and reliability (Carson et al., 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1999).

The data sources I collected and analysed include the transcriptions gained from my semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, photos and videos generated from my participant observations, as well as the secondary data sets of the band such as official music videos/documentaries, marketing materials, interviews, press articles, critical reviews and newspaper articles. Moreover, in order to gain a deeper understanding of Wigan, the secondary data such as the photographs, films, books and documentaries about the town were also used as crucial evidence. This approach is in line with marketing scholars who draw on popular

cultural representations to help understand the sociocultural and historical backgrounds of brands (Brown et al., 2013; Preece et al., 2018). In the following sections, each method will be discussed in more detail.

Data type	Data collection method	Details	Data/information obtained
Primary data	In-depth interviews	27 semi-structured interviews (See Appendix 2)	Transcriptions and memos gained from the interviews with the participants (e.g. local residents, tourists, authorities, the fans, managers of The Lathums)
	Participant observations at the band's events/gigs in Wigan and elsewhere	**Events:** Debut album signing event at Wigan Market, music video shootings, the band's music video shooting on Wigan Market Street **Gigs:** Wigan Roller Rink (2023), Liverpool St Michael in the Hamlet Church (2022), *Liverpool Sound City* (2021), O2 Academy Sheffield (2021), London Omeara (2021), Wigan Monaco Ballroom (2021), Manchester Academy 3 University of Manchester Students' Union (2021)	Field notes, videos, photographs made/taken by myself; The fans' comments on the band; observations on the behaviours, interactions and comments of the band and their fans; participant recruitment

	Site observations in Wigan	**Guided walk:** *Wigan King Street Project – Photo Walk Along a Complicated Street* (2022) **Events/exhibitions:** *Make Some Noise: From Stage Door to Dance Floor* (2023), *Gerrumonside! The passion of rugby league past, present & future* (2022), *Coalopolis – Wigan's Mining Heritage by Alan Davies* (2022)	Field notes, videos, photographs made/taken by myself; observes, learns and experiences the culture, history, story, and everyday life about Wigan; participant recruitment
Secondary data	The Lathums' official videos (music videos, documentaries)	**Music videos:** *Fight On*, *I'll Get By*, *How Beautiful Life Can Be*, *Oh My Love*, *The Great Escape* **Documentaries:** *Making Memories*, *The Memories We Make*	The band's view on Wigan (e.g. photos, videos, comments, lyrics); used as the video elicitation for/by my participants
	The Lathums' online resources	**Official social media accounts:** Facebook: *The Lathums* YouTube: *The Lathums* Instagram: *The Lathums* Twitter: *The Lathums* **Online fan communities:** Facebook: *The Lathums Community* Twitter: *Up Fuk Latum, Lathum Mania* **Online press interviews/ newspaper articles:** e.g. *The Guardian, Vice, Oasis Mania, BBC, NME*. Details see the reference list	Understand the band's view on Wigan (e.g. photos, videos, comments); understand the press's views/comments on the band and its relationship with Wigan; participant recruitment

	Secondary resources about Wigan and the region	**Books:** *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Orwell, 1937/2001)*, The Road to Wigan Pier revisited* (Armstrong, 2012), *Wigan Pier Revisited: poverty and politics in the 80s* (Campbell, 2013) **Films:** *Northern Soul* (2014), *Wigan Casino* (1977) **Online articles:** e.g. *The Guardian, The Independent. Wigan Today.* Details see the reference list	Author's views/comments on Wigan; understands the culture, history, everyday life about Wigan

Table 3.1 Details on Data Sources

3.4.1 In-depth interviews

In my research, I conducted in-depth interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants interpret the mythical stories related to the Wigan brand. This method helped me explore aspects associated with my research topic, and delve deeper into the responses provided by my participants (Cassell et al., 2018). In-depth interviews can take forms from conversations, to more structured questionnaires (Cassell et al., 2018; Miles et al., 2014). In this thesis, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach, combined with open-ended probing questions. While conducting my research, I found that the interview method comes with both advantages and limitations. While such interviewing technique provided a general framework to avoid confusion, it also allowed the participants and myself to spontaneously explore other relevant topics around my research theme (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Although the central

principle for the semi-structured interview approach is to allow unanticipated questions to emerge during the interviews, the proposed themes of the interview questions were prepared as a guidance in order to make sure that the questions meet the aim of the study (Roberts, 2020). The semi-structured interviews were organised into four themes:

1) Profile information about the participants (e.g. Can you introduce yourself please?)
2) The interpretation of the place myth of Wigan (e.g. How would you describe Wigan as a place? What is the place known for?)
3) The relationship between Wigan and The Lathums (e.g. Do you think The Lathums is important to Wigan, and vice versa?)
4) Participants' relationship with Wigan (e.g. Is there any interesting story about Wigan you have heard of or experienced?)

While the interview method has its advantages in research, it does also have some limitations. One major obstacle I faced was its reliance on language for generating and exchanging knowledge. For example, this became problematic when participants found it challenging to grasp and articulate ideas like the concept of 'myth'. To address this issue, I introduced The Lathums music video as a stimulus during the interviews, allowing my participants to express their emotions through visuals and lyrics. This approach is in line with marketing literature that utilises videos to gain insights, into consumers stories and behaviours (Larsen et al., 2018; Sayre, 2006).

Sampling and recruitment

Sampling is an essential component of designing research. In the qualitative research context, sampling refers to the strategy of choosing a subset of items, things or participants from a large population to include in research (Marshall, 1996). Sampling is regarded as the

process of "taking a smaller chunk of a larger universe" (Miles and Huberman, 1994:31), which is inextricably linked with the development of data collection and analysis. In order to meet the aim of my research and answer my research questions, I adopted a snowball sampling technique to selectively, purposely and effectively recruit my interview participants. Snowball sampling is a commonly used sampling technique in qualitative research, which focuses on recruiting participants through referrals made by a small set of individuals who share specific characteristics that meet the requirement of the research interest (Bryman, 2016). The prominent selection criteria for participants in this study were:

- British who have been to, lived in or have heard about Wigan. The focus on domestic participants helped avoid ambiguity and divergence of cross-cultural interpretations (Goulding, 2001).
- In the meantime, they listen to, or have listened to, the music of The Lathums.

Notably, at the beginning stage of my research, my recruitment focused on the fanbase and acquaintances of The Lathums, reflecting my original interest in the band's stories. However, as my research progressed, also in line with the principles of theoretical sampling in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), the narrative organically shifted towards the significance of 'place', specifically, the town of Wigan. This emergent and dominant theme led me to adapt my recruitment approach, strategically and purposely seeking out individuals with vested interest and rich knowledge of Wigan, such as residents, tourists, and local historians. Their insights into Wigan became the cornerstone of my research, although a connection to The Lathums remained a pertinent and valuable facet of their perspectives, considering the importance of the band in representing the myths of the town.

During the recruitment process, I followed an uncategorical approach to avoid selecting participants from the same pre-defined social categories (Cresswell, 2007). Instead, my

participants were from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, differing in age, social class, position and educational background. The main reason I did not use pre-defined social categories as my selection parameters were that I intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of the place myth of Wigan. In terms of the geographical distribution of the participants, twelve of them were from Wigan and the rest of them were from different parts of England. I paid more attention to participants from Wigan and the ones who are self-identified 'northerners', as according to the informal conversations with the band, participants and my own observation, the participants from the North of England tended to have a deeper understanding on Wigan and its stories. Also, speaking to the participants from Wigan has brought me valuable information about the local people's views of the town. However, emphasising on the participants from the North did not mean that the voices of participants from the South of England could be ignored, as they were also co-authors of the Wigan myth, who bring different, and sometimes controversial, narratives to the place brand.

Following the multi-dimensional and multi-perspective nature of MDA (Scollon, 2001; Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2004), as well as the multi-stakeholder characteristic of place branding (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Jain et al., 2022; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015), I purposely recruited participants representing different sectors of place branding (e.g. cultural intermediaries, residents, tourists, authorities). This recruitment strategy is also in line with my social constructionist epistemological stance, which highlights that knowledge is constructed through the interaction between heterogeneous social actors (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

It is worth noting that due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK in January 2020, I was unable to conduct my fieldwork in Wigan, nor attend the band's live shows and tours, as they were all cancelled during the global pandemic. Under these circumstances, I had to change my recruitment strategy to an online setting. The online recruitment was mainly conducted via the

band's official social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, as well as the online fan communities on Twitter and Facebook. In order to contact the community members, I firstly asked for, and gained, permission from the administrators of the fan communities. After gaining the permission, I then sent direct messages to all community members explaining the aim and purpose of my research, and asking if they were interested in participating in my research. This recruitment process was very challenging as most of the fans were suspicious about the credibility of my research and me as a person, even after I presented my student card and ethical approval of my research. For addressing this issue, I started conducting interviews with the administrators (who are from neighbouring cities and towns of Wigan) of the fan groups and asked them to refer me to other fans, and especially the ones who live in or are from Wigan.

As soon as the regulations around COVID-19 were eased and in-person contact was allowed in the UK, I went to Wigan several times for my fieldwork, and also attended the band's gigs and events (see more details in the participant observation section). During my fieldworks, I attended several events and activities organised by the local council, such as King Street Photo Walks, and the Gerrumonside! rugby league exhibition where I met and recruited more participants such as local residents, visitors, business owners and historians who worked with the local council., I also had chance to speak to more fans at the band's gigs. These fans also introduced more participants to me, which allowed me to recruit more participants.

Interview process

I have conducted a total of 27 audio-recorded interviews (details see appendix 2), both via Zoom and in-person, with each session lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The interviews generally started with participants' self-introduction, followed by my questions around Wigan and the band The Lathums, and their relationships with them. Even though some predetermined

questions were prepared, the direction of the conversations was led by participants' answers. Once no more information relevant to my research emerged, the interview entered into the next stage – viewing music videos. I selected five music videos of the band – *Fight On*, *I'll Get By*, *How Beautiful Life Can Be*, *Oh My Love*, *The Great Escape* – and documentaries – *Making Memories*, *The Memories We Make* – which were either filmed in Wigan, or contain elements about Wigan, available via their official YouTube channel. These videos were chosen as representations of different stories about Wigan told by the band, which were used as stimuli to trigger deeper conversations with my interviewees. The discussions around the videos were mainly led by participants, yet I also raised some questions concerning further clarifications about participants' answers. My intention was to let the participants decide what they could see and feel about Wigan through the band's videos, rather than imposing my understanding on them (Shortt and Warren, 2012). By using videos as contexts to facilitate conversations, the participants generally became more open and comfortable in sharing more feelings and views about Wigan, in a way that would not have been possible merely with interviews.

3.4.2 Participant Observations

Another qualitative data collection method I adopted was observation. Though interviews do provide a rich source of data, it is overly relied on the speech of participants (Belk et al., 2013). However, as discussed above, participants were not always able to express their feelings and opinions in words when it came to conceptual questions. Furthermore, the observation method allows me to observe and assess actions and events that occur in Wigan within a natural setting without relying on people's words (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the observational research method was applied in this research as a complementary method in order to gain the 'external validity' of data (Belk et al., 2013). By adopting this method, I was able to observe and record information in real-life settings of Wigan, and to identify my participants'

conscious and subconscious behaviours and speech relevant to my research topic through my own eyes (Cassell et al., 2018).

Observation studies can be carried out in various ways through adopting different techniques. In this study, I adopted a participant observation strategy rather than a non-participant observation approach, as the former allows more interaction and communication with my participants in the research setting. It provided me with more opportunities to think and question the phenomenon I study through my own eyes (Carson et al., 2001). Specifically, I used an overt observation strategy, which means that everyone involved was aware of the identity of me as a researcher and the purpose of my research. This is to make sure participants feel more comfortable and less threatened for their participation in my study. Such approach was considered necessary in my study in order to build trust with my participants. For example, some of my observations took place at the band's promotional activities in Wigan. They were normally small-scale events and many of the audiences were the band's friends and family members. Under such circumstances, my honesty regarding my intention of joining the event and talking to the audiences was expected. Generally speaking, my objectives for using the observational method were, firstly, to deeply understand the stories of The Lathums (e.g. characters, habits, growing environment) and their association with Wigan; secondly, to look, feel and experience the culture and tradition of Wigan and the life of Wiganers; and thirdly, to identify the consistency/inconsistency between my participants' accounts and actions, and ask why (if inconsistent).

My observations took place in Wigan and at the band's gigs/events. Overall, I undertook eight visits in Wigan – four visits at the band's promotional events in Wigan (e.g. album signing event at Wigan Market, music video shootings), and five gigs of the band in the UK – and each of them lasted between 3 hours and 2 days. During my observations in Wigan, I was generally accompanied by my participants, but I would also leave a couple of hours to explore the town

alone and look for more information that might be relevant to my research. I undertook various activities with different participants during my visits to Wigan. We explored the town in various ways, such as long-distance walking, skateboarding and driving, whilst they were telling me their stories and memories of the town. They showed me places that they thought would represent Wigan the most; we went to the bars and clubs where The Lathums used to play and/or the streets where they bumped into the band. The on-site observations provided me with a lot of information and thoughts that directly affect the focus of my research. During these observations, I realised that the place myth of Wigan is not merely a grand story that is formed by social, cultural or geographical contexts, or the brand management team or local authorities, but it is also embedded in an individual's memory and experience rooted in everyday life.

As for the observations at the band's gigs/events, I spent most of the time with the fans (either from Wigan or elsewhere). By watching the shows together and having informal/formal conversations about the band and themselves, I developed a close relationship and trust with my participants. Apart from getting to know the fans, I also built a close relationship with the band during my fieldwork. I was invited by the band several times to visit their practice studio, tour bus back stage, and to join their celebration parties after the gigs. We had some interesting informal chats in terms of the shows, their day-to-day lives, and their relationships with their hometown of Wigan. The participant observation method should not be underestimated in my research, as it not only enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the culture, identity and story of Wigan, but also allowed me to observe the consistency/inconsistency between what my participants said and what they did in a real-life setting (Cassell et al., 2018).

3.4.3 Secondary data

In order to get a grasp of Wigan and the band I dedicated myself to studying books and watching films that delve into the town and its history and culture. For example, I thoroughly explored George Orwell's book titled *The Road to Wigan Pier*. I also spent some time to watch films related to Wigan, such as *Northern Soul*. Through analysing these secondary sources, I gained insights into Wigan's geopolitical foundations. Moreover, I learned about the customs, characteristics and identity of its residents. I also gained knowledge on the influence of cultural intermediaries regarding the perception of the Wigan brand.

Furthermore, the band's YouTube channel and their music videos and documentaries were also considered as valuable data in my research. These videos provided insights into the band's perspective on their hometown, which is free from external influences. Additionally, they allowed me to explore viewpoints expressed by influencers who played a significant role in creating Wigan myths. Moreover, these videos sparked conversations during interviews with participants as we delved deeper into their understanding of Wigan. Lastly, some of the band's videos directly showcased Wigans architecture, streets and everyday life giving me a glimpse into the town's essence. Apart from the band's videos, I found their marketing materials including posters, photos, show reviews, press interviews and comments shared on the band's fan communities on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to be also informative.

3.4.4 Data collection process

The data collection process of this thesis consists of four phases (See Table 3.2.):

My data collection process started from having informal conversations about the band with the band's management team and their fans, listening to the band's songs, watching their music videos and documentaries, viewing the band's online interviews, articles and commentaries, and browsing the comments people made on the band online. At this stage, I

looked for the elements and narratives that could demonstrate the band. Soon, I realised the central role that Wigan plays in the band's narrative and image. This finding sparked the idea of shifting my research interest toward the story of Wigan, which The Lathums are part of. However, I refrained from making this decision until I had conducted several interviews with the band's fans and management team.

In the second phase, after obtaining the ethical approval to my research, I started recruiting my interview participants and conducting interviews. However, due to the disruption of COVID-19 when in-person contact was restricted, all data collection was conducted online. I spent a long time immersing myself in the context by conducting in-depth interviews with the band's management team and the fans. I also observed three online fan communities (including one Facebook group, and two Twitter groups) of The Lathums regarding the fans' feelings, attitudes and comments towards the band. The findings showed that rather than looking at Wigan as the cultural or geographical context of The Lathums, it was more appropriate to consider the band as part of the story of Wigan, and they were just the representation of the culture and identity of the place. These findings ultimately led me to redirect my research interest toward the stories of Wigan, and use The Lathums as an analytical lens of Wigan's stories. For developing a deeper understanding of Wigan, I conducted on-site observations in the town as soon as the restrictions around COVID-19 were eased in the UK.

In the third phase, I went to Wigan and the band's gigs/events multiple times to observe, experience and analyse the story of Wigan in a real-life setting. During these visits, I made pictures and videos of the places, buildings and streets of Wigan, and some of them have also been captured in the band's music videos. In order to gain a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the stories of Wigan, I conducted more interviews and informal chats with participants (e.g. the band members of The Lathums, residents, owners of cafés, shops or bars).

I kept making notes during the observations to record my thoughts and reflections on the places, things and people I had seen and experienced.

In the last phase, I focused on hearing more voices on the stories of Wigan by attending several events/activities organised by the local council of Wigan, and the independent historians. This was the time when I met and spoke to more people who I believed had made a significant contribution in constructing the Wigan brand, such as tourists, historians, and (former) Wigan council employees. Again, I carried on making field notes and taking photos during my fieldwork. I reconstructed my interview questions to reduce misunderstandings, and to ensure I obtained optimal responses from my participants (Creswell, 2007). Since it was the last stage of my data collection, I also recorded the information that I neglected or that did not emerge during my previous fieldwork. I continued this process until theoretical saturation was reached, which means no new theoretical insights were generated from my data (Charmaz, 2000).

3.5 Data analysis

As discussed in Section 3.3, I adopted a constructionist grounded theory approach to guide me through a systematic process of data analysis and theorisation. Grounded theory generally adopts an inductive approach, requiring researchers to use the constant comparative method to identify themes by comparing similar occurrences within and across different data sets (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The data analysis process most commonly involves three stages (Charmaz, 2002; 2006; Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Open coding refers to the analytical process for comparing data incidents for similarities and differences; axial coding is to organise and categorise data in new ways "by making connections between a category and its subcategory" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:97); and theoretical coding, a theory development

process that organises all categories/subcategories around one core category. In contrast to the traditional coding strategy for grounded theory that focuses on rigid and technical coding and diagramming process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I adopted a more 'evolved' interpretation and application of the grounded theory coding process proposed by Charmaz (2002; 2006; 2008) that highlights the importance of flexibility and innovation in coding process, and theoretical sensibility (Mills et al., 2006), in order to provide a more 'fluid' and 'dynamic' understanding and theorisation of place myths of Wigan. My coding process was closely tied to theoretical sampling in grounded theory, and it will be discussed in detail below (also see Figure 3.2).

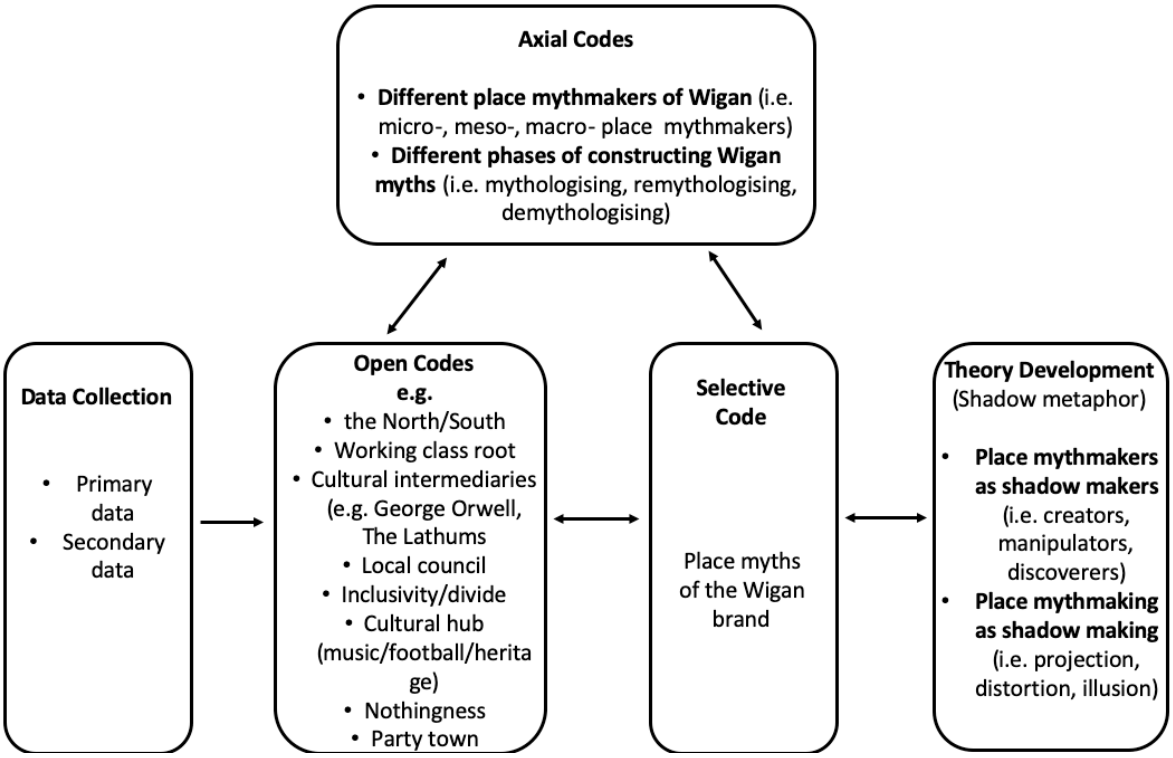


Figure 3.2 Coding Process

Open coding

Following the principle of the grounded theory approach, my data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection. Both textual and visual data was analysed

and compared for gaining a holistic picture of the story of the brand (Preece et al., 2018; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). Different data sets were coded and analysed manually line by line. I named and coded the lines, actions and elements that were useful for addressing my research questions (see Appendix 1 for the example). The open coding stage was more descriptive and it only showed what was found in my data. However, my personal interpretations, observations and feelings were also included and indicated in the transcriptions during the process of open coding, as it allowed me to be more reflexive and critical when reading the data (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, many participants claimed that the so-called north-south division was not salient in Wigan, yet I noticed that the participants often used the term 'us' and 'them' to differentiate people from Northern England to the ones from the South. This observation was recorded and later considered as an important finding in my research.

In line with my MDA methodological approach, I emphasised the nexus of discourses and actions during my coding process (Wong Scollon and de Saint-George, 2012). To begin with, I asked several questions such as what are people doing and why? What kind of discourses emerge in these actions? What are the relationships between what people do and what they say? In doing so, I identified and coded the behaviours and everyday practices of my participants (e.g. The Lathums often raise funds for their hometown of Wigan, local government, journalists, local residents and tourists treat The Lathums as Wigan heroes, fans chant Wigan Athletic football songs throughout the band's performance). I also focused on the comments (both positive and negative) the band and other participants made about the band and Wigan, and reflected on how these views affected their interactions with the band and Wigan. As such, I was able to take a critical stance towards people's actions as well as discourses. This allowed me to identify the mismatching between what people said and what they did (Scollon, 2001), and also to connect the seemingly mundane actions of the band, fans and locals to the grander discourses of football/music culture, working-class roots of Wigan and beyond.

Specifically, I firstly coded the stories of The Lathums brand with an open mind and let the themes emerge from data, avoiding drawing a conclusion too early. It was because, as discussed in section 2.1, my initial research focus was not on the story of Wigan, but on that of The Lathums. However, after open coding my participants' actions and discourses, I soon realised that the spatial aspect became predominant. The identification of recurring patterns such as the codes of 'Wigan', 'the North', and 'the South' meant my research focus shifted towards examining the story of Wigan that The Lathums were a part of. Additionally, during this phase, it became apparent that there were multiple stories about Wigan, and these stories were not solely constructed or conveyed by the band, but it was a collective activity, involving the effort of a variety of individuals or groups such as the codes of 'George Orwell', the 'local council', 'The Verve', as well as things, objects and elements. For example, I coded 'buildings' as a significant element that impacts what people do and what they say in/about Wigan. For instance, near King Street, where the magnificent historical buildings are in Wigan, people were always drinking and enjoying time with their friends and families, giving off a vibrant and cheerful atmosphere about the town. In contrast, near the train station, where the buildings are rundown and abandoned, Wigan takes on a gloomy, post-industrial reputation.

Following a grounded theory approach, my research questions and objectives were formed following the principles of theoretical sampling; thus, they changed alongside the progress of data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The outcomes of this initial open coding phase, therefore, led to various "unforeseen areas and new research questions" (Charmaz, 2006:46) that deviated me from my original research interest. For example, my findings suggested that the place mythmakers of Wigan were not limited to The Lathums, but there were various authors such as local historians, cultural intermediaries, and local council staff who have also significantly contributed to appealing stories related to the town. Furthermore, without understanding and analysing the stories created by these mythmakers, it would be difficult to

deeply comprehend the ones formed through The Lathums. Therefore, although my coding process started from using The Lathums as an analytical lens, it went beyond analysing the narratives and actions of the band, and it instead focused on that of a wider range of place mythmakers of Wigan. These findings have directly contributed to Chapter 4 of this thesis regarding the characteristics and relationships between various mythmakers of Wigan. Following the logic of theoretical sampling in grounded theory, I was aware that new information would emerge from my data and the extant data needed to be recoded and regrouped continuously along with my data analysis procedure (Charmaz, 2000). Although these initial codes were considered significant findings in my data analysis, considering the inductive nature of my study, they were used as the basis for the development of the subsequent stages of data analysis (Gao et al., 2012).

Axial coding

Although the concept of axial coding was introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1990), I did not follow the rigid scientific terms and coding procedures proposed by the authors, as I believed it would restrict what I could learn about the data (Charmaz, 2006). Instead, I applied a more flexible axial coding process that focused on, as suggested by Charmaz (2006), grouping initial codes into subcategories and exploring the relationships between them without any analytic frame (see Appendix 1 for the example). The axial coding process allowed me to generate more precise and complete interpretations of my empirical data, and to link the codes to the relevant literature for later theorisation (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Walker and Myrick, 2006).

During the axial coding process, the question I kept asking myself was how I would know if I had collected enough data for theory development. To resolve this question, I followed the suggestion of Urquhart (2013), in that data collection should cease when

additional data cannot teach a researcher more about their research topic, and no new codes occur in the data analysis process. This stage of data analysis is seen by Glaser and Strauss (1966) as reaching the theoretical saturation. My coding process continued until there was no new idea that could help me understand the stories of Wigan. Then I organised the repeating patterns into blocks of concepts and identified overarching subcategories that help conceptualise and theorise the stories of the Wigan brand. I also compared these emerging subcategories (e.g. 'the myth of the North', 'heroic archetypes from Wigan', 'the biblical Wigan') with relevant literature and theories (e.g. place branding, commercial myth/consumer myth, geographical theory, literary theory). Then I moved between data and the extant literature to find concepts and theories that might help explain and conceptualise the data. After the further reflection on the phenomenon, as well as revisiting the extant literature and my research aim and questions, many ideas, codes and categories were abandoned, with only a few subcategories left.

The first significant subcategory was the micro-, meso- and macro-level mythmakers of the Wigan brand. This categorisation was guided by my initial codes on the multi-author place myths of Wigan. It was also highly influenced by MDA's assertion on *mediational means* that not only human language and text, but also all objects and things that carry history and culture can generate discourses (Wong Scollon and de Saint-George, 2012). This point opened my mind about who the 'place brand mythmakers' are, and therefore I was able to look at the actions and discourses of a wide range of place mythmakers. Micro-level mythmakers' incorporated the mythmakers who contributed to the place myths of Wigan based on their personal memories, feelings, and emotions in relation to the place (e.g. the codes 'historians', 'band members', 'local residents', 'tourists). 'Meso-level mythmakers' represented the ones who constructed the Wigan myths at an institutional level, and their discourses were usually driven by obvious demands and purposes (e.g. the codes 'local authorities', 'arts organisations',

'cultural intermediaries'). 'Macro-level mythmakers' covered the sociocultural and geopolitical settings that formed the entrenched and stereotyped myths of Wigan (e.g. the codes 'north-south divide', 'big brother Manchester', 'food culture', 'Wigan music scenes'). This subcategory was enhanced by MDA's interpretation of *voices* (Norris and Jones, 2005). The data showed that the place mythmakers all have their distinct voices, yet these voices were often 'borrowed' from others (e.g. local residents/tourists and cultural intermediaries, local council and place culture). Therefore, I generated another code under this subcategory 'interactive place brand myth makers' to reflect on the heteroglossic and symbiotic *voices* of various mythmakers (Wertsch, 1991).

Another crucial group of subcategories were 'mythologising', 'remythologising' and 'demythologising', which demonstrated the place mythmaking process of Wigan. Mythologising refers to a phase of enshrining or deifying Wigan by reflecting on and highlighting the local/regional culture and history (e.g. the codes 'northern/working class root', 'indie ethos', 'post-industrial town'). Remythologising demonstrates a phase of adjusting and rereading the mythical stories of Wigan in accordance to people's personal experiences and intentions (e.g. the codes 'Wigan's biblical', 'nostalgic Wigan'). Demythologising indicates a phase of removing the mythical discourses of Wigan, either the good or the bad. It is a process of reversing something into nothing (e.g. the codes 'cultural dissert', 'ghost Wigan Pier').

Theoretical coding

As discussed above, during the axial coding stage, I identified two main subcategories: multi-level place mythmakers of the Wigan brand, and three-phase place mythmaking, which led me to focus on the main core category as 'place brand myths of Wigan' in this study. Once the core category was selected, I moved on to the theory development stage, where I aimed to create a convincing theoretical interpretation that could tell the coherence between my

subcategories and categories (Charmaz, 2006; Williams and Moser, 2019). Theoretical coding typically involves modifying an existing theory or developing a new one based on research findings. Therefore, I firstly attempted to interpret my findings using existing theories. While the more established theories such as DeLanda's Assemblage Theory, literary theories, and Baudrillard's hyperreality provided insight into some aspects of my research, I found these theories either too formalistic or insufficient in capturing the entirety of my findings. Thus, with the guidance of my supervisors and my extensive research, I developed a novel theoretical lens – the metaphor of shadow to theorise my findings.

The idea of employing a shadow metaphor to interpret the different findings I identified in relation to the place myths of Wigan originated from a journal article authored by Edensor and Hughes (2021). In this publication, the authors analysed the aesthetics and meanings of shadows in Melbourne's urban landscape and how they transform over time and space. The elusive and constantly changing nature of shadows in their study shed lights onto my understanding of place brand myths. My findings also showed that Wigan myths were formless and difficult to capture and comprehend. Like shadows, they were constantly formed and reformed based on the viewer's attitudes, intentions and experiences, as well as external elements such as weather, culture, and so on. This observation resulted in my interest on utilising shadow metaphor as an analogy to comprehend the obscure and fluid place mythmaking process of Wigan and the dynamic relationships between different mythmakers that I identified in my data.

I was also aware that relying solely on a single paper as a theoretical foundation was insufficient for developing a convincing and well-rounded theoretical lens. In order to develop the conceptualisation of the shadow metaphor, therefore, I drew on scholarly work on shadows from an extensive range of social science disciplines such as mythology, arts, geography, and psychoanalysis. Furthermore, since using metaphor as a conceptual framework has been a

relatively unconventional approach within marketing studies, I also referred to other marketing literature that has utilised a similar approach to address marketing issues (Cheetham et al., 2018; Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; Hede et al., 2022) while developing the shadow metaphor. Developing a novel conceptual framework was a challenging process – the theory development process was complex and iterative. I continuously compared and synthesised existing knowledge on the concept of shadows across various disciplines with the new ideas derived from my findings. I reviewed the relevant literature continually, refining my understanding of the shadow metaphor to ensure a coherent and convincing conceptual framework was created (Charmaz, 2006). As a result, a shadow metaphor was used to provide valuable insights into the understanding of the two main categories I identified during the axial coding stage. I categorised and explained the complex and interdependent relationships between various place mythmakers in Wigan by exploring three key types of shadow makers – creators, persuaders, and discoverers. Similarly, I identified three predominant phases of shadow making – projection, distortion, illusion – to explain the obscure and organically formed place myths of Wigan.

Phase	Time Scale	Data Collection	Purpose	Data Analysis
1	January 2020 - June 2020	Observation of online resources about the band (e.g. songs, music videos, documentaries, online interviews, live streaming concerts, online fan communities); informal conversations with the band's management team, fans, business partners, family members.	Get familiar with the band and its story	Notes made based on the initial observations and investigations of the secondary data related to the band

2	July 2020 - February 2021	Interviews with the band's fans, management team.	Identify recurring patterns regarding the stories of The Lathums; switch focus to Wigan	**Open coding** Interviews transcribed and coded manually; ask questions to explore the *nexus* between people's practices and discourses; preliminary codes emerged
3	March 2021 - September 2021	Multiple visits to Wigan; interviews and informal chats with locals; attending The Lathums' tours, the band's events/activities in Wigan; field notes, videos, photographs taken.	Identify the main stories about Wigan through the eyes of The Lathums and then other mythmakers; generate the key research questions	**Axial coding** More codes generated until theoretical saturation reached; subcategories identified (in line with MDA principles); relevant literature and theories identified, compared, rejected and applied
4	October 2021 - January 2023	Follow-up interviews and informal conversations with various mythmakers of Wigan (historians, visitors, local authorities); re-analyse secondary date related to the culture, history, identity, story of Wigan. Field notes, videos, photographs taken.	Further understanding of Wigan	**Theoretical coding** Organise all categories/subcategories around one core category – place brand myths Review the relevant literature, refine the findings, develop a shadow metaphor as a meaningful theoretical explanation to the key findings

Table 3.2. The Data Collection/Analysis Process.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have shown my philosophical stance and provided an account of the methodology applied in this thesis in order to address my research questions. In accordance with my relative ontological position, I adopted a social constructionism epistemological approach that argues that knowledge is constructed through the interaction between different social actors within certain cultural and social settings (White, 2004). Such an approach

allowed me to understand and analyse place-dependent brand myths from multiple mythmakers' perspectives, and emphasis on the construction and interaction between different voices in a specific sociocultural context (Hackley, 1998). For providing a thorough examination on my research questions, I applied a qualitative research approach combined with multiple qualitative data collection methods (Belk et al., 2013). While primary data collection strategies (e.g. in-depth interview, participant observation) provided authentic and reliable information around my research topic that was directly generated through the observations, thoughts and lives from my participants and myself, secondary data (e.g. music videos, films, books) helped enhance my understanding on the pre-existing culture and history of the Wigan brand. An MDA informed grounded theory analytical approach was adopted to organise, (re)group and conceptualise and theorise the data generated from my research on the place myths of the Wigan brand (see Table 3.3.).

Position	Decision	Justification
Philosophical position (Ontology/Epistemology)	Relativism/Social constructionism	No single reality; Knowledge is constructed through the interaction between different social actors in certain cultural settings
Research design	Qualitative approach	Provide an open-ended and flexible approach to deeply and thoroughly explore the place myths and mythmaking process of the Wigan brand
Methodological approach	MDA informed grounded theory	Understand the complex and mythical stories of a place through everyday practices; provide a flexible and open methodological approach to understand and analyse the fluid and complex place brand myths
Sampling strategy	Snowball sampling	To identify and reach participants who are difficult to approach by using other sampling strategies

Data collection	Multiple qualitative data collection methods: Semi-structured interviews; participant observations; secondary data (e.g. comments in the online fan groups, band's music videos/documentaries/lyrics of the songs, books, music reviews)	Allow a thorough investigation of the phenomenon; helps demonstrate multi-voiced and multi-layered and complex place brand myths
Data analysis	(Constructionist) Grounded theory	Provide a systematic but open analytical approach to examine and theorise the fluidity of place brand myths

Table 3.3. Summary of the Research Methodology

Chapter 4. Place Brand Mythmakers as Shadow Makers

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical finding on the various place mythmakers of the Wigan brand emerged in the data analysis process. It is worth mentioning that although the research has initially treated The Lathums as the analytical lens of the stories of Wigan, as mentioned in Chapter 3, a wider range of mythmakers have emerged during the data analysis process. Each of them has equally and significantly contributed to the intriguing and powerful place myths of Wigan. Therefore, this chapter aims to give equal voice to each key mythmaker identified in the study, analysing their roles and complex relationships within which The Lathums represent merely one aspect. This approach resonates with the propositions of the extant literature that place brands co-created by various stakeholders (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Kerrigan et al., 2012). While the existing literature has certainly brought insights into the understanding of multi-author place branding, the place brand mythmakers identified in this research are more complex than previously explored, with the wider range and multi-level place brand stakeholders involved, and the multiple perspectives of each stakeholder considered.

To effectively analyse various place mythmakers of the Wigan brand (both human and non-human factors), as well as their complex interrelations, the study argues that the metaphor of shadow makers serves as a useful conceptual framework (Kite, 2017; Impett, 2008). In the process of shadow creation, numerous shadow makers contribute in varying capacities. For example, shadows in puppetry are created through the interplay between puppets, the light source that can cast shadows of the puppets on the screen, puppeteers, the narrators who manipulate these shadows to create stories that captivate their audiences, and audiences who

in turn actively engage with the narratives (Kaufmann, 1975). Similarly, in arts world, shadows within painting or cast by buildings are formed by the interaction between the subject matter, be it buildings or objects, the light that illuminate them, architects and artists who create diverse images and shapes of shadows, and art critics, viewers, buyers who interpret the meanings and symbolism of the shadows in these artwork based on their distinct knowledge, aesthetics and real-life experiences (Edensor and Hughes, 2021; Gombrich, 2014; Hefner, 2015). Throughout these different shadow-making processes, this study identified three primary shadow makers: shadow creators, shadow persuaders and shadow discoverers.

Creators constitute the essential elements that initiate the birth of shadows. In the realm of mythology, creators refer to entities or forces that bring objects, places, things into existence (Leeming, 2010). Shadows, despite their fleeting and intangible nature, are no exception to this rule. As discussed above, the natural or artificial lights, illuminated objects, and cultural narratives surrounding the conceptualisation shadows can be seen as the representations of the shadow creators. Persuaders are the individuals who skillfully manipulate shadows, refining their forms to convey certain meanings to their audiences. This category is represented by shadow puppeteers who use flat puppets or hand shadows to create stories and characters through the manipulation of shadows, painters and architects who use shadows in their artwork, to add depth, dimension, and contrast to their creations. Discoverers are the interpreters exploring new principles and insights about shadows. They can be identified as the discerning audiences of a puppet show, or as art theorists and critics who actively uncover the hidden stories of shadows, whether presented in a puppet show, a building, or a painting. For instance, the Japanese author Tanizaki (2001) praises shadows as elegant and marvellous in order to overthrow the stereotypical western view of shadows as dark and grimy. Similarly, Gordon (2008) claims that shadows generally stand for the unsettling and the unknown aspects of our present. However, they can also signify potentialities, possibilities and changes. Therefore, it

is crucial to acknowledge and embrace ‘shadows of life’ in order to better understand our desires and life. Discoverers like Tanizaki and Gordon delve into the depths of how shadows are presented and interpreted on the surface, highlighting the underlying meanings and stories, as being ignored by others.

Inspired by the shadow maker metaphor, the findings in this study suggest that the myths of the Wigan brand are also shaped by a variety of elements, people, and things that can be loosely classified into three categories: the ‘creators’ that are essential elements for the formation of the Wigan myths, the skilled ‘persuaders’ who influence the shape and perception of the myths of the town, and the ‘discoverers’ who curiously seek to uncover the unknown aspects and symbolism of the Wigan myths. In the next sections, these different types of place brand mythmakers will be discussed in turn, followed by the complex and fluid relationships between them (See Figure 4.1.). This chapter suggests that the metaphor of shadow effectively demonstrates the diverse but interdependent roles that various mythmakers play in the mythmaking process of Wigan. Furthermore, by focusing on the ‘playful’ relationship between these shadow makers (Kaufmann, 1975), the shadow metaphor helps reveal the multi-faceted and shifting perspectives of each place brand mythmaker, which in turn results in the evolving and spontaneous relationships between different mythmaker groups.

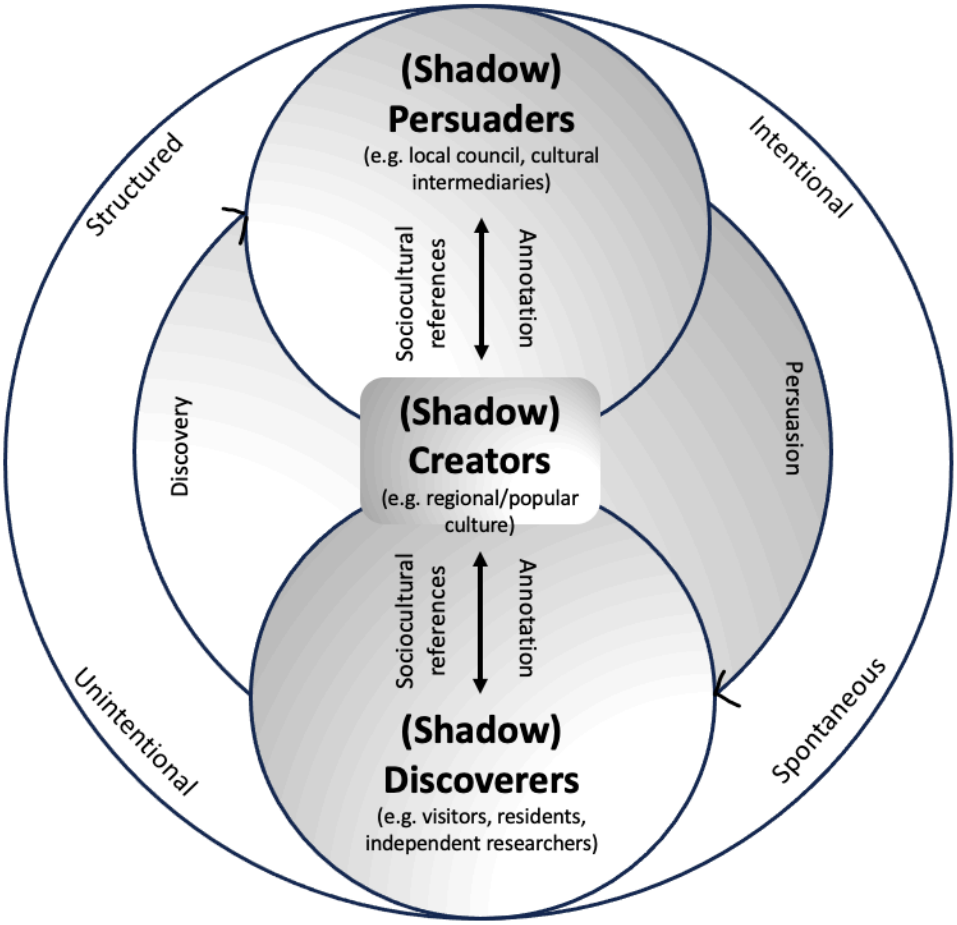


Figure 4.1. The Shadowy Relationships between Place Brand Mythmakers.

This chapter is divided into five main sections: Section 4.1 provides a comprehensive analysis of how culture and associated sociocultural and geopolitical events serve as the creators of Wigan's place myths. Section 4.2 delves into the role of the persuaders, such as the local council and cultural artifacts, who shift people's perceptions on Wigan through their storytelling abilities, academic expertise, or industry resources. Section 4.3 focuses on the discoverers (e.g. residents, tourists, independent researchers), the individuals or groups who uncover the hidden myths of Wigan by engaging with their personal experiences, stories, and memories gleaned from everyday life. Section 4.4 takes the analysis in Section 4.4 further by investigating the multifaceted perspectives of each place brand mythmaker, and the shifting relationships between different mythmaker groups.

In this chapter, numerous locations, institutions and businesses in Wigan will be mentioned and discussed. In order to help understand the context of this study, especially for those who are unfamiliar with the town of Wigan, two maps are provided below in Figure 4.2 and 4.3. In these maps, the locations, institutions and businesses that are considered as the key place mythmakers of the town by participants and/or the researcher are marked.

Figure 4.2. Map of Wigan Town Centre with Relevant Places Highlighted.

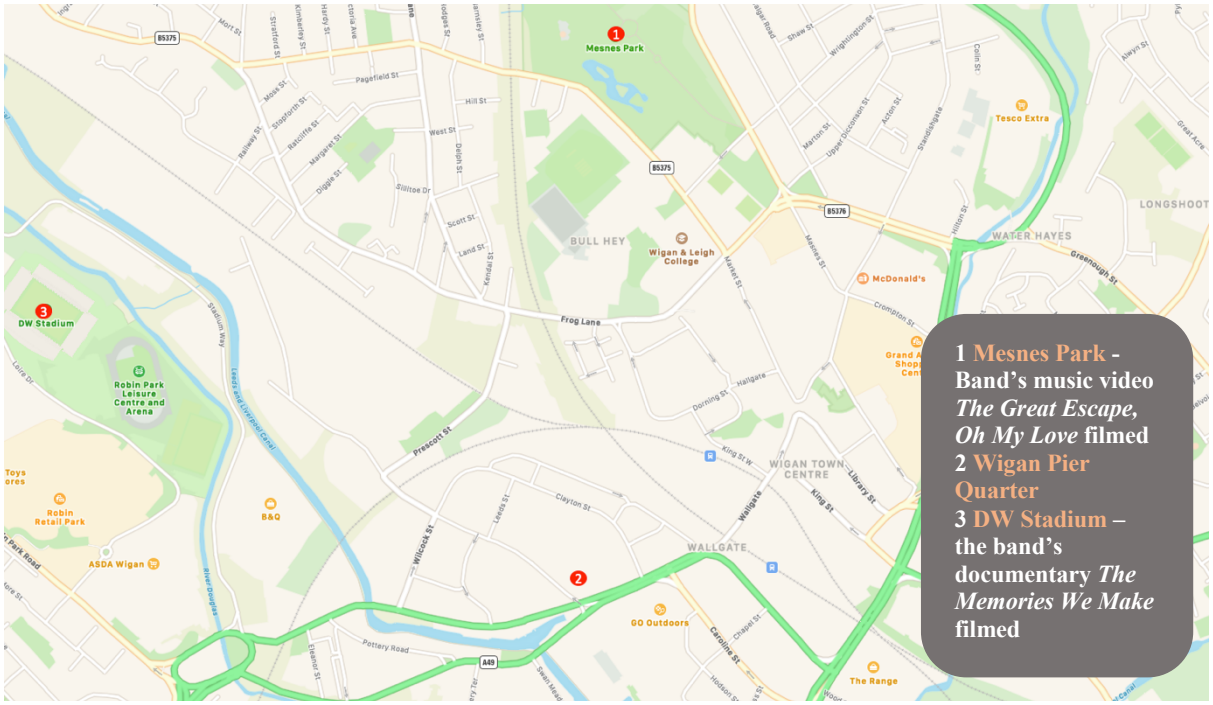


Figure 4.3. Map of Wigan with Relevant Places Highlighted.

4.1 (Shadow) creators of the place myths of Wigan

The metaphor of the shadow creator refers to the source that brings something into existence, in the case of this study, the place myths of Wigan. Based on the analysis of various data sets, culture, along with its manifestations such as cultural events, influential figures, and cultural heritage is essential for the creation of Wigan myths. This finding aligns with Sang's (2021) observation that "if place branding is regarded as a process of symbolisation, then place culture plays the role of 'object'" (1). Indeed, culture endows a place with significant meanings and contextual references, thus playing a dispensable role in the creation and cultivation of values, beliefs and identities associated with a place (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). The findings of this study also suggest that the place myths of Wigan are not the products of a monolithic culture. Instead, they are the

result of the interplay of various cultural forms and types, each rooted in distinct but also overlapping temporal and spatial contexts.

4.1.1 Regional culture

According to *The Wigan Archaeological Society*, Wigan culture is "buried under a relatively brief period of intense grimy industrial activity based on the twin spoilers of cotton and coal" (Morris, n.d.). From the end of the 18th century, coal mining in Wigan dramatically increased. In the early 20th century, there were over 50 collieries in Wigan, employing about 30,000 miners, which accounted for nearly one-sixth of all the coal mines in the county of Lancashire (Visit Wigan, 2023). With the opening of the canal between Liverpool and Leeds in 1779, Wigan has been a hub for the transportation of coal in the region. Although Wigan's century-long coal mining culture ended in the 1990s with the closure of the main mines, the town's reputation of being a coal mining centre still remains (Morris, n.d.). To quote the words of Leo, a local resident:

> "Anyone who comes to Wigan the first time will be stunned by these magnificent historic buildings that are scattered in this small town… I mean, you can't visit Wigan without visiting Wigan Pier. It's like visiting Rome without visiting the Vatican… Wigan is shaped and moulded by the historic buildings and the stories behind them… These buildings show how 100 years ago Wigan was when it had its most money in terms of the cotton industry and the coal mining industry… They also show where Wigan comes from."

Such local industrial culture is against the backdrop of the industrialisation in the England North. The Industrial Revolution, which began in 1760, saw a surge in industrial activity in Northern England. This growth was driven by the abundance of coal in the region, the use of water power as an energy source, and the availability of inexpensive labour from the surrounding uplands (Musgrove, 1992). This period of growth lasted for over a century, and the Northern regions of the UK saw a concentration of these industries. This leads to regional economies and job markets becoming heavily dependent on industries such as mining, manufacturing and textiles (Shields, 1992). The remains of such regional industrial culture can still be seen in Wigan today, represented by the town's cultural heritage. For example, the iconic Wigan Pier, which used to be the most crucial wharf for transporting coals between Leeds and Liverpool, is still present, reminding people of the coal mining culture of the town. Figure 4.4. shows the former Wigan Terminus warehouses that were built in the 18th century and refurbished in the 1980s. Although the warehouses are no longer in use, there are still canal boats mooring inside the buildings as if they are about to offload coal into the warehouses like old times. Below is the field note from one of my visits to Wigan that more vividly demonstrates the presence and significance of cultural heritage to Wigan even today:

> "When I walked alongside the Wigan Pier area, I saw many historic factories and warehouses that were built during the period of industrialisation. On the east side of the band, there was the Gibson's warehouse, originally built in 1777, one of the biggest Victorian cotton warehouses on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. Another magnificent historic site, Trencherfield Mill, was built on the other side of the bank. I was told by those who worked there that the mill had one of the biggest and oldest steam engines in the world. It represented the glory of local industrial engineering, and it was regarded as the symbol of Wigan's industrial development. These sites had been

redeveloped into bars and cafes, yet the structures of the buildings had been meticulously preserved as though the machinery were still running. Even though the industrialisation had long since ended, the stories, history and culture behind these cultural sites moulded my first impression of Wigan – an industrial machine that had been frozen while it was asleep during the industrialisation era" (Field note memo, Wigan, May 2022).

Figure 4.4. 'The No.1 Wigan Pier' Warehouses.

The town's industrial culture is not only embedded in the golden age of industrialisation represented by magnificent industrial buildings and more job opportunities to the region; it is also affected by the dark side of industrialisation, namely, the 'deindustrialisation'. From the 1980s onward, the England North underwent 'deindustrialisation', marked by steep declines in its primary and manufacturing sectors (Musgrove, 1992). This was a result of the availability of cheaper alternatives from overseas, made more accessible by decreasing transportation costs, which led to widespread outsourcing. As a result, jobs in these industries rapidly vanished, and the North was hit the hardest in the country. The number of industrial workers in the UK dropped from 9 million in 1970 to 4 million in 1990 (Taylor, 1993). Such a high employment

rate resulted in economic depression, low average income and low life expectancy in the northern region of England, including Wigan. As Martin, a local resident, comments:

> "Wigan is a bit of a time capsule, because 100 years ago, when it had its most money in terms of the cotton industry and then the coal-mining industry. Whereas once those industries died out, either through environmental reasons or because you could simply make the garments cheaper or the coal was exhausted, or the political issues, then there wasn't an alternative economic strategy put in place when it should have… Wigan was really badly affected, and it still is."

Wigan culture is rooted in the strong coal-mining and cotton industries, but it has also become a representation of the regional economic depression caused by the decline of industrialisation. Despite progress, a significant portion of Wigan still lacks development and remains in disrepair even today. For instance, walking along the main streets in Wigan such as King Street and Market Street, dilapidated buildings, abandoned factories and warehouses seem to be ubiquitous. These edifices, which once stood as symbols to Wigan's architectural and industrial glory, have now degenerated into shelters for unauthorised occupants.

Furthermore, the regional culture of Wigan is also formed by its geographical proximity to other influential regions such as Liverpool and Manchester. Due to the imbalanced economic growth and regional disparities, the South has been positioned as the central, whilst the North is seen as peripheral. However, it is true that most areas in northern England have experienced economic recession due to deindustrialisation, yet some places, such as Wigan, suffered more than others. Despite the economic decline, some big cities in the North such as Manchester and Liverpool have successfully capitalised on their industrial image by re-presenting the places into economic and cultural hubs. As a result, Manchester has become the 'capital of the North',

while Liverpool is considered the economic centre of the northwest of England (Shields, 1992). From a cultural perspective, Manchester and Liverpool also gave rise to crucial youth movements and styles such as Madchester, Merseybeat, and post-punk, which have provided the cities with enormous cultural, symbolic and commercial capital (Mazierska, 2018). Wigan, on the other hand, as a small town being stuck in between two big cities, has not received the same resources and attention as their neighbouring cities, and still struggles to develop. Compared to the well-known Manchester and Liverpool, Wigan maintains irrelevant and insignificant. As pointed out by Jack, a participant from Wigan:

> "If the North is the margin of England, Wigan is at the margin of the margin, the edge of the edge… We've got Liverpool 25 mile in that direction and Manchester 20 mile in that direction… You look at Liverpool, they've got two football teams. Manchester, they've got two football teams… Indie music is massive in Manchester. And Liverpool. They've got different artists from these areas… But we're only small. There's not a lot going on. People just think we are part of Manchester… Why would people want to come here?"

Drawing on the assertion introduced by Shields (1992), Wigan is a representative example of a 'place on the margin'. Jack's discourse further clarifies that Wigan's marginality derives from its liminal geographical location for being sandwiched by two big cities, as well as being affiliated to the Greater Manchester area. As a result, Wigan as a place is seen existing in the shadow of its neighbours and especially Manchester, with better-established cultural and economic resources. Such complex sociocultural and geopolitical context has also led to the hostility towards its neighbour, Manchester. Historically, Wigan was one of the oldest boroughs that belonged to the historic county of Lancashire. In 1974, due to the rearrangement

of local government, the town has become part of the new administrative unit of Greater Manchester, along with other neighbouring towns of Wigan. Although Manchester was also part of the historic county of Lancashire, this change still upset many local residents, as the town has not historically built a close association with the city of Manchester. As a result, even today, people from Wigan, especially the older generation, still claim that they are from the county of Lancashire, which they were formerly part of. Despite their connections to Manchester, the majority of Wiganers still identify themselves as Lancastrian. This view is supported by Scott, a 30-year-old local resident, who claims:

> "When you mention the Great Manchester and people think no, I still live in Lancashire. In some parts of Wigan, you can still hear Lancashire accent, even among the young generation… People say we're part of the Great Manchester, but we are the furthest away from Manchester, we're on the border."

4.1.2 Popular culture

The mythical stories of Wigan are not only formed by the regional history and identity, as stated; they are also a mixture of various types of popular culture emerged in mundane life. Music is one of the representers. Wigan has a long musical history, which can be traced back to the 1940s with George Formby, one of the most well-known singer-songwriters and comedians in the UK at the time. Decades later, Wigan has entered into the era for dancing music. In the '70s, Wigan was regraded the mecca of the Northern Soul music scene because of its acclaimed Wigan Casino club, which was voted the best Northern Soul club in the world (Harris, 2022). Wigan Casino was synonymous with Wigan, attracting crowds from all over the world. In the 2000s, another type of dance music movement brought considerable fame to

the small town – the Donk music scene. Donk is a high-octane dance music combined with rap and different forms of electronic music. On the Donk music nights, thousands of "donkers" would flood into the nightclub on Wigan Pier, enjoying the fast-paced sound played by Donk MCs. Despite the enormous popularity and acclaim that Northern Soul and Donk brought to Wigan, these once flourishing music scenes have dwindled in the town today. Even so, while landmarks like Wigan Casino have shut down, and so does Wigan Pier, the illustrious narratives around these music scenes continue. Mat, a 19-year-old local resident, claims:

> "I think that was before my time, but you always hear stories about Northern Soul, about Donk. I think people from quite far away used to, just travelled to go to Wigan Casino and Wigan Pier and dance the whole weekend in Wigan. They are not popular in Wigan anymore, but I suppose they still play a part in how people think about Wigan and why locals are quite proud of Wigan."

In contrast to the ephemeral prevalence of Northern Soul and Donk, the indie music culture continues to thrive in Wigan even today. The history of indie music (or 'indie') can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a number of post-punk bands began to emerge in the UK, and especially Manchester. These bands, such as Joy Division, The Smiths, The Stone Roses, were characterised by their DIY ethos and their rejection of mainstream music production and distribution. This 'indie' movement was based on the above-discussed regional culture of deindustrialisation, when the North economically lagged behind the South. However, the abandoned post-industrial factories and high unemployment rate provided ideal for the low-budget music production and distribution (Mazierska, 2018). Indie music has been serving as a sanctuary for those living in the North, providing a respite from the difficulties they face in their daily lives (Cohen, 1991).

In the context of the ‘indie’ culture in the North, since the 1990s, Wigan has seen a wealth of indie rock bands spawn from the town, including the legendary band The Verve. The band’s album, Urban Hymns, has changed the history of Britpop music, according to Liam Gallagher, the lead singer of one of the greatest UK indie bands, Oasis, who were once the support band of The Verve back in time (Oasis Mania, 2017). In the ’90s, The Verve successfully brought Wigan to the centre stage again after the Northern Soul scene and reminded people of the musical talents of Wiganers. Wigan’s contribution to the UK’s indie music scene, however, is more than just The Verve. In recent years, a number of up-and-coming bands sprung up, of which The Lathums, as agreed by Jack, are the rising stars and local favourites. As a local resident, Jack, highlights:

> “We've got many indie bands, like The Verve, which is one of the biggest bands, over Oasis and Blur… If you go up to Haigh Hall and where all the cafes and stuff are, there's a little bar there. And there is a mosaic of The Verve on the wall. Like we had them here once. It was the pinnacle of the indie scene in Wigan. But that was in the ’90s and there was a big gap in between. We've got nobody… But we’ve now got The Lathums, and it's really interesting that people are actually coming to Wigan now to see these bands and to listen to this music… It's interesting to see indie music in Wigan has moved to that momentum. It's gone quite quick, hasn't it? And you've got to try and keep that momentum… I think indie music makes up Wigan’s identity too, because we’ve got some big bands come out from Wigan with a lot of pride.”

As pointed out by Russel (2004), “[indie] Music has provided the region with some of its most potent cultural, symbolic and psychic capital and earned some of the most positive and least grudgingly given external respect” (208). This theoretical assertion can be effectively

applied to the case of Wigan, a seemingly unremarkable town that has been the birthplace of various esteemed indie bands. Because of this, Wigan has developed its reputation as a focal point in the musical landscape, consequently attracting a variety of music tourists from diverse regions. This fame brought by indie music has contributed to an enhancement in the local cultural milieu, and concurrently, the development of local pride and self-confidence.

Apart from the various local music scenes, sports such as football and rugby are also significant contributors to Wigan's popular culture. The football culture in Wigan is heavily centred around the sport history and traditions in the north of England, which is the home to some of the most historic and successful football clubs in the world, including Manchester United, Liverpool, and Newcastle United. Football in Britain has long been associated with the working-class communities and culture (Russel, 1999). Historically, many of the early football clubs were formed by factory workers, and the sport has its roots in working-class factory towns such as Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield. Wigan as a northern industrial town also has carried such entrenched football culture. The local football team, Wigan Athletic F.C., were formed in 1932, playing on a weekly basis at its home DW Stadium in Wigan until today. Wigan Athletic once beat one of the best football teams in the UK, Manchester City, in the League Cup in 2006 and won the FA Cup Winners in 2013. Jack, a local resident, points out the important role that football plays in creating local culture, story and pride:

> "Football has a huge impact on the local culture in Wigan. The town has a long history of working-class culture and football has always been a big part of that… We've got Wigan Athletic that is the symbol of the town… Football binds people together in Wigan, and it creates a sort of community. When we watch the team playing, we all wear the club's colours, and we've got flags and banners. It is a source of pride for the

town. Football and especially the club is an important part of Wigan's identity and its success brings a lot of stories about Wigan."

The supporters of Wigan Football Club self-identify as "The Latics", which is a shorthand reference to the club's full name, Wigan Athletic. As stated by Jack, the fan base of the Wigan Football Club is primarily composed of individuals belonging to the working-class demographic, characterised by the fervent passion and occasional aggression among the fans, the cultural inclination towards heavy drinking and a strong sense of community among the fan groups (Russell, 1999). These characteristics of the local football culture also echoes the typical traits of the above-mentioned regional culture.

Another crucial contributor to the sports culture in Wigan is the local rugby team, Wigan Warriors. The history of Wigan Warriors Rugby League can be traced back to 1987. The local rugby team has brought enormous attention and fame to the town. Wigan Warriors is considered one of the most successful sports clubs in the world, winning 22 League championships (Wigan Warriors, 2022). Joe, a Wigan Warriors fan but has never been to Wigan, points out:

"Rugby is the first thing coming to my mind when thinking about Wigan. When Wigan had a Premier League team, suddenly, you'd have people in Africa that were suddenly aware of Wigan, so that gave Wigan a glory and a glamour. And before then, you'd have people in New Zealand and Australia will be aware of Wigan because it's a rugby connection."

Indeed, like the comments made by Joe, one of the things I was impressed by the most was the cult-like rugby culture in the town. Figure 4.5. shows the so-called Wigan Rugby

League's Walk of Fame, which is located within the town's shopping mall arcade. As I strolled through the gallery, the palpable pride and glory that the local rugby team has brought to the small town was evident. The team's illustrious journey was portrayed through significant games and trophies, and the personal artifacts of celebrated rugby players enshrined in the display cases. Below is an excerpt of the field note that records my memories of the significance of the rugby team to Wigan:

> "I saw signs of rugby everywhere in the town – rugby exhibition, rugby new season release, the trophies and pictures of the team displayed on the town's main high street, Market Street… I went to the Museum of Wigan Life, wishing to see something about Wigan more than just rugby. But here we go, a themed exhibition that celebrates the past, present and future of the local rugby team, Wigan Warriors. The show takes more than two-thirds of the museum, which pushes the exhibitions of sophisticated Roman potteries and ancient Egyptian coffins to the dark and noteless corner in the museum. I have to admit that I am not a big rugby fan, so the achievements the local team has meant nothing to me. But I can see how much this sport means to the town" (Field note memo, Wigan, February 2023).

Figure 4.5. Wigan Rugby League's Walk of Fame.

The development of rugby culture in Wigan is an interesting one. In the context of England, there are two types of rugby games – rugby union and rugby league. Rugby league is a sport that evolved from rugby union in the late 19th century in England. The split between the two sports occurred in 1895, when a group of clubs in the north of England broke away from the Rugby Football Union (RFU) to form their own governing body, the Northern Rugby Football Union (later known as the Rugby Football League) (Spracklen, 2010). In the decades that followed, rugby league continued to grow in popularity, especially in the northern regions of England and in the countries of the British Empire. Therefore, rugby league is also known as 'northern rugby' (Collins, 2012). Despite sharing the same root, these two games have different and even oppositional cultural associations. Rugby union is more popular in the south of England, and is often considered a sport for the upper classes that is associated with private schools and universities. Rugby league, on the other hand, is more originated and widely played in the north of England. Therefore, it is considered a working-class sport and is closely associated with the northern regions of England, where it originated.

Both types of rugby games have been developed in Wigan, although rugby league, which is the one Wigan Warriors plays, retains as a favourite for locals. Apart from the obvious reason that the local rugby team has won seven succussive league championships whereas the local rugby union team is merely an amateur-led community, the entrenched regional culture of the north-south division also affects how rugby culture is formed and appreciated in the town. For example, a local resident, Jude, admits:

> "So, there's rugby union and rugby league. Rugby league tends to be more northern-based, and tends to be more working class… So, traditionally, because Wigan has been a working-class team, or working-class town, then it's got a close affinity to the working-class sport, that is rugby league… I genuinely like both sports. And I also quite like rugby union. But I sometimes have a problem with rugby union fans, because I find them a bit too elitist."

Not only is there the divide between different types of rugby games, there is also a salient split between football and rugby fans in Wigan. Many participants admit that generally, people either support Wigan Warriors, or Wigan Athletic F.C., and it is rare to see Wiganers supporting both teams. The rugby culture in Wigan was more dominant than the football culture decades ago when the team had eight years in the Premier League. However, in recent years, the football culture has overtaken, along with the decline of the popularity of rugby in the town. Jude continues:

> "The other interesting feature in rugby in Wigan is you are either rugby league, or you are football. There are not many people that enjoy both… It's just, again, cultural reasons. It's a bit like religion. You're either a Catholic or a Protestant. You can't. You

> can't be both. It's like some people with music. Yeah, you're either into classical or you're into rock… The supporters for football and rugby team are 50/50. It's an interesting balance. But if you'd asked me that question 30 years ago, I'd say in Wigan, it would have been 70 per cent to rugby league."

Although birthed in different eras, these diverse forms of popular culture represented by music, football and rugby have woven together to create a vibrant, kaleidoscopic, cultural landscape of Wigan. These highly influential local musical acts and sports teams have undoubtedly contributed to the birth of the Wigan myth as a celebrated hub of music and sports. It is worth noting that despite these different kinds of popular cultures found in Wigan are formed in mundane life, they are also inextricably linked to the larger, more deeply ingrained working-class culture of the North.

Local food culture also significantly contributes to the distinct Wigan myths, though it remains underrepresented compared to the music and football cultures discussed above. Rabbiosi (2016) demonstrates that food is an essential element in creating the distinct local environment of a place. It also plays a crucial role in unfolding cultural events and processes. The food culture in Wigan coverages in its local market, the Wigan Market Hall. It is a historical market hosting over 100 independent stores and stalls selling drinks, foods and groceries. During my fieldwork in Wigan, Wigan Market has become my favourite spot for grabbing a quick bite. There are various traditional Lancashire foods I have tried: the small, round and flat Wigan cakes, the Lancashire hotpot – a hearty stew made with lamb or mutton, potatoes, and onions – and pease pudding, which is a savoury dish made from split yellow peas, flavoured with bacon, onions, and spices. The foods are always made fresh and served hot, cooked with traditional, locally-sourced ingredients. Caroline, a local resident, expresses how the market is well-loved by the locals and is considered a part of the local food culture:

> "Wigan Market offers a diverse selection of fresh local foods, like fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, baked goods, and ingredients… The market really helps to keep the traditional food culture in Wigan alive… The market isn't only a place where you get foods, we also build a close relationship with people who sell them."

The shops in the market are mostly privately owned and organically grown businesses, and many of them are run by families for several generations. Chatting with these shop owners at the market has always been enjoyable for me. The shop owners are extremely passionate about the food they sell and are always happy to share their cooking knowledge and everyday experience with customers. The intimate dialogue and bond between owners and customers, the friendliness, and the shared appreciation for traditional local food and culture give the market a foodie community with friendly and family-like atmosphere. As stated by Wigan Council (2022), Wigan Market is the "lifeblood of our community", and it is "where the heart is".

The pie culture is especially highlighted by many as the representation of the local food culture. Wigan has a century-long pie-eating culture, and Wiganers have long received a reputation as 'pie eaters'. The widely circulated explanation of this nickname I have heard is that during the General Strike of 1926 in Britain, Wigan miners were among the first to return to their shifts, and therefore, they have been teased by their brother town of Leigh for 'eating humble pie' and earned the sobriquet of 'pie-eaters' (Barnett, 2017). Although the nickname 'pie eaters' was supposed to be a mock to the town, Wiganers embrace it with pleasure and humour, and are proud of their pie culture. I have noticed the town's fixation with pie from the moment I stepped into the town – from the pie posters on the main streets and alleyways, to

the countless pie shops and cafes being 100 feet away from each other. I have also heard a saying: “You will never see a pie shop closing down in Wigan.”

The pie tradition in Wigan is deeply ingrained in the town’s identity and history. The locals take pride in their local cuisine, and pies play a crucial role in this cultural heritage. In Wigan every resident has their go to pie shop, with Galloways and Greenhalghs being two of the beloved ones. While chain shops like Greggs and Pieminister have gained popularity in years, they have not diminished the resident’s affection and admiration for their local pie culture - Wigan residents remain unwavering in their support for local pie shops seeing them as an integral part of their cultural legacy. Pies made in Wigan usually feature a pastry crust filled with delectable combinations of meat and vegetables. Popular fillings include beef with onion chicken alongside mushroom and steak combined with kidney. The notable characteristic of Wigan pies lies not in their substantial size and hearty fillings that make them a delightful choice, for a quick meal but also in the rich tapestry of traditions surrounding them beyond mere recipes or presentation styles. The residents of the town have gained quite a reputation for their ways of preparing and serving pies. Two notable examples are the 'Wigan Slappy' and the 'Wigan Kebab' (Barnett, 2017). The 'Wigan Slappy' is a filling dish that consists of a meat and potato or steak pie sandwiched between two slices of bread or a muffin. This unique presentation offers a satisfying snack for Wiganers who are always on the move. 'Wigan Kebab' simply features an assortment of pies skewered on a stick. These local delicacies may seem unconventional or unfamiliar to those, from Wigan but they hold great significance in the towns culinary traditions showcasing its resident’s creativity and resourcefulness. According to James, one of the locals:

“People from outside of Wigan might find it strange, but this food truly embodies the essence of Wigan - affordable and unpretentious.”

Because of its association with pies, Wigan has earned the title of 'EU capital of pies' by many. This proud designation is also evident in its World Pie Eating Championship (Barnett, 2017). It can be seen that the pie culture of Wigan represents a significant aspect of the town's identity and cultural heritage. It has been ingrained in the local community through generations, whether through eating at local pie bakeries, participating in pie competitions, and sharing the love for Wigan's pies with visitors. The stories and legends surrounding Wigan's pie culture have become an integral part of the town's mythology. Importantly here, I refer to pie as a culture, as it has not developed as a part of a local place branding campaign to attract tourists, as discussed in previous studies (Muñiz-Martinez and Florek, 2021; Pizzichini et al., 2020). Rather, pies in Wigan represent deeply ingrained ritual and belief, stemming from the collective imagination and expectation towards the town, whether positive or negative.

Wigan's distinctive food culture is also associated with other two world-renowned food brands – Uncle Joe's Mint Balls, and Heinz. Uncle Joe's Mint Balls is one of the UK's most famous sweet brands, which was established in Wigan by William Santus. The business started from a small stall at historic Wigan Market and then was registered as a company that has received national success since the 1930s. The legendary brand story and iconic brand image has been discussed in countless articles, films and TV shows across the country. Uncle Joe's Mint Balls is undoubtedly a local legend to Wigan and has witnessed and contributed to different stages of Wigan's history. As the brand states, "Uncle Joe's are synonymous with the town of their production, having been immensely popular there since their creation. This town is, of course, Wigan" (Uncle Joe's, 2022). As agreed by Liz, a local resident:

> "When they're cooking on Friday, if you stand on the events, the mint ball from the mint and the spices that they have in some of the... it really clears your head. It's

> really, really in your chest. It's so powerful. You can smell Uncle Joe's cooking from different parts of Wigan. When the wind's blowing, you can smell it... A minty sweet town… when I was at university, my mum would send me things of Uncle Joe's meatballs, so I would share them with people. I mean, now you can easily buy Uncle Joe's in any kind of gift shop anywhere. But in the old days, we used to buy them and share with people who are not from Wigan."

Uncle Joe's is not only a popular local snack for kids; instead, it is the representation of Wigan identity that is vividly and thematically performed (Rabbiosi, 2016). When Uncle Joe's factory is cooking, as stated by Liz, the town is filled with the scent of mint, which leads to the image of Wigan as a 'minty sweet town'. For Wiganers like Liz and her mum, Uncle Joe's is treated as the representative local food of Wigan, and is selected as souvenirs for promoting their hometown. Local identity and culture are enacted in the scent and stories created by Uncle Joe's, which contributes to a distinct 'taste' of Wigan even for the ones who have never been to the town (Pizzichini et al., 2020).

This section has shown that culture, along with related sociocultural and political events, things, people and activities serves as a cornerstone in the formation of the Wigan myths. As pointed by Kaufmann (1975), the perception of shadows is restricted by various elements such as the special effort of eyes, and the right conditions of illumination. Consequently, without these efforts and conditions, the marvellous shadows would not be formed or perceived. Like the shadow creators such as light, objects and a human's eyes, the cultural narratives and elements construct a foundation that forms our understanding of the history, custom, and identity of the town, leading to the development of the powerful and long-lasting Wigan myths. However, the creators of shadows only account for part of the shadow-making process. To vitalise these shadows, there are other shadow makers such as artists who make the shadows

visible at certain moments, imbued with specific colours, thereby capturing and presenting these ephemeral entities to others (Kaufmann, 1975). In next section, the study will use these type of shadow makers, defined in this study as the shadow persuaders, as a theoretical lens to investigate the mythmakers of the Wigan brand. While creators constitute a broad range of non-human mythmakers, from history and politics, to buildings, food, music, sports, and even archetypes, persuaders are, as identified in the shadow maker metaphor, predominantly formed by human actors who actively and intentionally construct various interpretations of the Wigan myths.

4.2 (Shadow) persuaders of the place myths of Wigan

In the context of shadow making, persuaders are the individuals skilled in the art of manipulating the shapes and meanings of shadows (e.g. puppeteers, artists, magicians). They tend to persuade others to accept their interpretations through leveraging their knowledge and expertise (Kite, 2017; Trafford, 2008). Tapping into the metaphor of the shadow persuader, the term persuaders here refers to the place mythmakers who have acquired an abundance of knowledge on the stories of Wigan, and tend to employ it to influence the thoughts and actions of others through the clever use of tactics and strategies. This section delves into the realm of place mythmakers of Wigan who skilfully manipulating the place myths of the town.

4.2.1 Wigan Council

The data reveals that one of the key persuaders to Wigan myths is Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council (or "Wigan Council"). Wigan Council is a local authority founded in 1974, which "aims to make Wigan Borough the best place it can be over the coming decade" (Wigan

Council, 2022). Such an aim of Wigan Council is embedded in The Deal 2030, which is a scheme that sets up the ambitious plans and goals of the town and Wigan borough as a whole to 2030. The scheme slogan is "our people, our place, our future", embodied by ten specific strategic goals, including ensuring the best start in life for children and young people, building a place where people are happy and healthy, creating communities where people care for each other, creating a vibrant town centre for everyone for doing something, creating a clean and green environment place that everyone is proud of, embracing culture, sport and heritage, boosting economic growth that benefits everyone, creating a confidently digital hub, improving connectivity of the place where people can travel more easily, and creating more affordable homes for all (The Deal 2030, 2022).

In line with the goals of The Deal 2030, Wigan Council has also launched a series of affiliated plans. For example, for 'embracing the heritage' of the town, there is Wigan Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) – a plan for the strategic redevelopment of Wigan town centre. According to the council (Wigan Council, 2022), a range of concomitant strategies will be taken to comply with SRF – the existing buildings owned by the council will be reused for creating start-up space to particularly help develop the digital, arts and cultural industries in the town; the historical shopping complex, The Galleries (including Wigan Market), will be redeveloped into a new retail, leisure and residential hub (see Galleries 25); and Wigan Pier Quarter will be regenerated and linked to the town centre; the town's conservation area such as King Street will be shifted from poor-quality weekend bars to a mix of high-quality cultural and leisure activities (King Street Wigan Heritage Action Zone project, 2022). The aim of the town's revitalisation scheme is to provide local residents and especially young people with a more fulfilling life, and more work opportunities in the future. Similarly, in order to 'create a vibrant town centre for everyone for doing something' and 'embrace culture, sport and heritage', Wigan Council operates a cultural manifesto, called *The Fire*

Within. The manifesto (2019) believes that Wigan has had a history of being a cultural and artistic town, and it is necessary to reinforce this root of the town by improving residents' participation in arts, heritage and culture, developing a network for artists and creative workers, and attracting cultural tourists to the town. It has also drawn up a five-year plan that by 2023, Wigan would become 'a new heritage'.

Through enacting a series of schemes such as The Deal 2030 and its affiliated plans, which tell appealing and convincing stories about Wigan, Wigan Council attempts to draw a picture of the bright future of the town to local residents and other stakeholders. The council makes the public believe that as long as the council plays 'our part' (e.g. 'create opportunities for young people', 'support the local economy to grow'), and the public plays 'your part' (e.g. 'believe in our borough', 'help protect children and the vulnerable'), such a dream of a wonderful Wigan can be achieved in the next decade. Similar to Plato's (514a-520a) allegory of the cave, Wigan Council acts as the soldier who manipulates shadows, rocks, puppets and fire light in order to create images on the wall and persuades prisoners that these images are the 'reality' of the world. It can be seen that in a shadow-making process, persuaders generally have greater knowledge and skills than others, and they tend to use them to achieve certain goals (e.g. telling a more appealing story, restricting prisoner's freedom).

The term 'persuasion' is often treated as a tool of affecting and manipulating people's attitude and behaviour – consumers, in the context of marketing – leading to an imbalanced power dynamic (Funkhouser and Parker, 1999). However, the investigation of Wigan Council shows that persuasion can also bring mutual benefits. A number of participants convey faith in the council's plan, given the tangible actions already in progress, and the evident benefits received by the local residents. For example, in line with *The Fire Within* manifesto (2019), the council attempts to rebuild Wigan into a cultural hub. In doing so, the council has

redeveloped empty spaces in the town centre into venues for arts exhibitions and live shows, as well as free, or low-price, practice rooms and studios for start-up artists and musicians. The music band The Lathums are one of the beneficiaries of this scheme – without the support from the council, the band would be unable to rehearse in a professionally equipped practice room. As Tommy, who is a former Wigan Council employee, states:

> "After graduating from college, The Lathums were lucky enough to be selected for a local program by Wigan Council, who acknowledged their talent and gave them an empty store in the town centre to transform into a rehearsal space. Thanks to the talent scheme, they've got a cheap place to focus on perfecting their sound and spending time practicing."

The council's persuasive efforts are further disseminated and strengthened through two cultural institutions operated by the council – *Museum of Wigan Life* and *Wigan Local Studies Library*. *Museum of Wigan Life* is housed in Wigan's first public library. In 1936, George Orwell, another influential persuader of Wigan myths, researched his book *The Road to Wigan Pier* in the Reference Library (now Family History and Local Studies) in the museum (Wigan Council, 2022). The exhibitions displayed in the museum show the different faces of Wigan, ranging from Egyptian, Roman to industrial and modern time. There have also been new events and exhibitions organised by the museum to help people memorise and celebrate the history and heritage of Wigan. For example, the bi-monthly rugby league exhibition tours guide people through the local rugby team's trophy-filled histories, whereas the regular talks by local historians show people the mining heritage and the celebrated buildings of the town. *Wigan Local Studies Library*, located above the museum, also has a range of exhibitions demonstrating the well-known as well as the unrevealed stories about the town.

The projects run by these two cultural institutions have had a significant contribution to help the council enhance the 'cultural hub' myth of the town. Due to the shows, exhibitions and events organised by the cultural institutions and funded by Wigan Council, local residents feel delighted by the wonderful cultural and leisure life they have in Wigan. As Jude, a local resident, claims:

> "I've enjoyed the experience living in Wigan. There's enough here to keep me entertained and interested as well… The museum is one of the joys of the town, and *The Fire Within* has been an interesting project. Like a new project I went to on Monday… That was a wonderful event because you had the lovely hybrid mix of three really strong local bands, plus the football team, plus the love and the support there. And it was really well organised by Wigan Council, but with some private sponsorships too."

Despite being a local authority, or a persuader as defined in this study, Wigan Council is also keen on hearing the voices from different stakeholders, and especially local residents and tourists. Take the King Street photo walk I attended as an example; it was one of a series of photo walks funded by the local council for redeveloping Wigan's King Street. The aim of the walks was to encourage people to share their memories and stories about the area through walking, talking and taking photos of the street. Below is the memo I made after the photo walk:

> "On my arrival, one of the organisers of the walk gave a brief introduction about the King Street redevelopment project and the history of the street to the participants. Apart from me, there were four participants who have lived or worked on King Street. The organiser firstly interviewed the participants about their memories of the street,

then we were asked to take photos of the aspects of King Street that attracted us the most. After the walk, we were told that the photos and interview transcripts would be used by policy makers as the primary reference in rebuilding the area. There was also an exhibition where the local authorities invited the participants to share their stories behind the photos, which unfortunately, I was unable to attend… I am very impressed by how closely the council works with the locals. The council has come up with this idea of redeveloping this historic street into an entertainment centre, but luckily, they are not just sticking in any commercial chain restaurants. But they actually try to listen to the voices of the residents who actually have lived here, and try to get more authentic stories about the area" (Field note memo, Wigan, March 2023).

As *Wigan Local History & Heritage Society* (2022), who are invited by the council to contribute to the King Street Heritage Zone project, comments: "King Street is not merely about the buildings, but it is about the people who used them, the people who lived in them, worked in them, shopped in them, or had a drink in them. They are all part of the story."

In place branding literature, local authorities are generally regarded as the representations of authority that leads to power inequality and conflicts in a place (Coyle and Fairweather, 2005; Oakley, 2006). However, we tend to forget that they are also aggregators of public needs and collective intelligence. Such co-construction process is especially evident in the case of Wigan – although the local council is classified as a local authority, its schemes, events and vision are formulated and governed by public. Therefore, rather than treating Wigan Council as 'decision makers' who endow supreme power in deciding the story of Wigan (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019), the study considers them as persuaders, inspired by the metaphor of the shadow maker. Like shadow persuaders such as puppeteers or magicians, who are skilled in manipulating shadows to their will using a variety of strings or tools. However, the true allure

of shadows emerges from the dynamic engagement with the audiences. Similarly, as the finding suggests, while the Wigan Council formulated plans for the town, and intended to persuade residents to accept their preferred stories through various practices and agreements, it was the equal interaction and collaborations with other mythmakers such as residents that made the plans possible and believable. This finding illustrates that the council does not possess any inherent superiority over other mythmakers. Instead, they are merely one of the mythmakers, facilitating and contributing to a more grand and complex mythmaking process.

4.2.2 Cultural intermediaries

The findings reveal that cultural intermediaries are another crucial group of persuaders in the stories of Wigan. According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural intermediaries are defined as "the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers" (325). In other words, these intermediaries act as conduits between cultural goods and consumer tastes, conveying a certain understanding and appreciation of these cultural products. Much like shadow persuaders who adeptly convince people to believe in certain stories about shadows, cultural intermediaries also persuade and guide people to accept certain meanings and symbolic values of a cultural product (Maguire and Matthews, 2010). Drawing on the role and characteristics of persuaders in the shadow-making process, this section analyses cultural intermediaries in the context of place branding – the individuals who are mastering in shaping and guiding people's perceptions on certain aspects of the Wigan myths.

In the stories of Wigan, one the most influential 'persuasive' cultural intermediaries is the renowned English writer George Orwell. One particular novel from George Orwell has

made a noteworthy contribution to the perception of Wigan myths – *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The book is a work of political and social reportage that documents Orwell's experience and observation during his trip to the north of England, including Wigan. In this book, Orwell (1937/2001) depicts the depressed and bleak living conditions among the working class in Wigan and the north of England in general, and also helps fuel the debate on poverty, government responsibility and social welfare in this region (Armstrong, 2012). Because of the significant influence the book has on Wigan, in February 2022, *The Museum of Wigan Life* established a permanent exhibition on Orwell and his works (locally known as 'Orwell's corner'), displaying the manuscripts, books and photos related to Orwell and particularly those related to his time in the town. Figure 4.6. shows an image of a bust of George Orwell alongside his book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, proudly showcased by *The Museum of Wigan Life*. Intriguingly, this is the only modern effigy displayed in the museum, sharing its space with ancient Egyptian statues, which is considered as the most precious treasure of the museum. I was intrigued by the elevated status that Orwell has received in this town, particularly given the bleak portrayal of Wigan's life and people presented by Orwell.

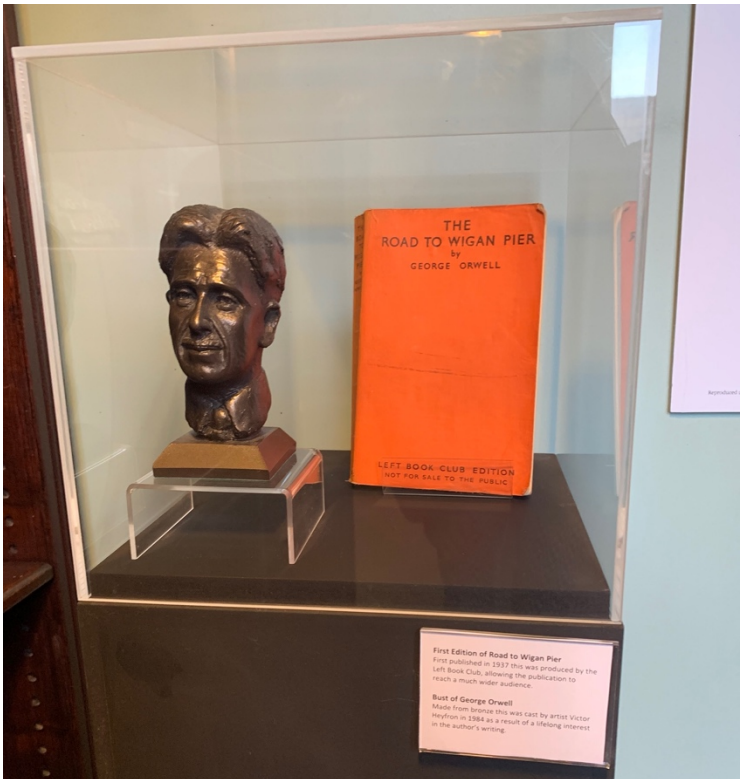


Figure 4.6. George Orwell's Bust and The Road to Wigan Pier Enshrined in a Display Box at The Museum of Wigan Life.

As stated by Chris Ready, an official at Wigan Council:

"The Road to Wigan Pier is an important part of the borough's cultural history… Celebrating our borough's rich cultural history is a key part of our cultural manifesto, *The Fire Within*, and we look forward to welcoming visitors from across the world to the Museum of Wigan Life" (Jones, 2022).

The Road to Wigan Pier is not merely a documentary work that records the living and working conditions of Wigan in the 1930s. More importantly, this book masterfully shapes and alters the perception and renown of the town to the world. As a world-renowned author and master of 'manipulating' words, George Orwell, with his scholarly acumen and refined

upbringing, skilfully illustrates a vivid and memorable portrait of a despairing Wigan to his readers. As a participant Leo, who is a member of staff of *The Museum of Wigan Life*, agrees:

> "For some people in the world, it's the only time they've ever heard of Wigan, unless they're interested in sport… Orwell made it famous in places like France, in Germany, in South America… Because the book was written in languages, so all of a sudden, everyone hears the story about Wigan, even though it isn't a nice story."

Orwell's influence to the place myths of Wigan is also recognised by one of the largest pub companies in the UK, J D Wetherspoon. George Orwell imagined his ideal pub and called it in a newspaper article as 'Moon Under Water' – the name being used by one of the most popular pubs in Wigan run by J D Wetherspoon. On the wall, just beyond the threshold of the pub, two eye-catching portraits of George Orwell hang on the wall. Under the portraits are two plaques: the first offers a succinct but powerful summary of Orwell's book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and the second records the origin of the pub's name, *The Moon Under Water*. As stated in the plaque:

> "As well as the famous, or infamous, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell is the author of the highly influential novels *Animal Farm* and *1984*… In an article first published in 1946, Orwell reflected on his ideal pub. He chose the name *The Moon Under Water*."

The pub also quotes Orwell's explicit description on the design of his ideal pub:

> "If you are asked why you favour a particular public house, it would seem natural to put the beer first, but the thing that appeals to me most about The Moon Under Water is what people call its atmosphere… To begin with, its whole architecture (with is grained woodwork and fittings) is uncompromisingly Victorian… it has plenty of elbow room… and it is always quiet enough to talk (in the absence of loud music)… You can get good food and wash it down with a variety of different beverages, including those of a non-alcoholic variety… The Moon Under Water is my ideal of what a pub should be."

And the pub concludes:

"J D Wetherspoon thinks so too" (J D Wetherspoon, 2023).

It is true that as an old Etonian, Orwell's account of Wigan and the North is commonly criticised for being a snobbish view of working class of Wigan. As Featherstone (2008) critiques, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a "misleading picture of the region, displaying a repertoire of imagery and judgements that remained influential throughout the century" (86). However, it is also undeniable that Orwell's book decades later made Wigan a small town a popular destination, and an archetypical proletarian place in the UK. The appropriation of George Orwell's concept of an ideal pub by commercial entities like J D Wetherspoon for a local pub further proves the power of Orwell's persuasive influence on the place myth of Wigan.

Following the path of Orwell, a few writers also revisited Wigan and recorded the changes of the town since the 1930s. For example, as a feminist journalist, Beatrix Campbell's (2013) book, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, reveals the poverty and unemployment of women in Wigan

and a selection of northern towns and cities in 1980s. The author's focus on women not only critically reviews Orwell's work, but also expands his view on the poverty issue of Wigan by adding a gender dimension. Similarly, in Stephen Armstrong's (2012) work, *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*, the author claims that the social issues such as rising bills and rent prices, lacking of working opportunities, and an unestablished transport system still haven't been resolved in Wigan and the North; the region represented by Wigan still maintains neglected and hopeless even after 80 years of Orwell's visit. Although these later works are not as influential as Orwell's novel, these authors have also contributed to reshaping the myths of a more modern Wigan, characterised by the rise of feminism, and continued economic decline.

Similar to book authors, filmmakers are also crucial cultural intermediaries who have masterful skills in persuading people about the stories of Wigan. For example, the TV show *Coronation Street* also acts as a crucial persuader of Wigan myths. *Coronation Street* is the longest-running soap opera on British television. The show centres around everyday life of working-class people living on a terraced street in Weatherfield, a fictional town in Salford, Manchester. Since it first aired on British television in December 1960, millions of viewers have grown up, and grown old, alongside the residents of this small, depressing, working-class street on the outskirts of Manchester. As Luis, a tourist from Manchester, comments on the show:

> "Wigan still has a 1970's vibe to it. But it's kind of the 1970's vibe of my childhood, but only in some aspects like, we can mark it on the cafe and bits and pieces. And some of the characters that you're seeing with the market could have been straight off Coronation Street, but in a good way. And I don't mean that in a, like a patronising Southern way, it's just that the good script writers of the programme, men were writing about real genuine characters. Whereas I've stopped watching Coronation Street for the

last over 10 years, because it's just got too much like EastEnders and too negative, and also Manchester's a million miles away now to what it was back then… Wigan still does though."

The story of *Coronation Street* is based on a fictional town in Manchester, and therefore, it does not have the intention of manipulating people's view on Wigan. However, many participants like Luis believe that the bleak street view, working-class community and everyday struggle portrayed in the show account for their impression on Wigan. Similar to the shadow persuaders, through utilising a range of techniques such as pictures, lights, sounds, costumes, lines, figures film/TV makers carefully make adjustments as necessary to produce the desired visual effects to audiences (Stoichita, 1997). The audiences, on the other hand, reform the images and narratives of Wigan they receive based on what they want to believe.

Another key cultural intermediary identified by the participants are local newspapers, including the *Wigan Post* and *The Wigan Observer*. They are sister papers, being issued weekly on the website *Wigan Today*. The newspapers provide a Wigan perspective on sports, entertainment and lifestyle, as well as local and regional news. As the primary and influential storytellers of the town, the newspapers keep people informed about the latest stories of the local football and rugby games, and the up-and-coming bands and artists, as well as the updates on the local crime, healthcare, business and politics. As the slogan adopted by *Wigan Today* (2022) says, they produce "news you can trust since 1853". However, despite the newspaper emphasising the validity of its reporting, local residents have expressed concerns regarding the newspaper's objectivity and fairness, given its prominent status in the locality. For example, Jude, a local historian, states:

> "I think the reality of any organisation when it's only dependent on a few news sources, it has to have a constructive and friendly relationship with that source of information. So whether it's the football club, the rugby league club, or the council, then I'm not saying they're just a mouthpiece for those organisations, but they have to have a sustainable friendly relationship. So how judgmental and critical a person can be whilst maintaining the constructive relationship is, is somewhat questionable… It's not a propaganda mouthpiece. But neither is its objective critical journalism."

The observation on the cultural intermediaries in this study resembles Warren and Dinnie's (2018) study on the significant role that cultural intermediaries play in the place branding of Toronto. The cultural intermediaries the authors focus on are bureaucratic organisations and institutions such as Economic Development and Culture Division at City Hall, Municipal Tourism and Planning Division and urban sustainability and place-making collective who 'construct legitimacy', and therefore have privileged voices over other stakeholders in place brand mythmaking. However, in the case of Wigan, as a small and underdeveloped town, such large-scale place branding promotional organisations have not yet formed, or can hardly be found. Yet, there have been individuals and groups (e.g. book authors, film/TV makers, journalists) who actively and voluntarily work as cultural intermediaries mediating local cultural norms, goods, events to diverse audiences (Bourdieu, 1984), although sometimes their works and actions can result in a negative reputation and perception to the town. These cultural intermediaries might have less power on constructing legitimacy to certain narratives (Bourdieu, 1984), but they certainly contribute to facilitating and influencing the perception of the Wigan myths.

Rather than considering cultural intermediaries as opinion leaders with significant control over 'discursive power' (Shields, 1991), like the observation of Warren and Dinnie

(2018), this study believes that they are akin to persuaders in the shadow creation such as artists, architects and puppeteers who purposely 'play' with the meanings of place myths, and persuade others to accept their opinions. Like shadow persuaders who are able to create different images, colours and shapes of shadows through various tools and skills (Kite, 2017), cultural intermediaries such as book authors, filmmakers/television producers, and journalists can also reshape the myths of Wigan and how they are received by people through using their expertise in storytelling and narrative creation. However, like the case of the local council, the reaction and engagement towards the message sent by the persuaders ultimately is up to the collaboration and discretion of the audiences.

While both cultural intermediaries and the local council serve as persuaders of place myths in Wigan, their underlying intentions and motivations for persuasion vary significantly. For example, George Orwell as a cultural intermediary utilises his knowledge to 'educate' the public about the unfavourable conditions of the urban landscape in Wigan, including poverty and social injustice prevalent in the northern regions of England (Armstrong, 2012). In contrast, Wigan Council aims to eliminate the negative image of the town and instead promote it as a cultural hub and leisure destination. This vision is predominately motivated by the potential financial and commercial benefits that the town can gain from such a transformation. It can be seen that, as shown in the process of shadow creation, persuaders in place branding often manipulate place myths with specific goals and target audiences in mind, though the degree of manipulation and intentionality can vary significantly (Smith, 1997).

4.3 (Shadow) discoverers of the place myths of Wigan

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term discoverer implies a person or a group of people who has taken the initiative to find something new, and/or has contributed to our

understanding and knowledge of the world in some way. We, as human beings, have always had a fascination with exploration of the deeper existence and meanings of shadows (Stoichita, 1997). They are often brought to light by individuals or groups who voluntarily discover and identify the alternative shapes, functions and symbolisms of shadows. These shadow makers extend our entrenched attitude on what shadow is and could be like. The shadow discoverer metaphor helps this study analyse the place mythmakers who explore and discover the place myth of Wigan from fresh eyes with no obvious intentions and motivations like persuaders do. Thus, they often come up with the unconventional and sometimes controversial ideas about the place.

4.3.1 Residents

The findings show that the most pronounced discoverers of Wigan myths are residents, who are also regarded as one of the most crucial stakeholders in place branding (Jain et al., 2022; Johansson, 2012). According to data published by Wigan Council in 2020, the population of Wigan Borough is 322,000 people, of which 90,000 people reside in the town of Wigan itself. Although being a relatively small town, different types of residents are found in Wigan in the study. As local resident Caroline points out:

> "Because my family have stayed for the longest time, they sort of looked at us as if we were traitors, and daring to go and live in the South. And I have friends who are, you know, they're born their lives and they'll die there and they'll never leave. And then there are other people who felt that it's really claustrophobic and they want to broaden the horizons and just get out as soon as possible."

In Caroline's story, at least two different types of residents can be found in Wigan. The study defines the first type as permanent residents who have been living in Wigan since they were born, and they have never lived or plan to live elsewhere. The second one is what this study refers to as diasporic residents who were born and/or raised in Wigan, but now live elsewhere for various reasons. They would occasionally move back during holidays and spend time with their families. Caroline falls into the category of diasporic residents, as she was born in Wigan and moved to Cambridge when she was fourteen because of the change of her mother's work, and she would return to Wigan to visit her family a couple of times a year. What can also be seen in Caroline's discourse is the tension between these two groups of residents. Diasporic residents are often considered as "traitors" by the permanent residents in the town, as moving away from one's hometown is regarded as a betrayal for permanent residents. Therefore, the unspoken attributing of "insiderness" and "outsiderness" is discursively evident between these two types of resident groups (Andéhn et al., 2020). For permanent residents, keeping the legacy and custom of the town as a community is more important. In contrast, diasporic residents generally believe opportunities and changes would be more important to the town. Caroline also uses the development of the new shopping mall, The Grand Arcade, in the town centre as an example to compare the different types of place myths created by these two types of residents in Wigan. As Caroline continues:

> "The Grand Arcade, I remember when that opened and how excited I was about that because when I came back, I could go shopping in like H&M and Topshop and stuff because they didn't have that before… My relatives in Wigan feel like Wigan will lose a lot of its character, especially with the main street like the Galleries used to be… If they change that and modernise that, they think it could lose some of these characters, which is a shame."

In Caroline's narratives, two conflicting Wigan myths are discovered by diasporic residents and permanent residents: diasporic residents like Caroline believes Wigan is a rapidly developing town, characterised by the proliferation of chain stores and a thriving local economy. Permanent residents represented by Caroline's relatives consider Wigan as a historic town with its cultural heritage that many are emotionally attached to (Andéhn et al., 2020). Except holding different beliefs and views towards the place myths of the town, both permanent residents and diasporic residents generally have a deep emotional attachment with their hometown of Wigan, believing that they are more "real" residents in the town (Hong and Vicdan, 2016). In the meantime, there is another type of resident who is not from Wigan originally but has moved to Wigan, usually due to work or family reasons. This type of resident is referred to as an immigrant resident in this study. One of the examples is Leo, an immigrant resident who has settled down in Wigan ten years ago, claims:

> "My family don't understand why I came here. My dad came here once and said, 'What are you doing here, son?' My mom didn't even bother to try…"

Similarly, Jude, an immigrant resident who has moved from a city in the south of England to Wigan five years ago with his wife from Wigan, states:

> "I met a shop owner from another city and I was very keen on talking to him, because you just think, oh, you are not from here. Neither am I… I've only lived here for five years. And I don't know what my own future will hold, or how much longer I'll live in Wigan, or whether I'll die in Wigan. You just never know what the future brings. But certainly, I've enjoyed the town, despite the fact of losing parents during the process

> and locked down and the local economy suffering. I spoke to my partner about this, and she used the phrase, 'Wigan has been good for us. And it's been good to us'… More importantly, it was so important for her particularly to be so close to her parents during the last few years of their life."

Like Leo and Jude, as the residents who are not originally from the town, immigrant residents often question or are questioned about their decision for moving to Wigan – a not as popular residential destination. Therefore, they generally struggle between the sense of belonging and sense of alienation (Ericson-Lidman, 2019). Their liminal status of neither being here nor there (Turner, 1969) leads to the pessimistic and dispassionate views towards the town. Like Jude, who uncovers a Wigan that shows similar liminal status represented by the sense of ambiguity and disorientation (Turner, 1969). His disconnection with his family and homeland, the stagnation of local economy, and the uncertainty about the future of himself and the town emphasise the transient and uncertain nature about the town.

In Jude's story, his interpretation of Wigan is in contrast with his wife, another type of local resident can be seen – the reunion residents. Represented by Jude's wife, reunion residents are the ones who are originally from Wigan, but have moved away for a period of time, and then return back to Wigan again. Though being apart, reunion residents still show a deep emotional connection and affection towards their hometown. Such emotional attachment can be seen when Jude's wife tries to convince her husband about the good life in Wigan: "Wigan has been good for us. And it's been good to us." It is noteworthy that these reunion residents often hold relatively positive attitudes towards the town, which may be interpreted as a means of legitimising their decision of returning back to their hometown – a relatively small and less well-known destination.

4.3.2 Tourists

Tourists are also seen as key discoverers who have offered alternative views on the place myths of the Wigan brand. As recorded by the local historian, the roots of tourism in Wigan can be traced back to 14th century when Wigan was, as described by an English traveller and writer Celia Fiennes in 1698, "a pretty market town built of stone and brick". On market days, Wigan became a trading centre for locals and people living in neighbouring towns to export and import goods. At the same time, Wigan was also a popular spa town that attracted thousands of visitors to 'take the waters' home (Morris, n.d.). Even today, Wigan continues to be a sought-after tourist destination, attracting visitors from various regions of the country due to its distinctive culinary traditions, dynamic musical scenes, and rich cultural heritage. Despite its popularity among tourists, the tourism industry in Wigan remains underdeveloped and inadequately structured in comparison to other established tourist destinations. Consequently, tourists including myself have to rely on their personal experiences and knowledge instead of the expertise of professionally trained tour guides. While tourists have been discussed in various place branding literature (e.g. Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Gao et al., 2012), the majority of them have focused on the established and professionally organised tourism industry that is planned and managed for place branding purposes. However, Wigan as a small town does not possess such luck. There is a noticeable absence of guided tours, promotional materials, and tourism brochures in the town. On a positive side, the absence of this professional guidance and organisation in the tourism industry has allowed me to engage with more 'authentic' tourists of the town (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006).

Based on their intentions and interests for visiting, I have identified two primary tourist types in Wigan – cultural tourists and the leisure tourists. Cultural tourists are the ones who visit the town for seeing local historic attractions, attending gigs of local bands and musicians,

or watching football/rugby games (McKercher, 2002). For example, Ann, a cultural tourist, shares her experience about touring and attending a local band, The Lathums', gig in Wigan:

> "I've been to a The Lathums' hometown gig couple of years ago, and it was really a lot of fun. People all enjoy themselves and the local fans are so nice and friendly with each other. My friends and I had a short tour in Wigan before the show starts. It's got that history and culture, like Wigan Pier, Market Town… And I think Wigan is just a kind of nice and laid-back place. … It's not like Manchester or Leeds. They are vibrant. They are mad. But Wigan just feel a bit more homely, if that makes sense… Feel welcome."

In contrast to cultural tourists, leisure tourists are the weekend shoppers, or the pleasure seekers (coming from both outskirts and neighbouring cities) who look for low-cost drinking parties and entertainment. Louise, a leisure tourist, recalled her memory of a night out with her friend in Wigan:

> "Wigan is so mental! I went to Wigan for a rave, I met a bodybuilder who was with her daughter and her mother, and all three of them were like totally fake-tanned, into bodybuilding, blonde hair. And I was like, 'Oh my God! We have three generations here!'… The boys in there have shaved chests and hair, wearing football t-shirts and shorts, or sometimes with no tops, and girls wear bikinis and furry boots. You can wear whatever you bloody like… And like this club was happy hardcore music. So you can imagine, there was a lot of drugs and stuff. And a lot of, like, nutters. The place was crazy. We had to dress up especially for it so we didn't look like we didn't fit in."

It can be seen that different characteristics and interests of cultural tourists and leisure tourists result in fairly different views on Wigan. Cultural tourists, such as Ann, often uncover a positive perception of Wigan as a welcoming and pleasant destination. Before visiting the town, these individuals usually have built some knowledge about Wigan, and their expectation towards the town is influenced by their particular interests (McKercher, 2002). For example, Ann's positive impression of Wigan partly comes from her experiences with The Lathums and the warm welcome she received from their fans. As a result, she sees Wigan as a welcoming community where people are warm-hearted and friendly. In contrast, leisure tourists like Louise view Wigan as a festive destination. This viewpoint stems from their exciting experiences related to shopping or clubbing in the town. For Louise, Wigan is remembered as a party town known for its consumption of drugs, alcohol and fast paced electronic music. This creates an image of Wigan as a place for indulgence and wild revelry.

The findings above align with the studies that emphasise how the physical experience of tourists plays a significant role in shaping their perception and interpretation of a destination, and ultimately, the construction of its place brand (Björner and Aronsson, 2022). When tourists visit a destination, they engage with various aspects of the physical environment among others (Mossberg, 2007). When the environment is well-maintained and attractive, like the experience of Ann, it can contribute to a positive narrative towards the destination. On the other hand, experiences such as congestion, crime, or poor air quality, like experienced by Louise, can detract from the destination's appeal (Edensor, 2013). However, despite experiencing different physical environments in the town, these experiences act as a foundation of the place myths explored by the cultural and leisure tourists. Interestingly, in contrast, there is another type of tourists been identified through the empirical research on Wigan, which this study refers to as armchair tourists. They engage in the experience of exploring Wigan without physically visiting the location. They gather information and gain a sense of familiarity with the town

through various secondary sources, such as literature, musical acts and sports teams associated with Wigan, as well as through oral narratives shared by others who have visited or live/lived in Wigan. John, for example, a typical armchair tourist, tells his story about Wigan:

> "Just very quintessential northern town with its like old, working-class roots. So been through many ups and downs and had a lot of like the heavy industry that used to support it. And that's kind of just the story of Wigan. I mean I'm from Stockport originally. They are really similar I suppose. We're both big rugby league towns… Like Bradford, Wigan is a place which you wouldn't want to go on a night out in weekends… [Because] it's quite violent. There's a lot of rugby lads. And I've heard like stories about… I've got a couple of friends from Wigan, and they would always tell me like, you know, it's just a nightmare, the certain roads that you don't go down on a night after 11 o'clock. It can be a really, really rough place. So I think that's like, that's another thing with that sort of Northern culture… it's a bit tougher."

The place myth of Wigan discovered by John is based on his memory of his hometown of Stockport, the narratives shared by his friends from Wigan, and his expertise on rugby. It can be seen that due to the lack of substantial evidence of their 'visit', like John, the view of the armchair tourist towards the town is more subjective, which relies on the personal knowledge, story, and stereotypes of the place. Compared to the cultural and leisure tourists, the place myths of Wigan revealed by the armchair tourists are more speculative and imaginative. They are not constrained by what they see and what they experience in the town, but what they believe the place should be like: the curfew after 11'o clock, the dark alleyways in the town centre, and the rough and violent rugby fans make up John's imagination of a horrific Wigan. Gao et al. (2012) introduced the term 'phantasmal tourists' to describe the

tourists who idealise certain tourist destinations. These tourists show a tendency of refusing the 'reality' of the place, thereby creating a utopian escape. In contract, despite sharing certain similarities, the fantasies of armchair tourists are based on no physical and substantial evidence. Additionally, they do not necessarily romanticise the place as a means to escape from reality (Jones et al., 2020) or resolve their everyday struggles.

Like shadow discoverers who uncover the hidden meanings of shadows (Sorensen, 2008), tourists, who come from various backgrounds and are motivated by diverse experiences, constantly strive to unravel the place myths surrounding the town of Wigan. These myths may be grounded in actual experiences of a wild night out, or they may be perpetuated through hearsay spread among friends. Regardless of their origin, these place myths are continuously explored and reinterpreted by these discoverers in an attempt to uncover new and unique perspectives. Although not necessarily universally convincing, these myths hold a degree of believability for those who actively participate in their creation and perpetuation.

4.3.3 Independent researchers

Local historians are also vital discoverers of place myths of Wigan. During my research, I have met several local historians who are passionate about the history and culture of Wigan, engaging in independent research on the town. Generally speaking, the local historians involved in this study do not take a permanent position within any council-funded institutions – although some of them might be involved in the council-led projects – yet they nonetheless contribute valuable insights and knowledge about the town through their independent efforts. While some of them are based in Wigan, others live in different parts of the UK. As previously discussed, these independent local historians occasionally organise cultural and historical tours that provide a unique and informed perspective on the town of Wigan. However, the majority

of their contributions are made through written media such as personal blog articles or social media posts, where they share their extensive knowledge and passion for the town. Through these means, they offer valuable insights into the cultural and historical landscape of Wigan, serving as important resources for both local residents and visitors alike.

Most of these local historians have neither received any credential in history or studied a related subject such as archaeology, nor they have published much academic research on the relevant topics. As such, they are the nexus between the orthodox historic materials, and personal reflections on the everyday life of locals and themselves (Marshall, 1975). For example, Flynn, who identifies as a local historian, contrasts the difference between independent researchers and the ones funded by the government:

> "As an independent historian, I can focus on whatever I think is important, without having to worry about influences or consequences. This means I can be really honest about what we find and tell the true story of what happened… If you are funded by a government, you have to follow their rules and regulations. You will need to write stories in a way that promotes their viewpoint. I've previously worked with a group of independent historians on a project funded by Wigan Council. It was nice receiving the government fund for doing research. But then they shifted our focus towards what they were interested in… You've got to be careful about what you write and think about the consequences of revealing certain stories."

In contrast to the council-run research institutions, such as the *Museum of Wigan Life* and its research centre, which aim to shape and persuade public to accept certain stories about Wigan, the place myths constructed by local historians are more subjective, fragmented, and unconventional. Their knowledge is based on both their research on local history that is

published in official documentations and publications about the place, combined with oral history, which is actively experienced and observed by them in everyday life (Marshall, 1975). As such, these independently discovered myths may offer alternative, and at times "undesirable" interpretations of the town (Cassinger et al., 2019; Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008), providing a unique glimpse into a previously hidden aspect of Wigan. The personal and non-institutionalised nature of these discoveries highlights the importance of uncovering the unknown aspects of Wigan myths.

In the shadow-making context, in contrast to persuaders, who tend to create appealing stories to different audiences in order to effectively shape public perception, discoverers' emphasis is on their personal exploration and reflection on shadows (Gombrich, 2014). Similarly, as discoverers, local historians may not have any intention of affecting the perspectives of others and their myth-making is not motivated by any commercial or political interests. Instead, their perspectives towards the town are based on their individual reflections, experiences, and interpretations, offering a unique and personal understanding of the town.

Another crucial independent researcher who also provides an alternative perspective on Wigan's place myth is myself, an academic researcher who has conducted four-year in-depth research on the culture, history and people of Wigan. As an academic researcher, I am neither a resident who has an entrenched association with the town, nor a tourist who comes to the town for certain purposes. Where I stand is somewhere in between these two identities – I immerse myself in the everyday life of residents for gaining an in-depth understanding of the town, but I also observe the people, things and stories around me from a fresh eye, with curiosity and enthusiasms like a tourist. I am also not like a professional historian who has developed established knowledge on the place. Rather, through harnessing my observations, feelings, experiences and memories, I position myself as a student continually learning and

renewing my knowledge of the phenomenon, and reflect these insights and queries in my writing (Goulding, 2001; Mulhall, 2003).

I constantly ask myself questions based on my observations and introspections on the phenomenon. This allows me to be able to directly observe internal states – my own thoughts and views, and collect data that I would otherwise never obtain from external examination (Gould, 1995). Such self-introspection also fosters reflexivity, which helps me reflect on my own experiences and contexts and understand how they affect the way I tell the stories about Wigan (Takhar-Lail and Chitakunye, 2015). For example, my perception of Wigan was shaped by a variety of personal and external factors, such as the people I met, my experiences during my stay, my mood, or even the weather of the day. These subtle yet crucial observations, actions, emotions and memories all contributed to my interpretations of the myths of Wigan. Below is an example of how external elements like weather conditions and incidents encountered during my fieldwork influenced my understanding of the Wigan myths:

> "It is a rainy morning. The first thing that catches my attention is a man being apprehended by the polices near the train station at 9am. As I stroll along the street, a sense of melancholy washes over me. Many of the shops are closed. There is a sense of solemnity in the atmosphere… Walking alone on the Market Street doesn't make me feel entirely at ease. However, what I mean is not any unkindness from the locals or any feeling of threat towards me. On the contrary, everyone I've encountered in Wigan has been incredibly friendly. It just feels a bit peculiar to be one of the few non-white persons" (Field note memo, Wigan, January 2023).

In contrast, the following excerpt was recorded during another fieldwork I had in Wigan:

> “Wigan on a sunny day is quite a sight. The sun is shining bright. There are people everywhere, walking around, shopping… people sitting outside at cafes and restaurants, basking in the warmth of the sun. The town centre is lively, with street performers and vendors selling their things. The market square is bustling, with locals and tourists checking out the stalls and making purchases” (Field note memo, Wigan, March 2023)

These two field notes have told completely opposite stories about Wigan. During my initial arrival, the weather was overcast and I was immediately confronted with a crime scene, which directly impacted my experience in the town, leaving me feeling isolated and uneasy. As a result, the story I relate about Wigan is negative and disheartening. In contrast, during my other fieldwork experience, the weather was sunny, and the individuals I met were all in good spirits, drinking, chatting, enjoying the sunlight. The pleasant weather encouraged more people to go out, making the market and high street much more bustling and livelier. As a result, I perceived Wigan as a joyful and energetic town where its inhabitants live harmoniously and happily. It can be seen that as a discoverer of Wigan's myths, similar to the local historians, my personal experiences and emotions play a crucial role in uncovering the unknown facets of the town (Jamalian et al., 2020).

The use of shadow discoverer as a metaphor in this section highlights the idea of exploration and discovery the alternative understanding of shadows. Rather than highlighting the perceptions and interpretations of shadows, shadow discoverers voluntarily and proactively redefine the meaning of shadows, inspired by their personal interests, experiences and knowledge (see Gordon, 2008; Tanizaki, 2001). The discoverers of place brand myths of Wigan, much like their metaphor, are those who delve into the lesser-known or overlooked aspects of Wigan's culture, history, and daily life. As discussed in this section, local residents,

tourists and independent researchers are keen on exploring the alternative and hidden stories about the town based on their personal experiences, reflections, and imaginative elaborations in relation to Wigan. They exist beyond the boundaries and expectations commonly held by society, offering a distinctive viewpoint on the town. The metaphor of the shadow discoverers also highlights the nature of their explorations in findings. These explorers are not confined by conventional social norms or communal beliefs; instead, they are free to pursue their curiosity and intuition (Perniola, 2004). This allows them to uncover truths and capture the essence of Wigan in a manner unaffected by external influences (from the persuaders). Their alternative perspectives also sometimes contribute to the allure and thrill mythical stories of Wigan.

4.4 Shadowy relationships between different place brand mythmakers

Although in the section the roles and characteristics of creators, persuaders and discoverers were analysed individually, the findings also highlight a symbiotic connection between these mythmakers. Moreover, the research findings suggest that the roles and perspectives of these place brand mythmakers are evolving and blending with other mythmakers. This study argues that such an interacted and fluid relationship between different place mythmakers mirrors the dynamism observed among shadow makers (Kite, 2017; Perniola, 2004). The following sections will further utilise the shadow maker metaphor, along with evidence from the findings, to investigate the entangled and ever-changing relationships between creators, persuaders and discoverers in the co-creation of the Wigan myths.

4.4.1 Symbiotic relationships between place brand mythmakers (shadow makers)

The data indicates that there exists a symbiotic relationship between creators and persuaders/discoverers in Wigan's place mythmaking process (See Figure 4.1). The creators serve as primary sources, providing original sociocultural context for the place myths of Wigan, while the persuaders and discoverers contribute supplementary commentary to the narratives supplied by the creators through visual, verbal, or physical embellishments. The example of persuaders adding annotation to creators of Wigan myths can be found in the statement that Wigan Council made in *The Fire Within* manifesto (2019):

> "When George Orwell first encountered and described the 'lunar landscape' of Wigan Pier, he witnessed a space transformed by the Industrial Revolution. Orwell's powerful and vivid book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, etched our collective cultural memory of working-class life in a coal mining town, making Wigan Pier internationally famous. In 2019, Wigan Arts Cultural Heritage Trust and Step Places will collaborate to transform the iconic cluster of buildings at Wigan Pier into a cultural hub for community arts. An alternative arts and cultural education centre, a new conference room and a large food and beverage events space with a micro-brewery will inspire a new generation to make Wigan Pier a destination for all."

As recorded in the book, Wigan Pier has historically served as a symbol of the town's working-class lifestyle and coal-mining heritage (Armstrong, 2012). In recent times, however, Wigan Council and its associated organisations have sought to reshape this pre-existing historical site into a multifunctional cultural hub for art, education, and events. This reinterpretation of Wigan Pier as envisioned by the local council confers new functions and

significances onto the iconic cultural heritage, with the expectation that this transformation will enhance Wigan's appeal as a tourist destination and place of residence.

Similar to persuaders such as the council, discoverers also act as annotators of the Wigan myths embedded within the sociocultural fabric of the region. However, the annotations made by discoverers tend to be less structured and more discursive in nature compared to the organised annotations of the persuaders. For instance, Fred, a local historian specialising in the history and culture of Wigan, provides insightful interpretations and observations regarding the indie music culture in the area,

> "It's just the nice thing about Wigan is the tendency to think, oh, it's just going to be the same old northern indie stuff, that there's going to be nothing new. But because of the emergence of the new indie bands, that hasn't been the case. And because bands like The Lathums, and the other Wigan bands, who have used Wigan in their album covers, or as publicity shots or whatever, they don't sign up for the old indie stuff, they are happier, nicer, then it kind of suddenly brings some new blood into a bit of rock and roll scene in Wigan."

The annotations produced by the Wigan Council are characterised by a well-defined structure and a clear vision that underscores the importance of the local cultural heritage, the necessity of transformation, and the systematic steps required to achieve this objective. In contrast, Fred's (as a discoverer) annotations to the local indie culture are more nebulous and lack a clear structure or purpose. These annotations are based on his personal experiences and observations, rather than the result of systematic and scholarly research conducted by academic institutions. However, despite its lack of structure and coherence, Fred's annotations still redefine the local indie culture in Wigan. For instance, his observation on the 'same old northern

indie stuff' questions the conventional 'indie ethos' that has traditionally dominated the music scene in Wigan and the North (Mazierska, 2018), calling for the emergence of new local acts such as The Lathums. Fred's annotation shows that the indie culture in Wigan is no longer limited by its northern roots and ethos, but instead, can strive towards being 'happier' and 'nicer'.

Wigan myths are woven from a rich tapestry of sociocultural and geopolitical events, with persuaders and discoverers acting as master weavers. They annotate these different cultures around Wigan with new meanings and stories, each stitch adding depth and dimension to the entrenched local cultures. Although they may differ in their techniques and motivations, these persuaders and discoverers illuminate the obscure and sometimes hidden stories of the town, bringing the town's rich history and culture to life. Like shadows, that are formed by the interplay of light and objects. But with the magic of persuaders such as magicians and puppet masters, and the vision of discoverers such as arts aesthetics and audiences, these shadows are transformed into wondrous creations, imbued with rich colours, meanings, and symbolism (Perniola, 2004).

Persuaders and discoverers are also intimately connected in the mythmaking process of the Wigan brand. Despite differences in their intentions, motives, and strategies, these two groups of place brand mythmakers are inextricably linked, and often draw influence from one another (See Figure 4.1). As previously discussed, because of their advanced knowledge and skills, persuaders often try to convince people including discoverers to believe in their narratives. Taken Orwell's (1937/2001) comments on Wigan in his novel, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, as an example:

> "The train bore me away, through the monstrous scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs. This was March, but the weather had been horribly cold and everywhere there

were mounds of blackened snow. As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town, we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the embankment… At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones… She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever-seen" (43).

In the second part of the novel, Orwell continues:

"We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive" (98).

In the first quote, Orwell vividly describes the dire living and working conditions prevalent in Wigan during the 1930s. By manipulating narratives and images, Orwell creates a depiction of Wigan as a place filled with poverty and despair. The landscape is marred by canals, soot covered snow and dilapidated slum dwellings. In the second quote, Orwell extends this sense of hopelessness of Wigan to the entire society. He argues that society as a whole is oppressive and lacking in freedom and security making it arduous to maintain honesty and survive in such an environment. This impactful message underscores the necessity for change in Wigan but also beyond (Featherstone, 2008). Through his vivid descriptions and powerful arguments, Orwell uses his writing to persuasively convey the image of Wigan as a place of poverty, oppression, and hopelessness, with an attempt to inspire people to act and to work towards a better world.

From the perspective of the discoverers, while drawing on influence from the persuaders, they also critically reflect on these impacts, thereby contributing to novel

interpretations. For example, Mat, a diasporic resident, comments on Orwell's portrayal of poverty in Wigan:

> "I think stereotype is a big reason why people like me still think Wigan is like the one in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. These stereotypes can be tough to change because they're deeply ingrained in people's mind from generation to generation. So what we know about the poverty and working-class life in Wigan are just reinforced by Orwell's book… However, in terms of making Wigan a positive message or a positive image, then he's bad news, which was the essential cultural message that was being pumped out to the nation, the 1930's of this is a tale of great poverty, then that is going to have an effect. We and some people in Wigan Council want to move on from those perceptions. And so the last thing we want to talk about is Wigan Pier, and probably Orwell, and coal mining and the cotton industry. But at the same time, we're happy enough to have a poster that says heritage to tourists."

By drawing the reference from the local council, another crucial persuader of Wigan myths, Mat has shown that rather than preserving and promoting the iconic elements of the town captured in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (such as the Wigan Pier, coal mining, and cotton industry), the local residents as well as the council nowadays regard these elements as obsolete, resulting in a negative reputation to the town. While many participants like Mat are influenced by the grim reality of the working-class life in the North and Wigan, as portrayed by Orwell, they have also criticised Orwell's presentation of a dated and unsettling Wigan. In this context, later authors such as Armstrong (2012) and Campbell (2013) have revisited Wigan with a fresh lens. They veer away from Orwell's persuasion regarding the stereotypical post-industrial Wigan in their books. Instead, they have recreated narratives around Wigan that align with

contemporary perceptions and expectations of the town by giving voices to the groups who have been excluded in Orwell's work, such as women.

The evidence of the bidirectional influences between persuaders and discoverers further reinforces that, as discussed previously, although persuaders are capable of 'persuading' discoverers by using their more advanced knowledge and skill on storytelling, this persuasion is not authoritarian (Funkhouser, 1999). However, they both draw influences from each other in order to create more believable and relevant place myths. They also have the freedom to rewrite and reread their stories, with neither mythmaker exerting dominance over the other. These dynamic challenges the traditional concept of 'authorship', reinventing the notion that everyone is both the author as well as the reader of the place myths of Wigan. Even a renowned author like George Orwell can only influence or be influenced by other "authors" of the place. This finding undermines Barthes' (1974) assertion that the authors have the authority over the meaning of the stories should be rejected. Stories are made up by a variety of writings and interpretations, and none of which is original and superior; rather, they are drawn from innumerable centres of culture, rather than from one individual or collective will (Barthes, 1987).

Such symbiotic relationship between different mythmakers can be better understood through Perniola's (2004) philosophical and metaphorical reflection on the nature of shadow and shadow making. According to the author:

> "… the shadow does not place itself as an adversary, but, if anything, as the keeper of a knowledge and a feeling which it alone can reach, only to disappear when the full light wants to appropriate it. It implies a deeper experience of conflict than what the institutions and communication can achieve and that is why it believes inevitable the establishment of compromise formations. That is why it does not agree with the

idealization of conflict and victory implicit in the dialectic. For the shadow, winning is impossible and to think of winning is naïve" (xix).

In the shadow creation, victory is an illusion, and the notion of winning is naïve. Indeed, neither persuaders nor discoverers seek to 'win' by overpowering the other. Rather, their interactions, enriched by mutual influences and adaptive learning, function as a symbiotic play, benefiting both mythmakers. Perniola (2004) shows that the wisdom of shadow creation is that when 'full light' tries to dominate, the alternative perspectives will overshadow it. Even the persuaders, represented by institutions or conventional ways of communication, who are commonly considered as more intentional and manipulative (Funkhouser, 1999) must adapt to the 'establishment of compromise formations', taking a back seat, making way for the holistic and harmonious process of shadow creation. This dynamic reveals an evolutionary process of mutual adaptation rather than a hierarchical power play, allowing the fair game of shadow making, and similarly, place mythmaking.

4.4.2 Shifting roles/perspectives of the place brand mythmakers (shadow makers)

The shadowy relationships between different mythmakers are not only evident in their symbiotic relationship, but also embodied by their shifting roles and views. As pointed out by Kaufmann (1975), a uniform perception of a shadow cannot be found, as even one person can view it in different ways. According to the author, "he may look at shadows, into them, or through them" (259). This shows that it is possible for an individual place mythmaker to hold different and sometimes contradictory views on a place (Björnera and Aronsson, 2022). As a

result, their perspectives and roles shift in the process of place mythmaking. This assertion is evident in the comments of a local historian, Gill, who is also employed by the local council:

> "… to use the term capitalism, money will go where money gets the greatest return wanted. So money will be invested where people get the biggest return for their money. The council can only take so much to try and influence and attract investments. Council is making the place a better place to live and improving the quality of life for the people in here… I think, arguably, Wigan's sort of image is still an issue… I do tend to look at it as a bit of an outsider still. I'd like it to be a sort of a different place, a more diverse place. You know, we're still battling good restaurants and things that were worth visiting. It lacks a lot of things, and I understand why it is. But I think people have this sort of aspiration to make the quality of life a bit better. I think that sort of aspiration is lacking. I think one issue is there's like a lot of young people who certainly leave to go to university or whatever. There is no further education college. I think a lot of young people who go away to be educated and don't come back. It's not on the top of their list of places that they want to live… Wigan is an interesting place with an interesting history. But I just think it needs a lift. It needs some kind of investments. Something that's going to get it to start looking for within a bit more outward… The council can do a certain amount, but without a sustainable sort of idea, and without arguably private sector funding or capital investment, not much is going to change. I mean, from our point of view, we're just trying to raise people's understanding of the history of the buildings and the people who lived in them and worked in them, just to try and generate interest in the area and get people to appreciate the buildings. Hopefully, that might provide some small spark to try and start that regeneration. Then

the more people know, and understand about the history of the area, and appreciate the value of the old buildings, I guess, the better."

In this extract, we can see the multifaceted views that Gill has on Wigan. As a consultant commissioned by the local council, he adopts a pragmatic perspective, highlighting concepts such as 'capitalism', 'return', 'investment'. This shows his focus on the economic improvement that the council brings to the town. By attracting increased investment, the council has progressively enhanced the living conditions, and therefore improving overall quality of life. However, when taking a lens of an ordinary resident, and especially an immigrant resident, Gill finds Wigan less desirable to live, due to the long-lasting issues such as lacking of education, cultural diversity, aspiration, and so on. As a local historian, Gill acknowledges Wigan as a place with rich historical and cultural meanings, which unfortunately, most of people are unaware of. Gill believes that it falls upon local historians like himself to educate people about the historical value of the town. Gill's shifting views and roles can also be seen from his usage of pronouns. When discussing the council's project, Gill uses 'the council' as the subject, highlighting the institutional decisions of which he is accountable. When talking about his personal views, he uses 'I' to highlight his individual experiences, which may not align with his institutional role within the council (Andéhn et al., 2020). He also uses 'we' to emphasise the responsibilities he bears as a local historian towards the historian organisation, and the 'imagined community' of the locals (Anderson, 1983; Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008). It can be seen that Gill's roles are overlapping and confusing. Nevertheless, his shifting identities play a crucial role in shaping the place myths surrounding Wigan. His perspectives dynamically fluctuate, adapting to the role he assumes playing within the mythmaking process.

The Lathums is another ideal example of such multifaceted and shifting roles and views of place brand mythmakers. For example, Jude, also a historian and a resident of Wigan, points out:

> "The actual talent pool of the bands in Wigan is really strong. And I'm sure that The Lathums played a significant part in this. Thankfully, these young bands allowed the music scene in Wigan to keep going… I wouldn't have a day trip or a visit to another part of town just to see some places. But now I've walked to those places to have the photo where the album or the single cover was filmed. Like *Fight On* with the kids on the bikes outside the bus station. The band was keen to increase the profile of Wigan, and themselves as a Wigan band. Again, it's just showing the different thing or with the video where the band is walking around Wigan… The nice thing about the band's character was, they were so humble. And so down to earth, not like some other bands… They were just happy enough to enjoy the sunshine. And also, you know that the friends and family had come out there, all the local people were there."

In Jude's narratives, the band emerges as a manifestation of the local music culture (as creators), contributing to the creation of a myth of Wigan embedded in the thriving local indie music scene. They are also perceived as cultural intermediaries (as persuaders), who construct particular images and stories of Wigan through their songs, videos, and lyrics (Kemp et al. 2012). They deliberately harness public perceptions of their hometown, thus establishing a place-dependent brand image of the band for commercial purposes. At the same time, the band is also regarded as ordinary local residents (as discoverers), unintentionally showing others the warmth and kindness of Wigan and Wiganers that have not been seen by many.

The multifaceted and fluid roles of mythmakers can be understood through the dynamic roles of those involved in shadow creation. For example, in his allegory, Plato (514a-520a)

portrays a story in which prisoners (as discoverers) in a cave perceive the shadows cast by soldiers (as persuaders) as the sole reality of the world. However, there is one prisoner who escapes and seeks to understand a different reality outside of the cave, one that he perceives to be distinct from the illusory shadows created by the puppet masters – the soldiers. Upon his return, the escaped prisoner tries to persuade the others about a more accurate reality, one that he sees beyond their shared cave existence. However, other prisoners are not convinced by his interpretations about the world as they are too alien to them. In response, the prisoners attempt to persuade the escaped prisoner that his newfound world is an illusion, and only the projected shadow on the wall is the only truth. This study does not intend to justify which prisoner in Plato's allegory has discovered an absolute reality, and who is escaping from the 'reality' (Jones et al., 2020). However, this allegory is an ideal example that helps explain the shifting and ephemeral perspectives and roles of persuaders and discoverers during the shadow creation process (Perniola, 2004), and similarly, the place mythmaking process. Both the escaped prisoner and his fellow captives shift between the roles of persuaders and discoverers based on their knowledge and experience with 'shadow' and 'reality'. Such a fluid view and position lead to a cyclical dance of assertion and acceptance, where they oscillate between discovering what reality is, and convincing others of their understanding of reality.

Scholars have highlighted the 'playful' nature of shadows, which means they are flexible and subject to change (Gombrich, 2014; Hefner, 2015). The findings in this study further amplify this assertation, proposing that not only the forms of shadows can be played, but also the roles and perspectives of shadow makers. As discussed above, every shadow maker can play different roles, and are permitted different perspectives when playing with shadows. This flexibility enables a spontaneous and non-hierarchical relationship between shadow makers. The shadow maker metaphor resonates with the dynamism of place brand mythmakers identified in this study. Like shadow makers, these mythmakers also interact 'playfully' with

themselves and each other (e.g. local historians, The Lathums) when telling the stories about Wigan. They constantly change their positions and the aspects of the story they wish to engage with. Even though sometimes these positions and views can be contradictory, within the process of mythmaking, like shadow making, these contradictions are allowed to play against each other, rather than being resolved or hidden (Maclaran et al., 1999). These varied and sometimes conflicting roles and perspectives converge within a single mythmaker, contributing to diverse and entangled place myths of the Wigan brand, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

4.5 Summary

Through the utilisation of the theoretical lens of the shadow makers, i.e., shadow creators, shadow persuaders, and shadow discoverers, this chapter examines the characteristics and roles of three different types of mythmakers in constructing the place myths of the Wigan brand, as well as the shadowy relationships between them. Creators refer to the essential elements (sociocultural setting in the case of Wigan) necessary for the formation of the place brand myths. Persuaders are the mythmakers with more advanced knowledge and skills, often possessing a stronger intention to shape and influence the meanings of place brand myths. In contrast, discoverers are the ones generally less intentional in mythmaking, but often come up with alternative interpretations of place brand myths based on their personal experiences and reflections.

Despite their divergent and sometimes conflicting roles and views, the data has also shown the shadowy relationships between the mythmakers. This chapter suggests that place brand mythmaking, like shadow making, is not a game of ‘winning’. As such, there is no consummate mythmaker, as they are different, but interdependent (Impett, 2008). Even the

‘persuasive’ place brand authors such as the local council or cultural intermediaries, who are often perceived as authoritative figures in place branding (Björnera and Aronsson, 2022; Coyle and Fairweather, 2005), are affected by the discoverers in order to create place myths that are both relevant and credible. Furthermore, the perspectives of a mythmaker are intricate and they shift over time along with their changing roles in the place brand mythmaking. For example, a persuader can hold a view as a discoverer at the same time. These findings challenge the conventional view that regards conflicts or 'disconnection' as the central focus in the relationships between various place brand stakeholders (Johansson, 2009; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015). The examination of the shadowy relationship reveals that power dynamics is not a prominent feature in the mythmaking process of Wigan. Instead, it is a fair game, akin to a shadow play, that harmoniously and equitably weaves together narratives, actions and characteristics drawn from various elements, individuals and cultures (Perniola, 2004). Therefore, instead of seeing different place brand mythmakers as isolated or hostile, the study argues that they can be compared to the relationship between shadow makers as symbiotic and fluid.

Chapter 5. Place Brand Mythmaking as Shadow Making

5.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into the place mythmaking process of the Wigan brand – as discussed in the previous chapter – through the lens of the key multi-faceted mythmakers of Wigan, The Lathums. Through the analysis of various data sets, the study identifies various phases in which different versions of the Wigan myth are created, reconstructed, and deconstructed by different types of place mythmakers (namely, creators, persuaders, and discoverers). The findings show that Wigan's place myths occur when multiple place mythmakers create, manipulate, discover, and reconstruct different versions of the myth, resulting in the multifaceted and dynamic stories about the place. As the study explores different phases of Wigan's mythmaking process, it becomes evident that the resulting place brand myths are not static, but rather constantly evolving in response to the interactions between different mythmakers. As such, to better understand the elusive and ambiguous nature of place mythmaking of the Wigan brand, this study draws on the metaphor of shadow making, highlighting the inherent subjectivity and complexity of constructing and deconstructing the place myths of Wigan (shadows) (Trafford, 2008).

Expanding on the metaphor of place brand mythmaking as shadow making, this chapter draws on the three different phases of shadow making as the conceptual and analytical framework for the analysis of the place mythmaking process of the Wigan brand (See Figure 5.1.). Section 5.1 uses the metaphor of shadow projection to understand the mythologising process of Wigan – the creation of place myths of Wigan can be seen as the casting of shadows over the illuminated objects (Gombrich, 2014). In Section 5.2, the shadow distortion metaphor is used to describe the remythologising process of Wigan – just as the shape, colour and

meaning of shadows can be distorted compared to the objects they project on (Perniola, 2004), place myths of Wigan can also be distorted, blurring the boundary between fantasy and reality, absence and presence of the place. In Section 5.3, a shadow illusion metaphor is used to demonstrate the demythologising process of Wigan myths – just as a shadow illusion can create a misleading image of an object, or it can vanish into 'nothingness' (Odin, 1985; Sorensen, 2008), Wigan myths can also create an illusional image that is not necessarily reflective of reality of the town.

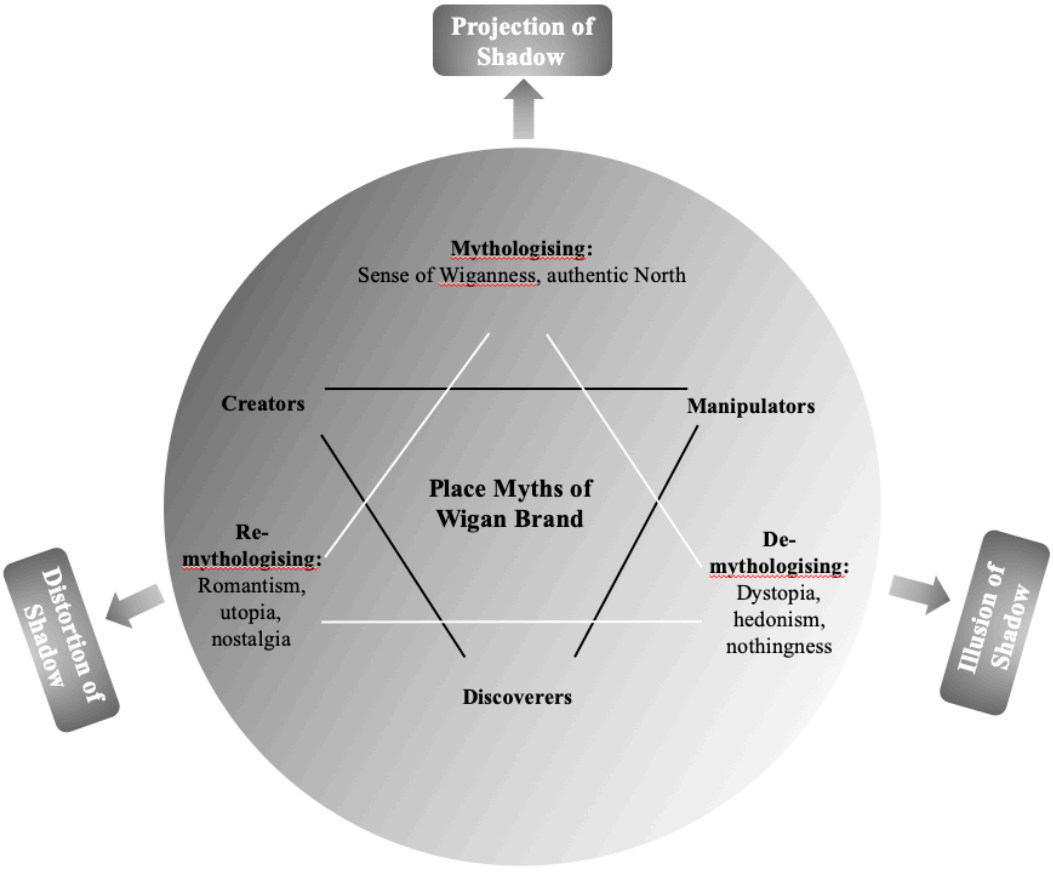


Figure 5.1. Shadowy Perspective of the Place Brand Mythmaking.

5.1 Shadow projection: Mythologising the Wigan brand

Mythologisation refers to the creation of sacred meanings and symbolisms to the well-known things, events, people or place (Zinnatullina and Khabibullina, 2015). Myths cannot be made up – in order to make myths believable and powerful, they need to be embedded in the building, street, people and history in certain cultures (Brown et al., 2013). This is to say that mythical stories cannot be created without the references they draw on. As demonstrated by Schorer (1959), the very essence of mythmaking is creating a story that reflects on the activities, experiences and ideologies in past and present. Such a view of mythologisation echoes with the projection phase of shadow making. Shadows are the dark areas where light is blocked because of an opaque object, a thing, or a person, which are both real and intangible. They can be seen as they project their presence on the landscape and in the atmosphere. The shape, structure and character of shadows are formed based on a projected 'reality' (Johansson, 2012). From this perspective, shadows are relational, and they cannot exist without the things they can cast upon. Similar to the projection phase of shadow making, the findings suggest that Wigan is mythologised through its projection on the sacralised past and present of the North of England and Manchester. The intellectual, public and political views on the past of these places, Wigan's relationship with these territories, as well as the culture, identity and history of these places all become crucial sources for mythologising Wigan.

5.1.1 In the shadow of the mythical North

Deifying the northern root

The place myth of Wigan begins with a ghost story in which the past of the north of England lingers in the present Wigan. The "disjointed, uncanny, other, no-longer or not-quite-there absent presences that 'haunt' the margins of everyday life" (Kindynis, 2019:29) help to

make sense of the town and its portrayal as a place caught between the past of the North and the present of Wigan. As stated in the last section, the industrial decline in the late 20th century has severely damaged the economy of northern England and has led to great deprivation of the region (Shields, 1992). Even today, many places in the North have yet to recover from the prolonged regional economic recession. As a result, it has become a stereotype of the North as a 'land of working class', characterised by deindustrialisation, working-class dress style and tight-knit community (Russel, 2004), all of which are the significant cultural references in mythologising Wigan.

Wigan is seen by many as a deprived post-industrial town that represents the failure of the economic revitalisation of the North. In his book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell (1937/2001) describes his first impression on Wigan as:

> "A world from which vegetation had been banished; nothing existed except smoke, shale, ice, mud, ashes, and foul water" (7), and "the real ugliness of industrialisation" (106).

Later on, the novelist Featherstone (2008) made similar comments after visiting the town, that Wigan:

> "… formed an awful warning of what capitalism, industrialism and its concomitant materialism of cracked pianos could lead to if left unchecked" (85).

Such a depressed urban landscape of Wigan is also captured by The Lathums. In many of the band's music videos and photographs, Wigan is portrayed as a place of depression, desolation, and darkness, represented by the disused factories and warehouses, rows of red-

brick terraced council estates, and bleak town centre (See Figure 5.2.). These videos are generally filmed in sepia, or a black and white tone, giving it a spectral quality, embodying a picture of the post-industrial milieu of the town. Lucy, a leisure tourist from Newcastle, describes the Wigan that she sees through The Lathums' documentary, *Making Memories*:

> "Wigan is a classic industrial town in the North… The warehouse, street, landscape… it's like a mill town, isn't it? The terraced houses, a little canal… It literally looks like Coronation Street."

Figure 5.2. The Lathums, Posing in Front of a Victorian Terraced House in Wigan (Source: 'Making Memories' Documentary).

Lucy associates Wigan with *Coronation Street*, a British TV show that reflects the living conditions and day-to-day experiences of working-class families in a made-up town in Manchester. *Coronation Street* is regarded as the 'early form of reality television' that showcases ordinary people, place and things in the North (and especially the northwest of England) discussed in ordinary accents (Broxton, 2020). Even though Wigan was not the focal point of the show, from Lucy's point of view, the street view of the town captured in the band's videos resonates with the national imagination of the North illustrated in the TV show – at least

the North in a certain era, characterised by Thatcherism, industrial dereliction and depressed urban landscape. It can be seen that while many places in the North have undergone a significant transformation (Russel, 2004), Wigan remains the stereotypical image of the North that has been portrayed by media and novels since the last century. It can be seen that like shadows, the place myth of Wigan is created through the projection of an object (the North in this case). Therefore, the shape and size of the shadow is determined by the position and angle of the light source in relation to the object, as well as the shape and size of the object itself (Johansson, 2012). In a similar way, the meaning of the Wigan myth is based on the history and culture of the North – because of the dark and gloomy 'shape' of the North, Wigan also carries such image through projection.

The history of the North is certainly disappointing and depressing, which also makes Wigan, a town located in the north of England stigmatised. However, rather than removing or denying, some mythmakers of Wigan celebrate and deify such stigmatised image and story of the North, and also use them as essential elements to mythologise Wigan. For instance, The Lathums are known for their symbolic working-class attire such as flat caps, braces, workman's jackets and hobnail boots, which have been the classic dress style for working-class men in northern England since the 16th century. Although it is merely the band's on-stage outfit, seeing a band of 20-year-olds dressing up like an old-fashioned industrial worker can be seen as the demonstration of Wiganers' tribute to their northern roots. As James, a 19-year-old local resident from Wigan, explains:

> "You won't see people wearing a flat cap in Wigan, especially not the youngsters. I think the band just wears it on the stage… But you can see the band is very proud of their working-class root. I know a lot of people are not bothered by their root anymore, but we do and it makes us humble and down to the earth… We want to

keep what we've got. We want to keep that sort of northern working-class spirit. That is powerful but I don't think it's appreciated… because the North is stigmatised… As I said, I am a bit arrogant but I just think the North means so much. There are so many better places, but if you ask me, I am going to say the North is the best place ever."

Through James's narratives, we can see that the mythical North that Wigan draws on is not merely its bleak urban landscape, but also the entrenched northern working-class community. Instead of hiding the unpleasant memories and images of the North, Wigan and Wiganers like The Lathums and James respect their northern working-class roots, and enshrine it into a 'spirit' that makes the town and its people humble and grounded.

In Morton's book, *In Search of England*, after his visit to Wigan, the author describes Wigan as "an old-fashioned country town" (2000: 153). Morton believes that Wigan is not "a mushroom town that grew up overnight on a coalfield". Instead, it has history, and behind it is its century-long tradition of being loyal to its roots. The author also suggests that Wigan remains part of the 'real northernness' that the superficial modernity has destroyed. This finding is redolent of Johansson's (2012) assertion on the place branding of a Finnish city, Tapiola. The author points out that by keeping the authentic architecture and urban planning in a city, the place develops a 'branded promise' – an assumption that the old architectural and social composition are still the genuine and valuable core to a city.

Even for the younger generation of Wiganers, like The Lathums and James, who are in their 20s and 30s, maintaining the northern image is about remembering one's roots, although sometimes, it may be stigmatised. As Morrison and Schultz (2015) point out, "the occurrence of an extraordinary event in a particular place enriches the progression from enshrining event to national myth and calls for remembrance, tradition, and commemoration" (6). Indeed, Wigan, as a place, carries a particular 'mnemonic resonance' (Morrison and Schultz, 2015) that derives

from the extraordinary historical events, and especially the tragedy of the North. The shared struggle and pain emerged from tragic events embedded in the myth of the North help create a cultural resonance of Wigan, and also transform this small town, or otherwise an unknown place, into a shrine. This finding of the noble working-class community in Wigan resonates with Anderson's (1983) assertion on 'imagined communities' in which people create national or communal consciousness through their imagination. Whether real or fantasised, these communities bond people with similar social remembrance and collective imagination of a place.

Making Wigan an 'authentic' northern town is the key element in mythologising Wigan. By highlighting and retaining the buildings, culture, and memories of the North, Wigan also becomes 'real', and 'authentic'. Like the shadow, Wigan myth is the representation, projection, or resemblance of an illuminated object (the North). Wigan keeps the authenticity of the North by accurately and objectively reflecting on the history, people and things of the North. It is difficult to justify if the projected shadow or the place myth of Wigan is the reality, or merely a simulation, a fake copy of the 'reality' Baudrillard (1994). What is certain is that, as the shadow projected on the wall in Plato's allegory of the cave, this projected place myth of Wigan is believed to be 'authentic' by people who view it, which makes it 'real' and believable (Stoichita, 1997).

Othering the South

The myth of Wigan is not only a projection on the post-industrial and working-class myths of the North, it is also embedded in the regional division between the northern and southern parts of England – the so-called 'north-south divide' (Baker and Billinge, 2009; Jewell, 1994). Data reveals that the profound north-south divide myth is a crucial element in the mythical story of Wigan. As recalled by a diasporic resident, Poppy:

> "I moved from Wigan to Cambridge with my mum a couple of years ago… My family said, "Oh, you are posh, aren't you? You are speaking with a posh accent now." So I felt alien… The Lathums have got that kind of Wigan accent, haven't they? When they speak, you know they are proper northerners… I understand why people from Wigan don't want to move to the South… That's a stereotype for a lot nicer up North. When you go down South. Where do you ever get down there is like, you know, you just sort of say you smile at people in the streets and that sort of friendliness doesn't seem to be as prominent. I know that up North is sort of working class, but people are more friendly and real there, that's it. That's the Lathums, isn't it?"

Poppy's story shows that the national north-south divide is not merely a geographical division between two regions, but also a cultural discrimination between different customs and identities. As demonstrated in the narrative of Poppy, her accent, for instance, is regarded as a significant indicator to distinguish Wiganers/northerners ('us') from southerners ('them') (Mazierska, 2018). By sounding like 'proper northerners', The Lathums receive credibility for representing a northern town. On the contrary, Poppy feels alienated from her Wigan family because of her southern accent. As a northerner/Wiganer with southern accent, or moving to the South, it is seen as a betrayal to her northern/Wigan family. Furthermore, the north-south divide is also evident in the interpretations of the place-dependent characteristics (Nevarez, 2013). In the previous section, the study revealed how Wigan or the North is described as a depressing place by the media and authors who are predominantly based in the South (Baker and Billinge, 2004). However, in the eyes of Wiganers like Poppy and her family, Wigan and the North as a whole is seen as friendly and real, which is in contrast to the posh and arrogant South.

The hostility and resistance towards the South accounts for the essential part of the myth of the North, and therefore the myth of Wigan. This finding resonates with the Jungian study of 'shadow projection' – a self-defence mechanism where an individual unconsciously projects their own negative traits, feelings, or behaviours onto others (Jung, 1958). This can happen when an individual is not aware of or not willing to accept certain aspects of themselves, such as their own negative emotions, fears, insecurities, or moral failings. Instead of acknowledging and dealing with these aspects of themselves, they attribute them to others, which can lead to feelings of blame, criticism, or judgment towards those around them (Casement, 2012). In the case of this study, because Wigan still struggles to overcome from the economic depression and high unemployment rate, people who are from and still live in Wigan, like Poppy's family, project the blame onto others – the South in this case – and perceive them as arrogant and responsible for the pain that themselves and their beloved town suffers. In doing so, whether consciously or unconsciously, they preserve a positive image and dignity of Wigan and themselves.

Through the narrative of Poppy, we can see the spatial mythology of Wigan projecting onto the 'dark side' of the northern identity that is based on territorial divisions, ideological differentiations, and spatialised identities (Essebo, 2019). This finding resonates with Shields' (1991) contention that place myth is formed by the difference and contradiction within a place that reinforces a position that polarises and dichotomises different places. Through reflecting and drawing on such binarism (i.e. the North and the South, the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders', posh and real), contradiction and confliction that are originated from the myth of the North, Wiganers also create a dramatic and appealing myth to their hometown. It can be seen that because of the cultural, social, political and economic differences between northern and southern England, the South has been regarded as the 'other' place by Wiganers (Baker and Billinge, 2009).

According to Kaufmann (1972), "shadows that overlie the objects creating them… give the effect of relief. Shadows cast by one object on to another make the objects seem to stand out, and help us to locate them in space" (258). As a shadow being created through the projection on an object, the place myth of Wigan is formed through the reflection on the North, characterised by its tragic history, pain and struggle, working-class community and hostility to the South. While these clichés of the North keep lingering in the current landscape and people of Wigan, they are also crucial cultural references in making Wigan mythical. By carrying and sharing these stories of the North, Wigan also becomes related, remembered, celebrated, and ultimately mythologised. As such, the place myth of Wigan and the North become indistinguishable and inseparable, and they affect and complete one another.

5.1.2 In the shadow of the 'great' Manchester

Projecting onto the mythical Manchester

The place myth of Wigan is formed through not only the projection on the myth of the North, characterised by the tragic history, working-class community, and regional divide, but also the reflection on the mythical stories of Manchester. As discussed previously, Wigan used to belong to the historic county of Lancashire, and is now is classified as a part of the county of Greater Manchester. Geographically, Wigan lies 20 miles to the northwest of Manchester. The geographical location and administration partition of Wigan has led to its deep affinity with Manchester. One of the most salient examples is the town's close association with the music scene of Manchester, which is evident in The Lathums constantly being "mistakenly" labelled as a 'Manchester band' (BBC, 2022).

Although Wigan is renowned for being a hub of live music, represented by influential music scenes such as Northern Soul, Donk and indie rock, it is still overshadowed by the

flourishing music scene in Manchester. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the early 1960s, by using independent production and promotion resources and networks to fight against the established record labels based in the South (especially London), a great number of Manchester 'indie' bands (i.e. Joy Division, The Smiths, The Stone Roses, Oasis) have gained enormous economic and commercial success across the country and the world (Russell, 2004). Indeed, indie music has generated a great level of pride and fame for Manchester, as well as the north of England, which used to be despised and mocked by the financially developed South. Due to the commercial success and international reputation the Manchester bands have received, it is common for young indie rock bands to draw on the influences from these highly influential bands. The Lathums are no exception. The band has openly claimed the big influence that those legendary Manchester bands have on them (BBC, 2021). Music critics also agree that the music style of The Lathums is highly influenced by the iconic Manchester indie bands in the 1980s and '90s, such as The Smiths and The Stone Roses. As commented by Apple Music:

> "Jangly, jittery and wise beyond their years, The Lathums belong to a great lineage of erudite British indie bands. Echoes of The Smiths' clever guitar pop… spiky, whip-smart rock ripple through the Wigan band's sharp, swaggering blend of youthful bluster and world-weary philosophy" (Apple Music, 2022).

As a satellite town of Greater Manchester, Wigan naturally shares the fame and resources that Manchester has received. The Lathums is merely one example of how Wigan benefits from being associated with a culturally meaningful city. It is believed by the fans of the band that although The Lathums' musical talent cannot be overlooked, it is also a fact that being close to or part of the Manchester music scene, where English indie music originates, does bring extra 'credibility' to an indie band. For some participants, such 'credibility' is also

applicable to the band's hometown Wigan – a kind of legitimation to the town as a birthplace to the 'real' indie bands, embedded in the authentic indie music roots and ethos that many music fans appreciate (Lashua et al., 2009). As Ann, a cultural tourist and also a self-defined indie fan, argues:

> "Manchester is a city that's been a cultural hub for indie music and has produced many influential bands and artists who have helped shape the genre. Manchester is a pilgrimage place for indie fans like me… As Wigan is a town near Manchester, I suppose it adds some sort of value to Wigan bands like The Lathums… I don't mean indie bands are only from Manchester, but it is true that most of the real indie bands are from that area."

Not only the significant cultural influences, Manchester has also brought political and commercial inspirations to Wigan. For instance, when discussing the town centre revitalisation scheme of Wigan, Tommy, a former employee of Wigan Council, and also a permanent resident in Wigan, states:

> "Manchester has had a degree of economic development, and there are a lot of things Wigan could learn from… There were certain things Wigan Council could do… I've also seen some successful examples… You look at Manchester city centre, and some of the independent shops there. We're only 20 miles away. There are a lot more pop-up stalls, or some creative strategies to get people into the town to get spending. You know, it shouldn't be impossible for Wigan to become next Manchester."

Manchester is seen by participants as a ‘big brother’, or a ‘great neighbour’ that Wigan can culturally, politically and financially ‘learn from’. The findings show that many participants think Wigan is part of Manchester, with a shared image and ‘vibe’. For instance, Jenny, a cultural tourist, describes her impression of Wigan:

> “I went to Wigan for The Lathums’ gig once. That's when I saw Wigan for the first time in my life… I'm not so sure what Wigan is famous for. I honestly thought The Lathums was from Manchester before I went to Wigan… It (Wigan) is near Manchester, and it’s got a similar kind of vibe to Manchester… You know, the music, the football, the buildings…”

The music scene, football culture and industrial architecture that are commonly seen in Manchester are used by Jenny as references to describe the place myth of Wigan. This shows that, similar to the projection onto the North, Wigan is also a shadow of Manchester, reflecting and amplifying the culture, people and things of the city. However, while enjoying the fame and reputation brought by being in the shadow of a well-known city, such affinity with Manchester has also become troublesome for Wigan. Compared to the iconic Manchester, Wigan, along with other satellite towns of Greater Manchester, remains unrecognised. By living in the shadow of the ‘big brother’, Wigan becomes a, as pointed out by participants, ‘forgotten’, ‘hidden’ and ‘insignificant’ town that people rarely know or talk about. Ultimately, the name of Wigan is replaced by just ‘somewhere near Manchester’. Jack, a fan of The Lathums, and also a local permanent resident, claims:

> “People will always talk about Manchester… Nobody else thinks about Wigan and our culture as we are only a little town… We've just always been drawn to

> Manchester… and it drew me into the music scene… [Manchester] represents where we're from and what we're about. So we're probably 20 miles away from Manchester. Wigan is classed as Manchester, Greater Manchester… I'll always just choose to go to Manchester for a night out or shopping just because things there are so much better and busier… what they've got is so much more than what we have."

Represented by the indie music scene and shopping experience, Jack reveals the pain and struggle that a little town like Wigan suffers. As a satellite town of a metropolitan, it is hard for Wigan to stand out. Such a situation of Wigan echoes Shields' (1992) observation on 'place on the margin' – somewhere has been left behind in the modern world. The author argues that such marginal status of a place does not necessarily refer to its geographical periphery, but it is a periphery of the 'central' cultural system that is ranked through social activity and imagination. From this perspective, Wigan can be considered as a marginal place in which its identity, culture, or history are highly affected by that of the 'dominant' Manchester. Like a shadow, the place myth of Wigan is shaped and defined by the projection onto the shape, colour and atmosphere of Manchester.

Due to its position and status as a small town existing in the shadow of the 'great' Manchester, Wigan can be understood as a 'shadowland' – a conflict zone or a forgotten continent that can be difficult to see and accessed generally due to long-term colonisation or political conflicts (Wulf, 2016). From a geographical perspective, Wigan is neighbouring a big and well-known city, Manchester. Politically speaking, Wigan is part of the Greater Manchester. As a small town, Wigan exists behind the shadow of the 'great' Manchester in a place that is difficult to shine due to the lack of sunlight. In this shadowland, the fame, reputation and story of the town are projected on that of Manchester. It is certainly beneficial for a small place like Wigan to be associated with a big city like Manchester, even if only

hiding behind its shadow. However, the common struggle for shadowlands is that in the long run, its own identity is often fiercely contested or forgotten (Wulf, 2016), and Wigan is no exception.

Despite the identity dilemma brought by Wigan's affinity with its 'big brother' Manchester, it is undeniable that Manchester still acts as a key component or reference in the Manchester-based Wigan myth. This shows that place mythmaking is similar to the shadow-making process – shadows cannot be formed without the concrete objects they cast upon (Gombrich, 2014); in a similar way, place myth cannot be created and resonated without the cultural, social and historical references they draw on.

5.2 Shadow distortion: Re-mythologising the Wigan brand

The previous section discussed how the Wigan myth is created in relation to the collective imagination and memory of the England North, as well as the stereotypical image, story and culture of Manchester. While the previous section revealed how the place myth of Wigan is built upon the projection on the collectively created grand stories of the North and Manchester, this section will focus on how such place myth of Wigan can be redefined and reintroduced through people's everyday story, memory and imagination. According to Johansson (2012:3622), re-mythologisation is a "dialectical exercise between opening up new possibilities and observing historical limits". The remythologising process of the Wigan brand resonates with the second phase of the shadow metaphor – distortion. Shadow distortion refers to the deviation from the expected shape or appearance of a shadow caused by the influence of external factors that can interfere with the formation of shadows such as the shape, size, or position of the light source, the surface material, or the presence of obstructions (Kite, 2017). This is to say that shadows are not merely projections of the objects they cast on; they can also

be distorted and sometimes reversed, depending on the time and angle we look at them (Kite, 2017). In line with such characters of shadows, this section emphasises that place brand myth is also a changing concept that is continuously formed and reformed by time, space and our everyday life and practice (Esseso, 2019).

5.2.1 Illuminating the darkness of shadows

As a town in the North, as discussed previously, Wigan has long been associated with the stereotype of being insular and parochial due to its long-lasting working-class community and culture. However, for many, such story in relation to the industrial period of Wigan is bygone, which is replaced by a Wigan that is thriving. As the local historian organisation, *Wigan Archaeological Society*, comments:

> "Outsiders think of Wigan as a grim northern town noted for coal mines, cotton mills, cobbled streets, rugby league and, of course, Wigan Pier. Possibly this image had some validity when applied to the town as it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But, where once there were at least 1000 mines within in a 5-mile radius of the town centre, none remain. Many of the old sites and associated railways are nature conservation areas and pleasant pathways" (Morris, 2009).

Similarly, Wigan Council (2022) describes the town on its official website as:

> "Metropolitan Wigan – an area where the best northern traditions of neighbourliness and a warm welcome die hard, yet where the old myths of industrial drabness have finally been laid to rest."

In order to completely lay to rest "the old myths of industrial drabness" in Wigan, the local council has also undertaken a series of actions: redeveloping the high street in the town centre, revitalising the abandoned buildings on King Street for building an entertainment hub, converting the Wigan Pier area into a cultural hub for helping start-up companies and boosting artistic and cultural activities, investing into education sector and making the town appealing to younger generation. Through these revitalisation schemes and plans, Wigan has become, or will soon become, an ideal place to live, work, and visit. As pointed out by the council (2022):

> "Wigan is an attractive place to live, has excellent connectivity via the rail network, a performing education system, and strong health and social care sectors. The town has a successful industrious history and therefore experiences net migration in the borough as a result… residents are proud, loyal and hard-working individuals."

Not only with the local council, but such a romantic view of Wigan is also captured by The Lathums in their music videos, such as *I'll Get By* and *How Beautiful Life Can Be*. Through the music videos, the band tends to portray a Wigan with no pain and struggles: drag queens, teenage figure skaters, disabled elderlies, and foreign bodybuilders can all dance, sing and live together happily in the town; the stallholders in Wigan Market come from different parts of the world, providing people with balloons, flowers and sweets. A vibrant, inclusive and thriving Wigan is recognisable in these videos (See Figure 5.3.).

Figure 5.3. Alex, The Lead Singer, Joyfully Dancing with a Shop Owner at Wigan Market (Source: *How Beautiful Life Can Be*, Official Video).

In response to this type of image of Wigan created by The Lathums, some participants also described Wigan as a 'friendly', 'tolerant', and 'free' town. For example, James, a permanent resident in Wigan, comments on the video *I'll Get By*:

> "One thing I will say is, Wigan, the youngsters of Wigan like The Lathums, because I can't speak for the older generation, the youth of Wigan is very, very open and accepting. This is exactly how Wigan is… Good, friendly people… I don't think it's predominantly, like, not phenomenally white; It's a nice mix… It's very, very diverse here, you can see all the different cliques. And I say cliques, that's quite an American term, but you know, all the different groups and sub-cultures about… I've not met a single homophobic, transphobic, anti-woman, you know, anything. I could genuinely walk out in a skirt. I can walk out in a skirt and no one's going to look at me. Because that's just what people are like here… There's nothing. There's no like racism, just like that. We don't care what you're like; at the end of the day, you are just another person. There's barely any crime as well. Around my area anyways. You know, it's quite safe Genuinely. We don't get break-ins. We don't get like threats, kidnapping, no serious

things happen around here.… We're all. We're all Wiganers. We're all happy. We're all friendly, we'll talk to talk to you. So it is really, really good to live around here especially because there's loads of nature in Wigan as well that you wouldn't expect."

It can be seen that Wigan is not only associated with the bleak and stigmatised industrial image, through the stories told by The Lathums; it is also regarded by many as a town in which residents, visitors, and small business owners all live in harmony, regardless of their age, class, race and nationality. The binarism, conflicts and struggle are compromised and everyone lives in peace, happiness and satisfaction. In fact, a report published by the Wigan Council reported in 2020 that Wigan is not a highly ethnically diverse area, with over 97% of its population identifying as white (Wigan Council, 2022). Despite this, James portrays a Wigan with a monocultural environment. Such a romantic view of Wigan does not merely come from local residents, but also tourists, even the ones who have never been to Wigan. Angie, for example, an armchair tourist of Wigan, quotes a few lines in The Lathums' song *How Beautiful Life Can Be* when she describes her fantasy of Wigan:

Out in the garden
A bumblebee buzzes by my nose
All the while, the kettle's boiled
Forgot my toast, these serve as reminders
Of what really matters most
Just how beautiful life can be

Angie especially refers to the a cappella version of the song, with emphasis on its relaxed tune, catchy lyrics and sophisticated a cappella skill of the band. For some of the mythmakers of the place like Angie, Wigan is a town that is not merely a geographical

destination, but an ‘achieved utopia’ where everything becomes possible and anything can be achieved through people’s imagination (Baudrillard, 1994). Through the eyes of The Lathums and Angie, they see the kindness, warmth and inclusiveness of a small, friendly town.

For the local council, The Lathums, as well as many local residents, tourists, Wigan is seen as a place where social harmony and perfection are achieved (Maclaran et al., 1999). Such perception of Wigan is in contrast to the entrenched stereotype of Wigan as a depressing and deprived post-industrial town renowned for its high crime rate, social exclusivity and spatial division. What is identified here is a ‘romanticised past’ of Wigan (Lichrou et al., 2017), a reconstructed place myth, characterised by inclusivity and harmony. This finding shows that like shadows, place brand myths can also be ‘distorted’ – the ‘shape’ of place myth of Wigan is altered from a post-industrial town to a utopia. Under certain conditions, place brand myths can be reformed and rebranded into something different – something that blurs the boundary of absent and present, light and dark, reality and imagination in a landscape (Maddrell, 2013). As a result of such distortion, the new dimensions of ‘reality’, for example, a utopian Wigan, are unfolded, subverting our entrenched attitude and belief (Ricoeur, 2004).

No matter how well the story about Wigan is remade and retold, however, the problems and conflicts in Wigan are still present. The myth of Wigan is always inevitably associated with the remnants of the place’s past (Goulding et al., 2018). “Glossy on the outside of a castle” is how a participant described such a dual image of Wigan (see Figure 5.3.). Under the glossy paint of flowers, laughter and a pantisocracy, the town is a rundown castle with enduring and unsolvable social issues and financial struggles. Below is an excerpt of my field notes recorded during the field trip in Wigan:

> “This is the first time I visited Wigan on a sunny day, which somehow brings a completely different vibe to the town. I saw luxury cars racing with their roofs down,

people sitting on the pave way of the high street drinking cocktails, chatting, laughing and sun bathing, which are accompanied by the chilled live music performed by street musicians, many boutique shops selling cakes, toys, pies and flowers… At some point, I had a mirage that I was touring in Paris or Rome, or any world-famous tourist destination that is sunny, beautiful and historical… My daydream was interrupted when I saw rows of rows of terraced council estates just on the edge of the town centre. Many of them were abandoned or in disrepair, which was very depressing… Teenagers were wandering on the track near the buildings with beers on a weekday… Lots of old and also modern buildings with sophisticated design and décor were left empty and waiting for being rented out… It is a dead town, but sugar-coated."

This excerpt reveals that the utopian view of Wigan is only a dream, as the 'real' Wigan is still a representation of unsavable social issues and post-industrial dilemmas. Such mismatch between how Wigan is imagined and how it really looks is also evident in Armstrong's (2012) book, *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*. The author also visited Wigan on a sunny day. He saw a similar scene to the one I observed – people were enjoying the glorious sun while drinking outside in the middle of the town square. On his arrival, the author met his interviewee, Bob, in a local pub, and he quoted Bob's words:

"Wigan's alright… there's lots of people here who don't like the cloth caps and Whippet image Orwell's book gave us. The town's not that bad – all the two-ups and two-downs have gone, the air's clean. It's alright. [He paused, thought, shrugged.] I mean… it's getting worse. You see more shops boarded up every day."

The Wigan seen by Armstrong and his participant, Bob, was sunny, pleasant and clean. However, in both the author's writing and the participant's comments, the complaint and

concern about the social issues in Wigan are just hidden underneath. It shows that the utopian myth of Wigan is not entirely true, yet it is deliberately created. This is a compensation of the flawed reality, and also a reflection of how a world should be like (Roux and Belk, 2019). Similar to shadow distortions, the reconstruction of a place brand myth can occur for a variety of reasons. One of the most common ones, especially in the art world, includes creating more desired images. Shadow distortion can have an impact on the perceived depth, shape and volume of objects, and can also affect the overall visual quality and realism of a scene (Ruskin, n.d.). Through various techniques such as adjusting the colour, size, and shape of a shadow, artists are able to create more desired images and meanings of their artwork (Kaufmann, 1975). Similarly, by reinterpreting and reconstructing the stereotypical image of the town, a more civilised and purified Wigan is also created by the local council, residents, tourists and other mythmakers. In this sense, Wigan is not a typical 'utopian destination' such as Shangri-la and Arcadia, which emphasise the poetic and literary form of an idealised society; it is more accurate to treat Wigan as 'emancipatory utopia' that accounts for the functional and critical perspective of an idealised society in order to challenge the unsatisfactory social conditions and long for a better world (Maclaran et al., 1999; Maclaran and Brown, 2005). Such interpretation of Wigan also resonates with what Michel Foucault (1967/1986) conceptualises as 'heterotopias' – worlds within worlds – or the 'other places' that are built to resist the dominant values and practices. They are the mirrors of the unsatisfied outside world but also distinguish themselves from that.

The finding shows that cultural artefacts such as The Lathums' videos, books and travel notes about Wigan propose alternative ways of deciphering and mythologising Wigan. Through these cultural representations of the town combined with their personal stories, people reimagine and reintroduce the myth of Wigan as inclusive and harmonious. Whilst maintaining the 'authenticity' of Wigan, they also enrich the place myth of Wigan by adding imagined

elements into the storyline, and therefore make Wigan multifaceted, and open to various interpretations and possibilities. Here, Wigan is half real, half fanaticised, half present, half future, half dark, half bright (Smith, 1997), and it is for the audience to decide what to see and believe. As pointed by the French philosopher Louis Marin (1984), utopia is a practice of 'spatial play' between affirmation and negation. It is a space of neutrality, allowing chaos, conflict and closure, and therefore paradoxical views are allowed to 'play' out against each other. As we can see, Wigan cannot be merely understood as an 'achieved utopia' with ultimate freedom, equality and harmony (Baudrillard, 1994). Rather, it is an ongoing process of being and becoming, in which the contradictory elements in the same spatial and social context coexist. In this utopian Wigan, the band, fans, local residents and tourists are allowed to 'play' with their imagination on what Wigan is and would become, as the boundary between true and false, reality and fantasy blurs.

Although Wigan is often considered as a typical working-class town that projects upon people's imagination on the north of England, the finding shows that such entrenched Wigan myth can be distorted and embellished depending on what is absent and present. When remythologising Wigan, the dark and unpleasant history of the place is absent and forgotten. What is present is nostalgia, happiness, intimacy and harmony people romantically create or imagine. As such, Wigan becomes a nostalgic town with intimate social relations and idyllic scenery and lifestyle, or an emancipatory utopia in which different cultures, traditions and perspectives blend and evolve into new cultures and identities (Wulf, 2016). In his work *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre draws on a shadow metaphor to explain his concepts of freedom, and self-awareness. For Sartre, the shadow represents the part of the self that is formed by external factors such as social norms, expectations, and that is not fully owned by the individual. However, Sartre (2021) also believes that individuals have a fundamental freedom to make their own choices and to shape their own shadow selves. Acknowledging and embracing the

shadow self is an important step in taking ownership of one's self, and it is essential for achieving authenticity and freedom. Returning to the story of Wigan, we can see a Wigan that redefines and reshapes its shadow self that is embedded in the unpleasant memory and image. Instead, they embrace the past, but also make a conscious and active choice on how they want to present the shadow self to the world.

Such a re-mythologising process of the place brand myth of Wigan resonates with Kerrigan et al.'s (2012) observation on the idealised and romanticised picture of a multifaceted India created through a national branding campaign. It also echoes Thompson and Tian's (2008) analysis on the reconstruction of the stigmatised identity of the South (US) through commercial mythmaking. However, in the case of Wigan, the place brand myth is organically recreated and negotiated through people's imagination, emotion and experience in everyday life, rather than being purposely reconstructed through commercial activities and campaigns. Like shadows, the place brand myths of Wigan can be distorted and reimagined: shadows that originate at the threshold of the known and unknown, the subjective and objective, and the absent and present, their shapes and meanings are not definite and fixed, but fluid and ever-changing. What was seen as a shadow – an insignificant dark spot that is merely the appendage of the 'real' object and is easily neglected – can also be overturned and be treated as a piece of art with its own beauty (Tanizaki, 2001).

5.2.2 Reinforcing the beauty of shadows

"Wigan's biblical"

Kaufmann (1975) points out that although shadows are usually identifiable by other clues such as the shape and colour of other objects, they also can be interpreted differently –

considering shadows as dark areas may be superficial, as they may also be regarded as separate and luminous patterns or objects rather than as projected by illuminating. Similarly, with the distortion of the light source or human eyes, Wigan, often considered a ‘shadowland’ of Manchester (Wulf, 2016), can also be seen as a hidden gem with its own unique glory. The data reveals that despite the benefits brought by being close to a big city, Wigan’s defiance towards Manchester is also predominant. For instance, The Lathums highlighted several times in their interviews that they were from Wigan, not Manchester, after they were frequently called a Manchester band. As James, a Lathums fan from Wigan, says:

> "Although we are technically part of Greater Manchester, Wigan is its own place and The Lathums is definitely a Wigan band, not a Manchester band."

Such differentiation between Wigan and Manchester is also made by Wigan Council in the manifesto of the revitalisation scheme of Wigan town centre. According to the council (2022):

> “The town centre must aspire to be distinctive to succeed and differentiate itself from other Greater Manchester (‘GM’) towns.”

Indeed, despite being a small town, Wigan is also a hidden gem with its distinct history, culture and identity. Wigan is believed by many, and especially the ones from Wigan, as a place with local pride. The local pride of Wigan is particularly evident in the magnificent historic buildings in the town centre, which are also captured in many videos of The Lathums. For example, Wigan Market Hall, which has been the main trade centre for local people since the 19th century, was used as the location for the band's rehearsal studio, debut album releasing,

and documentary shooting. Similarly, the iconic Wigan Pier, which is synonymous with Wigan for many people because of George Orwell's novel, has also been captured in the band's videos. Flynn, an independent historian who has visited Wigan a few times, comments on the architecture in the town:

> "The Victorian buildings here are gems… You know, the mining, college that's the town hall in its brick and terracotta, particularly on the odd sunny day, they just look amazing. Some of those buildings are just beautiful… And the theatre on King Street is stunning… Arcade is also a beautiful shopping centre that, if it was somewhere like Bath or Chelsea, or Oxford Street or Bond Street, people would rave about it. And it does have a lot of hidden gems here… The fact is, most of those buildings are still here because the town wasn't bombed in World War Two; that's the difference in Manchester in London and Birmingham. A lot of those buildings aren't there because they were destroyed, whereas Wigan was untouched."

Figure 5.4. The Majestic Wigan Town Hall on King Street.

On King Street, Wigan's main street located in the heart of the town centre, many listed buildings, such as the Grade II listed Royal Court Theatre and Wigan town hall, can be found. Figure 5.4. shows a picture I took during my fieldwork in Wigan. It was a beautiful sunny day when I visited King Street, where an array of heritage-listed buildings were standing there, telling the profound and marvellous stories about Wigan. These grand buildings transported me, creating an illusion as if I was wandering in Manchester or London. The history of these buildings can be traced back to the 1900s. Although many of them have been demolished or abandoned, the sophisticated exterior design of the buildings still remains. A five-minute walk from King Street, there is Market Hall, originally built in 1877 for continuing the town's century-long market culture. The old Market Hall was demolished in 1988 and rebuilt as a part of the shopping complex, Galleries. The original building of the market cannot be seen, but Wiganers are still proud of the culture and history of the market. The Lathums and local historians still consider these historical buildings as cultural gems today, even compared to Manchester.

According to the participants, what makes Wigan not a shadow town to Manchester is not merely limited to the local magnificent Victorian buildings, there are more stories about Wigan they can tell. The local music venue Wigan Casino was widely recognised as the mecca for Northern Soul music in the 1970s (Maconie, 2008); the local band The Verve was considered one of the greatest English rock bands in the 1990s; the small but plucky local football team won the FA Cup, beating Manchester City in the 2000s; the local rugby team, Wigan Warriors, maintained as the winner of almost every major rugby competition; and the renowned Wigan Pier attracted thousands of families and schoolchildren and won no fewer than 23 national awards for the best museums and associated tourist attractions (The Independent, 2003). Even today, the emergence and the success of the local music band The Lathums have again proven a proud Wigan that attracts tourists from different parts of the

country to visit the town. For example, Chris, an 'immigrant resident', shared a story about his friends from Glasgow travelling six hours to come and watch The Lathums in Wigan. As Chris comments:

> "People are wanting to come to Wigan just because of this band and the place where they are from… Of course, I'm biased and all towns have their own identities. But we do have something in Wigan. It has been a long time since Wigan has been heard again. Now I can tell my friends in London that Wigan can do things, things that matter."

Similarly, Caroline, a 'diasporic resident' and also a fan of The Lathums, states:

> "We don't really produce famous people or things in Wigan, but when Wigan is good, it's very, very good. Even Liam Gallagher said on his social media, 'Wigan's biblical'… I love that saying… I can see how much better Wigan does make people's identities, and the number of things we've had, you know, in the 1970s and '80s… I can see why people would feel like that."

"Wigan's biblical", a comment made by Liam Gallagher – the lead singer of the legendary Manchester band Oasis – who has significantly affected English indie bands, including The Lathums, after his album shooting in Wigan. Many participants refer to Liam's comment when describing the town. For them, Wigan is not simply an unknown town existing in the shadow of Manchester; it can be as great and holy as the Bible. It is a hidden gem with its own charm and glory. As demonstrated by Edensor and Hughes (2021:1315), "shadows can also take on wildly distorted shapes that diminish the presence of the object that they reflect".

The finding of a biblical Wigan promotes 'a shift of agency' that shadows determine the shape and structure of themselves, which is in contrast to the traditional view that shadows are merely appendages to the objects that they project on (Reinhardt, 2014).

Indeed, with the 'distorted' place myth of a biblical town, Wigan can no longer be seen as an unknown place existing in the shadow of Manchester, but it overshadows the aura of the big city that they project on. However, what is also interesting to see is that despite Wigan not being seen as merely a subordinate of Manchester, the reference on the 'biblical Wigan' is still made by a Manchurian band. This finding shows that even for distorted shadows with their 'agency', they cannot be formed without the objects they project on (Kaufmann (1975). In a similar way, the place brand myth may sometimes appear differently from the references they reflect on, but they are inseparable.

The birth of the local hero archetypes

Archetypes are the symbols (i.e. images, characters, figures, events, settings) that are solidified in people's minds, and are universally shared and believed by people across different cultural and social backgrounds. Jung (1958) states that archetypes are embedded in the collective consciousness of human beings and evoke shared memories, experiences and relations. Such actions and emotions not only express one's dreams or unconsciousness, but also contribute to the more consciously and collectively constructed myths. It has been widely discussed by marketing scholars that archetype is the key component for creating powerful and long-lasting marketplace myths (Brown et al., 2013; Stern, 1993).

Whether ancient or modern, western or eastern, a hero is one of the most commonly seen archetypes in cultural myths. Examples include superheroes in the American myth, King Arthur in the British myth, Odysseus in the Greek myth. In the place myth of Wigan, several iconic figures are enshrined as the local hero archetypes, and The Lathums are the most recent

and secular ones. The previous section shows that as a small town near the big city of Manchester, Wigan has suffered from unrecognition and indifference. As a result, iconic local heroes like The Lathums are created to make the town more recognisable and, more importantly, to differentiate Wigan from its 'big brother' Manchester and other Greater Manchester towns.

The Lathums were titled by the music critics as "Wigan heroes with local pride" (Jones, 2020) for the magnificent contributions the band brings to the town. For instance, due to the impact of COVID-19 along with the long-term managerial issues, the DW stadium, the home venue of 'local prides' Wigan Athletic F.C. and Wigan Warriors Rugby League, was facing closure and was put up for sale. In order to save the stadium, The Lathums filmed a short documentary at the stadium, promoting how rugby and football teams represented the spirit and culture of Wigan. One of the scenes in the documentary was filmed at a local pub. The band sat with local football fans and their families, listening to their life stories, and discussing the significance of the local football team for Wigan. The frontman, Alex, states in the video:

> "I understand how important for my hometown it is to have Wigan Athletic survive. Like music, football makes memories for generations of people… I feel like we've got a tight-knit community. Wigan is loyal to people if somebody is loyal back… I think that just makes everything better – the football, the music. They always pull through stuff like it always happens, that we get knockbacks, but we always pull through…"

For saving the symbolic local football club and its home venue, as well as for showing the tribute to Wigan's iconic Northern Soul music scene, the band also recorded a cover of Northern Soul classic *The Snake* as part of the campaign. As a result, £750,000 was raised for the stadium and the local football team (NME, 2022). The emergence of the heroic Lathums

has revitalised and reinforced the sacred Wigan myths. Through technology, actions and storytelling, the Wigan myths characterised by the local football team, rugby team, Northern Soul scene and indie music bands that have once shined but were then forgotten have glowed again.

In fact, The Lathums are not the first hero-like music band from Wigan. A staff member of the *Museum of Wigan Life*, Leo refers to another Wigan band, The Verve, when discussing the heroic figures in Wigan:

> "They've got nobody as big as The Verve until The Lathums, but The Verve is more like a Manchester band. They moved to Manchester and they sound like they are from Manchester… I would be very careful when I say The Lathums is a Manchester band, as they are definitely a Wigan band… They have a very strong Wigan accent."

Although The Verve is treated as a local treasure, it is interesting that they have never been titled as heroes of Wigan. According to Leo, this is because The Verve have lost their identity as Wiganers after moving to Manchester and adopting a Mancunian accent. For Leo and many other participants, people who remain loyal to their hometowns can be considered as heroes, whereas the ones who abandon their hometowns are villains. Leo's discourse also shows that the authentic local accent of the band is what makes The Lathums local heroes. Interestingly, while some participants, as mentioned in the previous section, believe the band's accent represents the authenticity of 'northernness', here, it is treated as a sign of a sense of Wiganness. In these different contexts, accent symbolises different identities that contribute to different versions of the Wigan myth. Accent can be a code to distinguish Wigan from the snobby and middle-class South, or the bossy and dominant 'big brother', Manchester. No matter how the contexts change, a villain is always created and remains a crucial figure in the

heroic myth of Wigan. Even within the same context, the ones who maintain loyalty and a closeness to their hometowns are treated as saintly and heroic, whereas the ones who are distant become betrayers and villains. This echoes Preece et al.'s (2018) assertion on the longevity of the James Bond brand, in that villains are often created in the brand mythmaking. By making the others sinful and immoral, the protagonists become heroic and immortal.

Some participants also suggest that the band's sense of Wiganness is evident in their fondness for pies. For example, pie appears to be an essential element in the band's videos. The first scene of the band's documentary is Alex, the frontman of the band, heating a pie in an oven, while saying "the pie must be hot" repeatedly. Also, the scene of one of the band's most-viewed music videos, *Oh My Love*, is set in an old-fashioned pie shop. The lady who serves the food asks, "What can I get for you, love?" Alex responds, "Can I get a pie and chips, please?" Getting a pie, or a Wigan Kebab, to be specific, is a rite of passage of anyone entering and getting to know the town (Taysom, 2021). Below is an extract from my field note at the band's album signing event at Wigan Market:

> "I witnessed how the fans consecrated the band with freshly-made Wigan Kebabs from Galloways. As a visitor to the town, I was also asked to try the exotic Wigan Kebab to pass the test of becoming a real Wiganer, while being educated about the prestigious status that pies have in Wigan."

Although pie has been a popular snack in northern England, Wigan's love and attachment towards it is much more well-entrenched. Even more so, the pie is regarded as a symbol to represent the culture and image of the town. Not only the band, but the acclaimed local football team Wigan Athletic also show the Wigan legacy to enshrine pies. In 2019, for instance, out of numerous images provided by public and well-known graphic designers,

Wigan Athletic selected a pie image designed by the local schoolchildren as a mascot for the club. Although Wigan's association with pie began with the rumour about 'eating humble pie', which was a mock to Wigan, Wiganers ignored the mock and turned it into the symbol of the town. In Wigan, a pie is not merely a type of snack, but it also symbolises the town's lifestyle, or 'pie-sonality' (The Manc, 2021), which is seen as humble, positive and self-mocking.

In fact, music bands have long been treated as crucial components in creating place myths, and the most frequently mentioned example by the participants includes Oasis and Manchester. Because of the exceptional commercial success the band has received, Oasis has been treated as heroes in Manchester, who also symbolise Mancunian heroism as being rebellious, undefeatable and defensive (Perraudin and Halliday, 2017). However, unlike the Mancunian heroism represented by the charismatic Oasis, it is believed that The Lathums have created a different type of heroism of Wigan that is 'down-to-the-earth', 'laid-back' and 'humble'. To quote participant Alex's comment on the Wigan spirit represented by The Lathums: "They are different from cocky Manchester bands… as Wigan is much more modest, sometimes too modest." Drawing on Holt and Thompson's (2004) observation, The Lathums are the 'man-of-action' heroes. They are not superheroes who create an illusional and fantasised version of reality, nor the 'great man' with charismatic leadership (like Oasis). Instead, The Lathums are 'man-of-action' heroes, or not-larger-than-life figures who are the representations of ordinary people and ordinary life (Frisk, 2019). Through the band's actions and words, we can see their capability as folk heroes of endowing temporal and inconspicuous mundane activities into mythical significance, and making a place and people who inhabit here heroic. As Zanette et al (2022) observes, the creation of iconic heroic figures not only help enrich mythical stories, but also empower consumers who are in a marginalised position or status.

Place myths are often reinforced by heroic archetypes, and Wigan is no exception. Through their lyrics, music and videos, together with their corresponding actions and spirit, The Lathums have brought a biblical Wigan back alive, characterised by legendary figures, mythical stories and invaluable heritage. By creating its own heroic band that is different from other Manchester bands, Wigan has proven again that the town is not merely an appendage of Greater Manchester and is able to create its own mythical stories and figures. This is a town with – as the words used to describe the spirit of the local rugby team, Wigan Warriors – "fame, pride, passion and desire".

With its marvellous architecture, heroic figures and mythical stories, Wigan is no longer merely a projection shadow of the North or Manchester. Instead, it stands on its own with its own beauty. As Tanizaki (2001) argues, while celebrating the light and brightness of natural objects (e.g. marble), we should also praise the beauty of shadows that are dark and mysterious. The author appeals that shadows should not be seen as something to be eliminated and despised, but rather as a piece of art itself that creates a sense of mystery and intrigue, and they also make the objects more dynamic and alive. Although shadow is commonly perceived as insignificant compared to the objects they project onto, it can also be elegant in aesthetics and significant in everyday life.

5.2.3 Retrieving the nostalgic memory of shadows

Wigan would appear to be a place that easily stimulates a strong nostalgic emotion. In Wigan, many old shops and markets have been well-preserved (see Figure 5.5.). Derived from the Greek 'nostos' – to return home – and 'algia' – a painful condition – nostalgia is seen as associated with 'homesickness'. Davis (1979) attributes the first application of the term to the 17th century physician Johannes Hofner, who used the term nostalgia to describe and diagnose

the symptoms of anxiety, melancholy and suicide attempts experienced by Swiss mercenaries after prolonged absence from home – a form of 'homesickness'. It has since lost its medical connotations, and has been superseded by a dislocation in place and time (Pickering and Keightley 2010). Nostalgia is commonly used today to demonstrate a personal sentimentality of yearning for the past, and is generally is associated with the beauty, pleasure or happiness of the past (Davis, 1979; Kaplan, 1987). Nostalgic emotions lead to the certain period of past (usually childhood, adolescence) being re-examined through 'rose-tinted spectacles' (Goulding, 2001).

Their careless youth, first love, and childhood memories in Wigan are often used as the motifs in The Lathums' songs, music videos and documentaries (i.e. *The Great Escape*, *Oh My Love*, *The Memories We Make*). In these artworks of the band, the place myth of Wigan is re-read through their personal memories in relation to their hometown that they see through rose-tinted glasses (Goulding, 2001). Instead of emphasising on the regional pain, or the local pride of the town, as discussed in the previous section, The Lathums portray a Wigan steeped in love, romance and happiness, and a nostalgic and romantic Wigan can be seen. Such romanticised myth of Wigan presented by the band is also seen by their fans. Caroline, a diasporic resident, who is originally from Wigan and has moved away at the age of five, recalls:

> "That video, *How Beautiful Life Can Be*, really got me right in the heart, because it's just about all of my childhood memories of spending time with my nan around like Wigan Market and Wigan town centre in general… And that instantly triggered that memory of my nan for me because we used to go there every single Wednesday… She had her hair cut… and then we'd go around to charity shop… and then she could get her Uncle Joe's Mint Balls and Cadbury Eclairs… And it was just such a lovely video that it got me interested in the band… see such a bunch of young lads, obviously proud of where they come from."

For Wiganers like Caroline, Uncle Joe's, as one of the most well-known Wigan brands, has been playing a crucial part of their childhood and family life. As the brand highlights:

> "The mint balls would be brought back home to kids and presented as gifts" (Uncle Joe's Mint Balls, 2022).

Although Uncle Joe's was not presented in the band's video, Wigan Market, where the music video was filmed, and where the founder of Uncle Joe's started his business, evoked nostalgic memories for Caroline in relation to her warm childhood with her nan. Such nostalgic feeling is especially enhanced since she moved away from her hometown and her family in Wigan. Liz, a reunion resident, also tells a similar story:

> "I still remember buying Uncle Joe's from the market in Wigan, where they'd have the sugar base and they bash it up with a hammer and all the jars and everything, and we used to get them in the paper bag. I've still got lots of tins and jars from Uncle Joe's in my room… It used to be Santus's and treacle toffee, liquorice, curly aniseed, whatever, whatever, whatever. And the Uncle Joe's were just one of the things that they used to sell. So now they've used the Uncle Joe's as their brand."

Interestingly, Liz also uses another food brand – Heinz – as a reference to describe a 'sweet' Wigan that she nostalgically remembers:

> "Every year, they had a Christmas party for the kids of their staff. I remember watching *Cinderella*, Disney *Cinderella*, when I was five or six, and then there was party games, lots of nice food, goodie bag, you know, brilliant. So if you're five, then

they give you presents, an exciting box of chocolates. And if you're a bit older, they will take you to pantomime. They also give you the, you know, packed lunches, sweets and stuff."

In both stories told by Liz, sweets play an important role in weaving her nostalgic feelings about her hometown Wigan. Whether it is Uncle Joe's sweets she bought from the Wigan Market, or the sweets given at the Christmas party as part of her dad's staff ware fare, these moments in relation to sweets triggered her nostalgic memories about her childhood and hometown. Even today, when she is in her 40s, after moving away, and then moving back to the town, she still keeps the empty jars and tins of these sweets to remind Liz of the happy memory of her childhood in Wigan. Such place myth of Wigan rooted in people's nostalgic past can be thought of as a distorted shadow in the sense – like a shadow that can change shape, size and colour in certain conditions, place brand myth can also be altered and reshaped into various versions and meanings. This finding resonates with Ruskin's (n.d.) observation of shadow that "frets itself into all manner of fantastic schism, taking neither the shape of the thing that casts it, nor of that it is cast upon, but an extraordinary, stretched, flattened, fractured, ill-jointed anatomy of its own". The changing angle of light sources make the shapes of shadows more fluid and shape-shifting (Edensor and Hughes, 2021). Similarly, the place myth of Wigan as a 'sweet' town is embedded in the nostalgic memories of Wiganers such as Caroline and Liz. Through the romanticised memories of locals toward their childhood and hometown, Wigan's commonly accepted place myth as a gloomy industrial town is distorted into a dreamland characterised by sweets, a Christmas party, and pantomime.

The data reveals that the main reason Wigan can evoke people's nostalgic feelings is because the town has maintained a slow pace of urban development. Scholars see nostalgia as spatial and it must be embedded in the memories of an actual place (Fullilove, 1996; Mayes,

2018). Furthermore, nostalgic feelings are more easily triggered by ‘old places’ – the places that have not shaken off the image of the past (Legg, 2004). Wigan appears to be a such ‘old place’ that is frozen in time (Su, 2010), and is haunted by its past. Its past is haunted by the stereotypical memory and imagination of the town and the region, as discussed in Section 5.1.; it is also summoned by the ‘mundane haunting’ where the ghost lives in the local’s oldest arcade or shops (see Figure 5.5.), where ‘outmoded habits and lifestyle choices’ (Moran, 2004) have been well-preserved.

Figure 5.5. Wigan’s Oldest Arcade Brimming with Retro Shops.

As supported by John, a cultural tourist who lives in London, that The Lathums portrayed “a fanaticised version of everyday life in a small and never changed village”. John further explains:

> “If you ask me what Wigan looks like in the videos, I would say it's like travelling 20 years into the past… The town hasn't changed a lot… They only have had shops like H&M and Topshop recently… People all know each other… They still go to the same place as their parents… It actually felt like it would lose a lot of its character,

especially with the main street where the main entrance of the Galleries used to be, that if they changed that and modernised that… It would be a shame if every town was becoming another replica of London… You know, the fast-paced city life, with all the hustle and bustle… People also become colder as everything around you is constantly changing."

The way John describes Wigan is a 'post-place' community, a *gemeinschaft*, which is the antithesis of a modern metropolis, characterised by the rapid turnover of an urban plan, minimal social interactions and dispersed residential areas (Bradshaw, 2008). Like James, many participants (either the ones from Wigan or not) are happy to see a slowly developed and 'old' place like Wigan. 'Old' does not always mean out-of-date or backwards; it can also create an image of a mythological past, which triggers individual satisfaction, happiness and peace (Harvey, 2000). For James, for example, even as a person who has not lived in Wigan, the unchanged landscape and slow-paced lifestyle here represent simplicity, content as well as enduring and close social relations. Even though Wigan is economically underdeveloped compared to the big cities like London, people who live here still have fulfilling and happy lives. Similar to Gao et al.'s (2012) observation on tourists' expectation of Shangri-la, Wigan is also regarded as a place where one can hide or escape from an industrialised world – a harsh reality where people have been governed by rationality and discipline, but lacking of consistency and intimacy.

It is worth noting that the slow-paced village that triggers people's nostalgic emotions does not merely refer to Wigan in particular, but it is a symbol that reminds people of their childhood, dreams and love. This idyllic community here is different from the northern community as a whole, as discussed previously, that unites social groups with shared social and political philosophy on a macro level. It instead represents safety, intimacy, and support

that emerged through private and intimate social relationships (Brint, 2001). Such a story of Wigan echoes with the contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (community and society). The former represents the childhood of humanity, with inclusive social and emotional bonds based on individuals, families, sentiment and traditions, while the latter is its 'maturity', where people are tied by social rules and beliefs that reinforce distrust and dissimilar beliefs (Brint, 2001).

Nostalgia involves a re-ordering of the past into a series of memories and absences. Yet, when reality fails to live up to such idealised memories, the nostalgic feeling is disrupted (Goulding, 2001). For example, Caroline, as mentioned above, a participant who considers Wigan as a place where it restores the happy memory about her childhood, also admits that she gets disappointed every time she revisits Wigan. It is because her experience of the place does not always match her memory or expectation. To quote Caroline's words:

> "The Lathums really captured that Wigan Market really well… It's not the most common image of… It's actually quite bleak. They made it seem like magic… Because when you go into the actual market itself, I don't know how they've done this in the video, but like the lighting is even cheerful. Looks like it's a really bright, airy space. And it's not. It's really claustrophobic and dark… Every single time I walked in there, I ended up sneezing because of the amount of dust and the stuff. They had to run this but they made it look so lovely… I think it is an exaggeration. But I do think it captures the sense of community and locality that Wigan actually had… They've highlighted the charm of that. It's a nice portrayal of Wigan as well, because I feel like it's sort of been published in the media when it has been mentioned before, as you know, sort of oppressive, small town, working class, lots of socioeconomic problems. And I think a

lot of people about put the negative stereotype about Wiganness, and The Lathums are challenging that as well… I saw the video of *The Great Escape* as well."

After watching the band's video, Caroline also reflected on her own experience and memory with her family in Wigan since she moved away:

> "I've had kind of an ambivalent relationship. As a kid, I was really homesick about going back to Wigan and not going to Bristol at all… But then actually, as I got older, I felt some kind of like, alienation from them too… I get back up there and I don't know how I would have ended up… But I always felt like I had left some part of myself behind in Wigan… I mean, as somebody who comes from Wigan, I have this sort of rational homesickness."

It can be seen from Caroline's story that the historical, entrenched north-south division and the stereotypical image of Wigan still lingers in people's ideology and everyday life even today. However, people can also distort or redesign the myth of Wigan into something they are willing to remember. By changing the angle, they view Wigan, the story and image of the town as sanitised in accordance with their own needs and desires. To quote David Lowenthal (1986), "the past is a foreign country" and we can never truly know it in its authentic form. But, like shadows, it can be reconstructed, played with, manipulated, and brought back to life through various mythmakers. When Caroline is away, The Lathums' videos stimulate nostalgic feelings of close family, times, places and experiences. But these are also subject to the omission of any negatives. This is always the case because "memory is life… history, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (Nora, 1989:8).

Returning to Wigan, to the physical place itself, necessitates confrontation with reality, but a reality void of fantasy lighting and stimulating soundtracks. In this sense, there is a tension between nostalgia and reality. With nostalgia, there is a form of constructed memory that is the

subject of what MacDonald (2013) terms ‘memory work’ – a complex combination of cognitive individual functions, and social, collective and cultural evocations of the past (Crane, 2000). However, memory does not always operate in a purely functional and rational manner. It may be driven by fantasy. Essentially, memory is not always ‘real’ but it can be made to seem so through the creation of forms of representation, such as videos, images, and narratives, that attempt to solidify memory’s meanings. The fanaticised or romanticised interpretation of Wigan, though, is not entirely contradictory to the past, or the ‘reality’, as it does not erase the presence of the entrenched history, struggle and culture of the town. Instead, The Lathums’ videos and the viewers offer an alternative way to re-evaluate and rethink the enduring and deified myth of the town. This finding echoes MacDonald’s (2013) assertion that humans are capable of existing in an elliptical, blurred relationship to truth where the audience/viewer may be persuaded into refocusing his/her understanding of the world and its representation. Through the lens of The Lathums and their music and videos, people remake the place myth of Wigan, and also reconstruct their personal memories and the understandings of the world.

5.3 Shadow illusion: De-mythologising the Wigan brand

In the previous two sections, the study investigated how Wigan is mythologised and remythologised, based on the national imaginations, communal ideologies and personal stories and memories in relation to the town. Whether the depressing Wigan myths that are associated with the North and Manchester, or the place myths of Wigan reintroduced by people through rose-tinted glasses, Wigan is enshrined. The place myths of Wigan are seen by various mythmakers such as the band, fans, residents, visitors, and local council as embedded in the meaningful culture, history and people in relation to the town. However, the data reveals that there are also mythmakers who refuse to mythologise Wigan; they instead dispel, question and

devalue the meaning, belief and myth of the town with alternative perspectives. Through the narratives, actions and believes of these mythmakers, Wigan is 'demythologised'.

The concept of demythologising was first introduced by Rudolph Bultmann (1984) in his renowned and controversial work, *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings*. For Bultmann (1984), demythologising is an approach to translate the biblical texts that contain mythological materials into philosophical, sociological and ethical teachings. It is an alternative way of interpreting a biblical text by focusing on the essential and natural meaning of the text behind the myths. Marketing scholars Arsel and Thompson (2011) also redefined the term of demythologising as the practices consumers adopt to devalue the commercially mediated myth in order to protect their field-dependent identity. In this study, the concept of demythologising is adopted and adapted to understand the deconstruction of the above-mentioned place myths of Wigan, and the loss of the meaning of the place.

The demythologising process of Wigan resonates with the third phase of shadow making identified in this study – illusion. While some believe shadows have substantial existence that can be formed and reformed, others argue that they are nothing more than deception of lights and minds (Davidson, 2015; Gombrich, 2014). Like shadows, place myths are also illusional and ephemeral, or purely a fantasy. When considering such traits of mythmaking/shadow-making that embody the meaninglessness and voidness of existence (Edensor and Hughes, 2021), how Wigan myths are deconstructed can be understood.

5.3.1 Seeing the emptiness in shadows

With a prolonged history and distinct identity, Wigan is seen by many as a socially and culturally meaningful place. However, for others, Wigan is also a place with emptiness and voidness, where there is arguably an absence of distinctive and magnificent history, identity or

culture. Alex, for example, a reunion resident, made comments after watching The Lathums' music videos that were filmed in Wigan:

> "It's just nothing nice about Wigan. There's nothing, there's not really anything apart from the people. People from there are very friendly… You'd have to go to Wigan yourself. Wigan is not really a nice place. That's all… It's just an old part forgotten-about town… It's just nothing nice about Wigan… There's nothing to see in Wigan. There's no museums, there's no cathedral, there's no money spent. Just nothing there… It's beautiful in places, but I'm glad that I don't live there anymore. And I'm sure that a lot of people would say that they're always proud to be from Wigan, but they don't mind not being in Wigan."

Through the reflection of the Wigan shown in the music video of the band, Alex deconstructs the entrenched historical, political and sociocultural meanings of Wigan. For Alex, the churches, museums and historical buildings that have been considered as the crucial cultural elements in the Wigan myth are considered insignificant and illusional. In his narratives, Wigan is portrayed as a place of nothingness and meaninglessness. Indeed, according to *Wigan Local History and Heritage Society* (2022), since the last decades, there have been an increasing number of "lost buildings" in Wigan – the historic and magnificent buildings being destructed or demolished for various reasons (e.g. King Street Baptist Church, Shakespeare Hotel, Hippodrome, Palace Cinema and Wigan Brewery). Although the local council has been trying to refurbish some of the historic buildings, or replace them by new buildings, they have been criticised for lacking of 'beats and soul'. As pointed out by Luis who is a cultural tourist and also an independent researcher on the architecture of Wigan,

> “Architecturally, I think what they've built there has been horrible. And nothing, you know, no beats and sour, the rest of the architecture is all it could be the same thing just done 100 times, whereas they had a real opportunity to have something striking. And all they've done is a Dubai in the rain.”

As previously discussed, although the band and some of their fans attempt to mythologise and remythologise the town through highlighting its cultural heritage and distinctive history of Wigan (i.e. the Northern Soul scene, The Verve, Wigan Warriors, Wigan Pier), the fact is that these crucial elements that form the myths of Wigan are all absent in the town today. The most acclaimed Wigan band, The Verve, have been refusing to be associated with Wigan ever since they left the town; the golden age of the Northern Soul scene and Wigan football was long gone; even Wigan Pier, probably what the world knows best about Wigan, was demolished in 1929, and what has been left is only a replica. In fact, it can be questioned if the famous “pier” has ever been there, except in song and joke. The story begins when some day-trippers went on a train to Southport. The passengers spotted a wooden railway gantry leading to a jetty from which coal was tripped into barges on the Leeds-Liverpool canal. "Are we at Southport?" a passenger asked. "Nay lad," replied the railwayman. "That's Wigan Pier tha' cun see." (The Guardian, 2011; The Independent, 2003) The whole story might sound apocryphal, and what makes the existence of Wigan Pier even more questionable is that when George Orwell went to Wigan to search for the celebrated Wigan Pier in the 1930s, he was disappointed by the absence of the landmark. He wrote: "Alas! Wigan Pier has been demolished… and even the spot where it used to stand is no longer certain" (Orwell, 1937/2001).

Apart from the phantasmal historical landmarks, the emptiness of Wigan is also evident in the town’s dying-out high streets and abandoned dwellings. Due to the combination of

increasing rents, business rates, digitalised commerce, a global pandemic and corporate expansion scheme, many residential and commercial spaces in Wigan are for sale and to let (Marsden and Wright, 2022). As one of the biggest old market towns in northern England, Wigan has now become a ghost town, with deserted high streets, shuttered shops and empty buildings. The international chain brands such as Marks & Spencer and H&M were forced to pull out from Wigan Market, let alone the boutique shops and independent cafes. The major shopping centre, the Great Arcade, and the iconic Wigan Market that are often captured in the band's visual marketing materials, are left half empty. Goods, counters and furniture are left in the dumped shops as if people have experienced a catastrophe in a Doomsday event. The new graffiti on the roller shutters of the local grocery stores, the faded sign of 'Sorry! We have closed' on the window of a time-honoured café, the sealed doors of the turn-of-the-century pubs, have witnessed the failure of corporate greed and the loss of Wiganers' shared youth, custom and memory.

In 2019, the local council set out the *Strategic Regeneration Framework*, with the aim to regenerate Wigan's high street and town centre. Some work is already undertaken, such as creation of spaces for cultural, arts and digital sectors, the purchase and redevelopment of the iconic shopping complex The Galleries and Wigan Market, the regeneration of Wigan Pier quarter, and rebuilding the main high street Market Street. However, the council's revitalisation scheme of the town along with its concomitant actions are seen as merely empty promises, or even the blasting fuse that turned the vibrant Wigan into a ghost town. According to Jude, as discussed previously, an 'immigrant resident', and also a local historian who has also contributed to the council's revitalisation scheme,

> "Because all of a sudden, the cotton industry supply stopped because of the Civil War, Wigan was really badly affected… They've not really had an alternative economic

> replacement strategy, and any job enterprise schemes that are organised from the top down, never seen to have either the planning or the economic resources behind them to make them a success. And a lot of people, even from local authority, whose intentions are good or noble, they don't have enough commercial experience to know what they're doing. You know, it's like the council took over some of the shopping centres because they were dying in their feet. But they should have employed retail specialists from the private sector who worked in retail and they know what they're doing. Instead, they didn't, and the plant died, you know, the shops basically withered on the vine."

Due to the inefficiency of the local council's regeneration scheme, along with other internal and external issues, many of the cultural heritages and local businesses that were used to be the landmarks of Wigan are bygone. It has become a ghost town with no trace of root and local legacy. Following Orwell's visit to the industrial Wigan in the 1930s, Featherstone (2008) revisited Wigan in the 2000s and described Wigan as "a strange and exotic place of wonders", in which its political and historical backgrounds are often ignored. Through the descriptions of researchers and the participants, it can be seen that Wigan has become a place of 'nowhereness', defined by Kunstler (1993) as "depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, spiritually degrading, wastelands", or of 'placelessness', interpreted by Arefi (1999) as a place that "lacks chronological connection to a physical, cultural and emotional context" (183). Though derived from different contexts, both terms are used to describe the disconnection between place and meaning. Place meaning is considered as a crucial tie for bonding and enhancing the rootedness of a place. As explained by Arefi (1999), while 'placeness' is ingrained in rootedness that creates meaning and therefore a sense of belonging, 'placelessness' signifies loss of meaning.

Such emptiness and dreariness that is found in Wigan by Luis is redolent of Baudrillard's (1993) observation on the 'hyperreal' America that is an antithesis of 'referential

cities', which is an unidentified object where history becomes absent along with time and space. In this place, there is, according to Baudrillard (1993), "no space for historical memory, but rather a space for dispersal, dissemination, a space like that of the desert, the space of potential amnesia and never-ending circulation" (245). Here, the illusional property of shadows can help understand the emptiness in place myth. To Plato (514a-520a), shadow refers to the idea that reality as we perceive it is not actually real, but is instead a projection of our own fantasy and prejudices. According to this view, our experiences are shaped by our own desires, and preconceptions, and what we see as real is actually just an illusion. Shadows represent this illusion, as it is a projection created by the interplay between light and darkness, just as our perceptions of reality are shaped by the interplay between our own imagination and the external world. Represented by the demolishment of historic buildings in the town, the long-lasting myth of the place has also vanished accordingly. The mythical stories of the town are illusional, which are merely formed by people's desires and fantasies.

What is absent in Wigan is not merely the heritages, the buildings or the shops, but also people's attachment, hope and belief towards the town. Susie, a diasporic resident who was born in Wigan and moved to Southampton, states:

> "There is a much darker side of Wigan. And I feel The Lathums kind of... got that greatness of Wigan, but it's not as great as it actually is… King Street at Wigan had, at one point, the most murders per square mile in the United Kingdom… I think it was in the '70s and it held that record. And then I think it was only broken by Glasgow… And if you walk on that street now, it's very depressing. You see many homeless people taking drugs in the abandoned buildings… There is a park near where my dad lives… And all the kids will go down there and just get really drunk. There was somebody who does cocaine, and they did it via their 10-year-old son, and he sits outside on his

doorstep. And there's usually been loads of broken glass and burnt-out cars and bikes and stuff. So there's a lot of problems… Wigan is my hometown, and I know people should be proud of their hometown, but I don't see any reason why I should move back…"

Susie claimed that The Lathums' videos reminded her of the 'dark side' of Wigan, and it was the reason why she moved away from her hometown. In her narratives, there is no evidence of nostalgia. Contrary to this, what is experienced by this ex-inhabitant of Wigan is a form of 'anti-nostalgia', with all the negative memories of the place brought sharply into focus, and even amplified. In the previous section, the finding shows that for some who were born and bred in Wigan such as Caroline, their experience and memory constituted a form of nostalgia in relation to Wigan. However, paradoxically here, Susie's story shows the reverse. Here, there is no romantic and rose-tinted sentiment for a 'noble' working class, held together by strong community ties, as so often portrayed in the mythologised and remythologised stories of Wigan. Even at a distance, when nostalgia is more likely to manifest, Wigan is perceived as a bleak and depressing place. The past and the present are drained of any positive qualities and are reduced to a set of sepia images of forgotten industries and spectral, bleak landscapes. People, streets, parks, and buildings, such as those described by Emma, are exposed to the public gaze, and in their remembering, convey stories of social relations – drunkenness, dreariness, violence.

Like Susie, Wigan is seen by many participants as a place where the social and political issues of Wigan such as racism, crime, drug abuse, and economic depression still remain prominent. Such narrative is opposed to the mythologised and remythologised Wigan that has been discussed previously. The participants deliberately deconstruct the bright and positive side of Wigan, but emphasises and exaggerates the social problems at the time in order to

present a complete failure of the town, and to deconstruct the entrenched place myth of Wigan. As Tillotson and Martin (2014) state, the process of emancipation occurs when the prevailing and powerful beliefs and ideas are challenged. People who support this assertion are generally concerned with social changes, and particularly the change of new forms of consumption. While in the previous section, how participants reconstruct the place myth of Wigan as a utopia that symbolises a tolerant, inclusive and culturally diverse community was discussed, here, the data shows an anti-utopia or unachieved utopia of Wigan – a dystopia. According to Claeys (2013:155), "dystopia is usually supposed to be an inverted mirrored or negative version of utopia, the imaginary bad place as opposed to the imaginary good place." A dystopian story usually contains an unsatisfied society that people fear or attempt to escape from (Podoshen et al., 2014).

As a result of the meaninglessness, placelessness and dystopias of the town, some of the locals have lost their contractual obligations, historical connectedness and sense of belonging to the place (Auge, 1995). It is evident when The Lathums attempt to distance themselves from their hometown of Wigan. For instance, The Lathums consistently declared in the interviews that they did not want to become the next The Verve, just simply because they came from the same town. The band believes that being a four-piece guitar band from Wigan is likely to make people jump to conclusions about them and their music before they have even listened to them. Being closely associated with Wigan or the North certainly becomes a curse rather than a blessing. Therefore, the band chooses to become an exile, deviating from their past, culture, and root. Rather than being forced to move, they voluntarily and deliberately move away. To quote the lyrics of the band's signature song, *The Great Escape*:

So now I'm lost in space

I've spent a lifetime

Trying to find my place

But I've had no luck of late

I've had to abandon

The human race once more

Gravity feels like a forgotten force to me

And they could call it the great

The great escape of the world

And I don't need diamonds and pearls

Just to vanish off the face of the earth

While the band has emotionally distanced themselves from Wigan, other participants, in contrast, have physically exiled themselves from the town and have hardly returned. Although the band did not make any concrete reference to Wigan in *The Great Escape*, the participants often quote this song to demonstrate their relationship with and view on Wigan. The lyrics such as 'lost in space', 'find my place', 'abandon', 'forgotten', 'great escape' and 'gravity' are used to explain their attitude and relationship with Wigan. James, a 'permanent resident', and a big fan of The Lathums, admits:

> "I'm going to get the line 'Gravity feels like a forgotten force' tattooed on my arm. I just think this song really speaks to me… Wigan is my hometown but I also want to just leave the place behind… Coming from a working-class background in Wigan is not easy… a lot of problems here, and not many opportunities for people to do things… It is really claustrophobic to live here, and in my whole life, I've always been wanting to just get out of this place."

Wigan is treated by many as a place where people want to forget about, or escape from. The long-lasting social issues, lack of support and resources, and the absence of historically and culturally meaningful heritages and neighbourhoods collapse the myths of the place and eventually cause people-place detachment in the town (Kristensen et al., 2011). As such, whether emotionally or physically, many Wiganers become diasporas who are displaced from their original homeland, which makes Wigan an empty town with no hope, meaning and belief. Nevertheless, unlike the 'classic' diasporas who are dispersed from where they originally reside but still remain collective bond and identify in relation to their homeland (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2013), Wiganers deliberately exile themselves from Wigan and purposely erase their roots for their own sakes. As stated by Sorensen (2008), the illusional shadow is in contrast with the concrete reality. By recognising and embracing the illusory nature of shadow, we can experience a sense of liberation and detachment, and can gain a deeper understanding of a more complex nature of our existence. By the end, shadow is merely a visual "gap in your visual field that you mistake as the perception of an object" (Sorensen, 2008:71).

5.3.2 Celebrating the hedonic mirage of shadows

While the sense of meaninglessness and dystopian narratives of Wigan certainly make the place sound dull and hopeless, it has also brought a different kind of place myth to the town – a place offering the ephemeral hedonism and carnivalesque spirit. Such character of the town is evident in the superficial and hedonistic tourism and leisure activities. Wigan has received a reputation as a destination for an affordable night out. Wigan, as a small town located between two big cities, Liverpool and Manchester, has never been a popular tourist destination. However, cheap drinks and foods, various choices of bars and a convenient railway network have brought some vitality to the town. On weekends, when the sun goes down, the small

market town is crammed by the revellers from Wigan or the neighbouring towns and cities who are looking for drunken debauchery. They are spoiled by the nightlife scene in Wigan, which boasts everything from fancy cocktail bars to historic pubs to stylish nightclubs to underground raves. History, culture and meaning become a cliché in this dimension of Wigan, which is replaced by ephemeral hedonism. To quote the local historian Jude's words:

> "Underneath the arches in Wigan, on the way to Wigan Pier, there's a number of bars, and there is this one called 1984. And when the guy first opened 1984, he very much had an Orwellian theme. So he had lots of copies of the book *1984* and he had all these nice little touches of a dystopian totalitarian state. And then he just found, but like the furnishing, so much, so that even the furnishing was just wood. It was just not comfortable. You know, which is what you'd expect in a totalitarian, but, you know, you want comfort in a pub. You don't want the discomfort of a totalitarian state, but you want it as a distraction. So, he basically then changed it to kind of just make it more of a 1980's theme bar. And so that 1984 becomes like 1980's music, and he basically dumped Orwell… Because there wasn't enough of a commercial attraction in Orwell for the locals to go to… Because people on the night out, they want a bit of fun. They don't want to be reminded that we live in a one-party, totalitarian state… It is just an '80's bar… it was such a shame."

1984 was a popular bar in Wigan, selling exquisite cocktails, wines and spirits. I was intrigued by the fascinating stories of the bar shared by my participant, so I decided to explore it first-hand. Unfortunately, during my visit, the bar was temporarily closed. The gloomy weather that day, combined with the shuttered bar, the peeling tiles on the walls, and the disorderly dumpsite nearby, together created a scene that seemed to be the perfect

representation of Orwell's bleak and absurd dystopian world (see Figure 5.6.). The name of the bar is obviously adapted from the novel of the same name written by George Orwell, who has been a significant figure in the town's place branding because of his acclaimed novel *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Whilst enjoying the celebrity effect brought by Orwell, it is in fact ironic for Wigan and Wiganers to celebrate this middle-class, old Etonian, considering the extremely depressing and decaying image of Wigan that the author portrays in his book. However, if using *The Road to Wigan Pier* as a cultural reference for promoting Wigan seems unexpected, naming a bar 1984 is even more farfetched, as the book is totally unrelated to the town, except the two books are both written by the same author. What makes such connection even more superficial is that, as James pointed out, in the early stage, the owner of the bar intended to recreate a dystopian atmosphere to some extent, which matches the plot of the original novel. However, such a duplicate of a cultural work is not appreciated by the customers as they come to the bar to enjoy a fun time rather than being reminded of the hard time of life. Consequently, the bar has no substantial connection with either Orwell nor his novel, apart from a few of Orwell's books collecting dust on the shelf, and nostalgic '80's live music on the weekends, reminding people of the name of the book, *1984*, and ironically, the book was actually written in 1948.

Figure 5.6. The Shuttered '1984' Bar in Wigan.

The story of the local bar, 1984, shows that the place myths of Wigan that were embedded in the credible historical events and products have vanished, which are replaced by the superficial and artificial interpretations on the culture of the town. In this sense, the place myth of Wigan can be considered as a simulacrum that pretends to be a copy of certain history and culture, or something real, yet it lacks of or has no relation to a profound 'reality' (Baudrillard, 1994). The shift from 'original' to 'invented' culture and history of Wigan marks the transformation of Wigan from a *referential place* (Baudrillard, 1994), to an invented place, "in which meaning is manufactured and restored through an ahistorical, ageographic and 'contrived' process" (1999:187). In this place, mythical stories do not reflect on a real item or an event, but they are all "fake" and invented, and originality becomes a concept that is meaningless (Baudrillard, 1994). Sorensen (2008) points out the hollow property of shadows that unlike concrete material things and objects, shadows can be absolutely hollow. However, the author adds, shadows do have abstract surfaces, but they are hollowed out until there is nothing left apart from the abstract surfaces. Like Sorensen's observation on shadows, place brand myths can also be 'hollowed', lacking of any substantial existence. Even though place brand myths might be completely illusional and superficial, they are still embedded in the 'abstract surfaces' coated by the things and people that are considered as meaningful (e.g. George Orwell, *1984*).

The 'invented' culture and history of Wigan is similar to the descriptions that have been used by many scholars to describe the US cities (Arefi, 1999; Baudrillard, 1994; Belk, 2000; Gottdiener, 1997). Although sharing obvious similarities, there are certainly significant differences. It is believed that the invented culture and its subsequent effects of rootlessness and inauthenticity of a place are generally caused by major political or economic events such

as globalisation and commodification (Agnew, 1984). However, Wigan is certainly not a beneficiary of such a modernity process. Due to its proximity to big cities such as Manchester and Liverpool, Wigan as a small town has suffered from a lack of financial support. Therefore, urban renovation and regeneration happen at a slower pace in the town, and its fakeness and inauthenticity are 'invented' by people in mundane life, instead of being formed by major political or economic forces. Local business, residents and tourists deliberately avoid the deeper exploration of meaning that account for the long-lasting myth of Wigan. Instead, they recreate an invented place with 'borrowed' or 'inauthentic' culture and lifestyle, as opposed to the 'real' tradition that is built on entrenched religious, mythical and historical meanings (Arefi, 1999).

If *1984* still has some kind of cultural or historical meanings that are related to the town, some other places in Wigan represent the pure ephemerality and euphoria of the place. For example, the nightclub Ibiza has the same name as the Spanish party island, the party capital of the world, characterised by wild pool parties, gorgeous Mediterranean beaches and non-stop drinking. Not surprisingly, these elements are absent in the Ibiza club; what remains is hundreds of party lovers immersing themselves in an illusional tropical experience of artificial palm trees, straw sunshades and Sex on the Beach cocktails. Similarly, Wigan Pier, which used to be a name of a historical and mythical site in Wigan, now refers to a Donk nightclub hosting euphoric "donkeys", which has nothing to do with the original pier whatsoever.

The subcultural and lifestyle magazine Vice demonstrates Donk music as the 'most terrifying and hilarious dance music genre' that ever happened in the UK, and Wigan is considered as the mecca of UK's Donk music scene (Hodgson, 2009). However, the locals in Wigan would not even want to associate the town with such a 'music scene'. As Alex, a reunion resident, states:

"Ha-ha, I won't call it a 'music scene'. You need to listen to it before you call it electronic music. It's just awful music… I don't want people to think such crap music comes from Wigan."

Whether a curse or blessing to the town, the 'Donk music scene' has quickly faded out in the UK. However, the 'scene' is still going on in the town, though on a much smaller scale. "Donkeys" from different parts of the country would still come to Wigan for a dirty Donk night, enjoying 48 hours of thrill, euphoria and freedom, and the recreational drug and drink consumption, combined with energetic dancing, create an ephemeral suspension of the reality in everyday life (Belk, 2000; Goulding et al., 2009).

King Street, where these sleazy bars and clubs are located, has received a stigmatised reputation of being a heaven for weekend revellers. Chris, an immigrant resident who has recently moved to the town, describes:

> "King Street is an interesting street, because I was always told about that this was the place to go on a night out… I think I got there by a taxi once… It is like being in the Mediterranean, because all of a sudden, people are outside, people are kind of falling out of bars. And it's like a holiday resort for those hours. But everyone's quite refreshed, shall we say? Choose my words carefully. And you wouldn't know what the season was. Because if you looked at the clothes they were wearing, you'd assume it's summer… If those people stopped going… it just becomes a bit of a ghost town… It was very much binge drinking and alcohol excess and ambulances picking people up and taking them to the hospital because of fights, drugs and bits and pieces. So it kind of got a bit of a sordid reputation… But King Street isn't what it was… It used to have theatres and cinemas and a bit of a mix of high-end things…"

Such a euphoric vibe combined with the loss of place meaning provide the town with a sort of readability, which may be a form of freedom (Baudrillard, 1993). This makes Wigan a fascinating and dazzling dreamland, a place that can be extended to infinity. People living here are no longer constrained by certain culture, history, identity and so on, of all the things that it had been infused into for decades. This is a kind of deterritorialization, a disqualification of objects, but also the possibility of fantasising and imaging everything (Baudrillard, 1993). This is another dimension of Wigan, a Wigan in which everything becomes boundless, rootless and possible, or a liminal space where social rules and normative practices discontinue and fall into disorder (Turner, 1969). Through creating temporary hallucination and the sense of chaos, Wigan provides a carnivalesque vibe where people come here to get lost, to escape and to forget (Bakhtin, 1968). However, unlike other hyperreal places that are 'fictional' cities developed from total extrapolation and hypothesis with no organic substance such as Sahara, or are designated as an ideal and sanitised space for commercial purposes such as Las Vegas, Wigan is not merely a fiction. Rather, it is a place with distinctive and long-standing culture and history. It is people who purposely eliminate the identity and myth of Wigan and remake it into a land of hedonism. One might ask that how could we celebrate a thing or a place that is superficial like the Sahara, Las Vegas or Wigan. We can probably find the answer from Sorensen's (2008) proposition on the philosophy of hollow shadows, "only the shadow's abstract surface remains. But that is enough for the shadow to persist. The shadow never owed its visibility to an internal part… Shadows are visible by virtue of their lack of light… Shadows are creatures of omission. Shadows are where the inaction is" (75). In a similar way, the mythical stories in these places might just be illusions, yet it is what they are famous or infamous for. These places provide an ideal environment for people to hide, forget and escape from the 'real' world. Here, people are able to become insensitive and apathetic to life, history, culture or anything with meanings.

In this hedonistic Wigan, The Lathums' stories also become completely fantasised and unconstrained, and they provide no rootedness, continuity, or meaning. They are no longer attached to any place, or at least the place that connotes tradition, belonging and fate. The storylines in their songs become completely obscure and delusional: they are demons who catch naughty kids on a Christmas night in a hellish Wigan; or clowns being killed and reborn in a deserted Wigan; or ghosts playing a band in a spectral Wigan Victorian house with floating plates, candles and jewelleries. They become anything and everything that is without an original referent and objective existence, and they also make Wigan anywhere and everywhere. The band, as the DJ at a Donk night, acts as a shaman who incants and guides the audiences, leading them to an evasive and apolitical Wigan where the crowd can completely "lose it" (Goulding et al., 2009).

By contesting the national/regional ideology and romantic imagination of Wigan, the entrenched Wigan myths are debunked, which makes us rethink the existence and meaning of the place. Several marketing studies have analysed such counter-mythology practices enacted by consumption communities. These studies emphasis consumers' practices and ideologies of countervailing commercial or national myths and the intention of fixing or changing an unsatisfied social system (Kristensen et al., 2011; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007), or a stigmatised image of a place (Thompson and Tian, 2008). While these discourses can be seen in the context of this study, there are also significant differences here. Firstly, the place myths that the participants attempt to debunk are not officially designated by authorities or marketers. Rather, they are organically constructed and negotiated based on the experience and fantasy in relation to the everyday life in Wigan. Secondly, instead of resisting the conventional identity in order to rebuild a new and brighter future, the participants show an attitude of acceptance and escapism, by letting go of the long-lasting emotion, attachment, and interaction in relation to Wigan.

5.4 Summary

This chapter examines how various place myths of the Wigan brand are constructed, negotiated and negated by the various place brand mythmakers identified and discussed in Chapter 4 (i.e. creators, persuaders, and discoverers). In order to provide an in-depth understanding of the Wigan myth, it especially used a local music band – The Lathums – as a lens to reflect on the culture, history, custom, identity of Wigan. By developing and utilising a three-phase shadow-making process as theoretical lens – projection, distortion and illusion, the complex and fluid place mythmaking process of the Wigan brand is unpacked. Some mythmakers view Wigan as mythologised through the 'projection' on the entrenched sociocultural context of the deprived England North, and the affinity with the culture and identity of 'big brother' Manchester; others look on Wigan with rose-tinted views, as well as the recent redevelopment plans of the town. For them, the Wigan myth can also be 'distorted' and reintroduced as an idyllic village that triggers people's nostalgic feelings, or a pantisocracy with no suffering and division. For others, the Wigan myth can also be seen as only a pseudo-proposition, or an 'illusion'. The data shows that the acclaimed Wigan myth, characterised by local cultural heritage, pride, profound history, and distinct local identity that some celebrate and enshrine, is bygone. What has been left in the town is permanent pain and nothingness, and temporary euphoria and hedonism. This phase is the subversion of the Wigan myths demonstrated in the first and second phases.

The data suggests that, like shadows, the Wigan myths constructed, experienced and perceived by the local band The Lathums and other mythmakers appear to be obscure and fluid. They shift and transform along with the mythmakers' narratives, interactions, fantasies and memories. These findings challenge the previous works, focusing on the linear and static approach, to understanding place branding and place brand storytelling (Johansson, 2012;

Kemp et al., 2012; Rebelo et al., 2020). Furthermore, the different versions of Wigan myths, either negative or positive, mundane or grand, organically emerged and negotiated with no salient regulations or purposes instead of being purposely designed and filtered by political and commercial forces (Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Sang, 2021).

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This final chapter concludes this thesis by providing a summary of the findings and contributions of this study, as well as discussing both the research limitations and the opportunities for future studies. This chapter begins with revisiting the research aim, which is to provide a theoretical understanding that accounts for the fluidity of place branding through investigating the obscure and shifting place brand myths (Section 6.1). This section also focuses on the discussion of the research questions and how they have been addressed through empirical investigation into Wigan in order to achieve the research aim. Section 6.2 outlines the theoretical and methodological contributions to the current literature, as well as the managerial implications of the research findings. Finally, the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research, are presented in Section 6.3.

6.1 Revisiting the research aim and questions

Since the discussion of 'inclusive place branding' (Braun et al., 2013; Karavatzis et al., 2017; Klijn et al., 2012) and 'participant place branding' (Kavaratzis, 2012; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Zenker et al., 2014), it has been widely agreed that place brands are co-constructed by various stakeholders, including the place management team, local authorities, cultural organisations, residents and tourists. Consequently, the diverse and sometimes contradictory interests and motivations of these different stakeholders have contributed to the dynamic view of place branding (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Rebelo et al., 2020). This means that the narratives, images, identities associated with a place

brand are not static, but constantly and continually evolve and transform throughout time and space, mirroring and responding to ephemeral and ever-changing individual contemplations, social interactions and sociocultural settings (Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Lichrou et al., 2008; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018).

While a few studies have provided theoretical frameworks to understand and investigate the dynamic place branding processes, they have predominantly adopted a managerial view, focusing on the reciprocal or conflictual relationships between different stakeholders (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Lucarelli, 2018; Sang, 2021). As a result, despite the acknowledgement of the dynamism of place branding, there is dearth of theoretical lenses to help interpret and examine its fluid and transitory nature. Therefore, as discussed in chapter one, this thesis aims to provide a theoretical understanding of the fluidity of place branding by delving into the obscure and continuously evolving mythmaking process of the Wigan brand. To achieve this aim, the novel theoretical lens of the shadow metaphor was developed to explore and examine the shadowy and transitory place brand myths of an English town, Wigan. Explicitly, this thesis utilises a local music band, The Lathums, as a lens to embody the organically evolving and collaboratively negotiated place myths of the town. In doing so, this thesis enhances the existing place branding literature by adding mutable and transient aspects to the dynamic relationships between various stakeholders, and the place branding process. It also deepens the scholarly understanding of other related marketing subjects such as marketplace mythmaking, place heritage and cultural place branding.

To unpack my research aim, I asked three related research questions: 1) Who are the main mythmakers in the formation and transformation of place brand myths? 2) How do they demonstrate and impact the fluid nature of place brand myths? 3) What are the processes through which the fluid place brand myths are created, negotiated and transformed? How these

research questions were addressed in this thesis and the contributions of these findings are summarised below.

RQ 1) Who are the main mythmakers in the formation and transformation of place brand myths? & RQ 2) How do they demonstrate and impact the fluid nature of place brand myths?

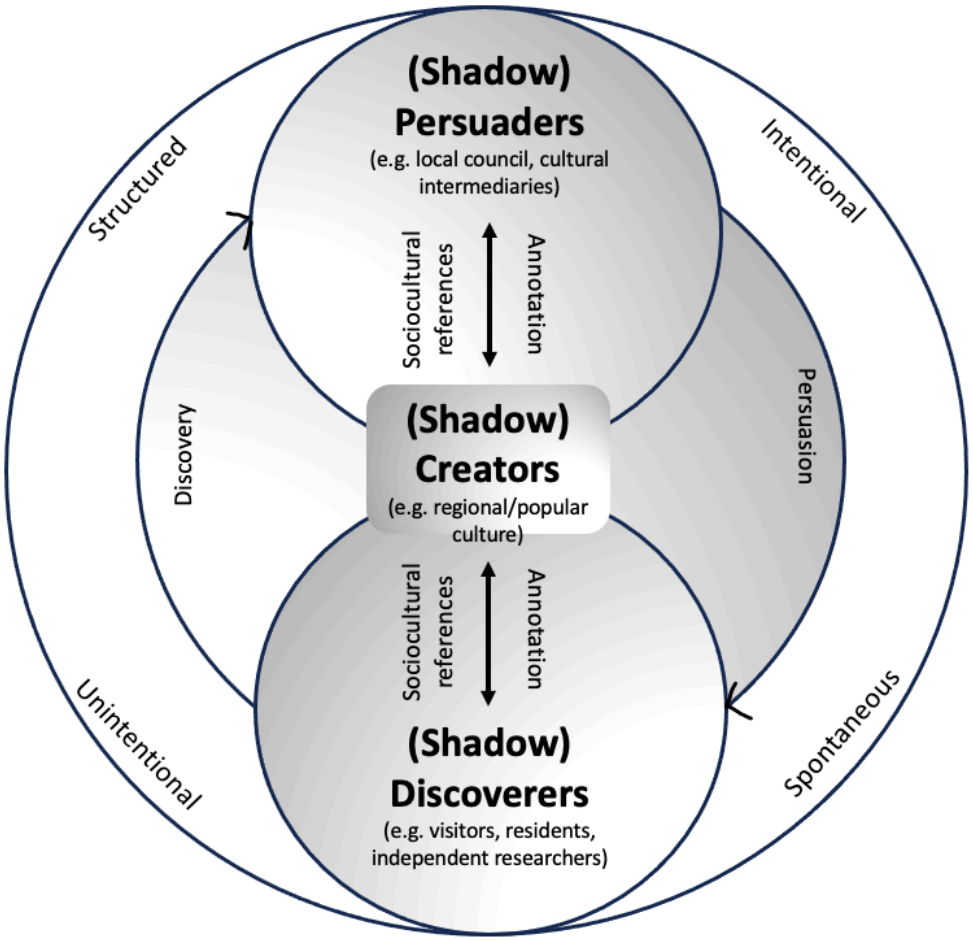


Figure 4.1. The Shadowy Relationships between Place Brand Mythmakers.

Although this research initially began through an interest in the local music band, The Lathums, as discussed previously, the findings suggest that it is crucial to consider the critical roles played by various actors (both human and non-human) in constructing the place myths associated with the Wigan brand. Therefore, instead of overly relying on the predetermined

key stakeholders of place brands based on previous scholarly work, the mythmakers examined in this study are identified through conversations and interactions with the participants in real-life settings. Such an alternative, bottom-up approach allows this study to identify that the mythmakers emerged organically *from* the storytelling and meaning-making processes of place branding, rather than being defined and selected *for* the purpose of place branding (Stoica et al., 2021). In so doing, this thesis deviates from the conventional top-down stakeholder approach (Jain et al., 2022; Ooi and Pedersen, 2010) and instead employs a bottom-up tactic when identifying and analysing the key mythmakers for place brands.

This study develops and utilises a shadow metaphor as a conceptual framework to investigate and classify various place brand mythmakers into three categories – creators, persuaders and discoverers. Like the shadow creators that are essential elements for shadow making (e.g. light sources, illuminated objects, human eyes), creators in the place branding context refer to the fundamental components for creating place brand myths. Based on the analysis of various data sets, as well as the study's sociocultural perspective on place branding (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Goulart Sztejnberg and Giovanardi, 2017; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015), culture and its associated elements, such as cultural events, figures, heritages were considered the key creators of Wigan myths. As Peñaloza (2001) argues that "all cultures have creation myths; they are important for cultural members in working through complex realities" (370). Similarly, the findings also suggested that Wigan was a melting pot of various types of cultures (e.g. regional culture, popular culture), which contributed to different 'realities' of the Wigan myths. Without cultural references, place brand myths would not be resonant and believable (Essebo, 2019; Holt, 2004; Thompson and Tian, 2008).

Persuaders were seen as actors with more sophisticated knowledge and abilities in shaping place myths. These persuaders, represented by local council and cultural intermediaries, can be likened to shadow puppeteers or magicians, who often possess a firm intention and skill

in utilising and manipulating the shapes and meanings of place myths (similar to shadows) for meeting certain needs and interests. In contrast, discoverers were those who were engaged in place brand mythmaking with less deliberate manipulation, and apparent objectives. Despite this, they often offered alternative views on how place brand myths could be interpreted. They were similar to audiences in a shadow play, or researchers, who are interested in exploring alternative ways of interpreting shadows. In the case of Wigan, discoverers were represented by local residents, tourists, independent researchers, who revealed more hidden and imaginative stories about a place brand, as their opinions and interests were not constrained by commercial or political purposes.

While this study develops the distinct categorisation of creators, persuaders and discoverers, these groups were not seen as separate entities. Rather, the findings highlighted the symbiotic relationships between various mythmakers. For example, creators, as the essential components of place myths, established the scene and provided sociocultural references for persuaders and discoverers to interpret. In turn, persuaders and discoverers provided vivid annotations for the stories formed by the creators, drawing on their real-life narratives, feelings, emotions, and practices. Additionally, despite differences in their intentions, motives, and strategies, these two groups of place brand mythmakers are inextricably linked, and often draw influence from one another (See Figure 4.1). As previously discussed, because of their advanced knowledge and skills, persuaders often try to convince people, including discoverers, to believe in their narratives. From the perspective of the discoverers, while drawing on influence from the persuaders, they also critically reflect on these impacts, thereby contributing to novel interpretations. The data showed that every place brand mythmaker was an independent organism with its own story and role, yet each was also interdependent, completing one another. Therefore, this study argues that the mythmakers must

be analysed in relation to one another as there were “cascading effects when they interact” (Preece et al., 2018:8).

It is worth mentioning that Preece et al.’s (2018) observation of the multi-level (i.e. micro-, meso-, macro-level) ‘brand assemblage’ has significantly influenced the understanding and analysis of the multi-category place brand mythmakers and their interactions identified in the data. However, the examination of the Wigan brand appears to be a more complex ‘brand assemblage’, due to a wider range of stakeholder groups being involved in the process of place branding (Jernsand and Kraff, 2017), as well as more ‘democratic’ and ‘inclusive’ relationships between different stakeholders (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2012).

The findings also suggested that different place brand mythmakers were not just interdependent; the roles, characteristics and views of these mythmaker groups were also sometimes overlapping and shifting. The local band, The Lathums, was seen as a crucial illustration of the complex existence of mythmakers. The band was a crucial representation and element of the local popular culture, acting as the creator of the illustrious Wigan music scene. In the meantime, they were also cultural intermediaries, skillfully manipulating the image and story of their hometown through their music, images, lyrics and narratives. Simultaneously, as local residents who were born and bred in Wigan, they carried the spirit of discoverers who eagerly uncover unknown stories about their hometown and their own youth. Not just The Lathums but also other mythmakers such as council staff, local historians, and residents share similar traits - each of them has various roles, interests and identities in the mythmaking process of the Wigan brand.

Based on these findings, this study draws on the shadow metaphor, and especially the idea of ‘play’ between different shadow makers (Gombrich et al., 2014), to conceptualise the complex relationships and characteristics of the mythmakers of Wigan. In the world of shadow making, each participant or entity plays a distinct role (e.g. light sources as creators, shadow

puppeteers as persuaders, audiences as discoverers). Despite the different roles, their relationships remain equal and open. They collaborate extensively during the shadow play, building different viewpoints and expertise into the shared experience. Moreover, these roles are flexible and interchangeable rather than rigid. The fluidity and flexibility of roles and interactions contribute to the creative dynamism and enjoyment of the shadow play. Drawing from the shadow metaphor, this study witnesses a 'playful' dynamic between various place mythmakers of the Wigan brand. It highlights their interdependence, and accommodates diverse interests, roles and viewpoints both between different mythmaker groups and within a single mythmaker. Whether they are local council, cultural intermediaries, residents, or tourists, this study suggests that the relationship between these different stakeholders was not necessarily hierarchical and conflictual, as shown in previous place branding literature (Kalandides and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005), but also collaborative and flexible, as shown in the shadow play.

RQ 3) What are the processes through which the fluid place brand myths are created, negotiated and transformed?

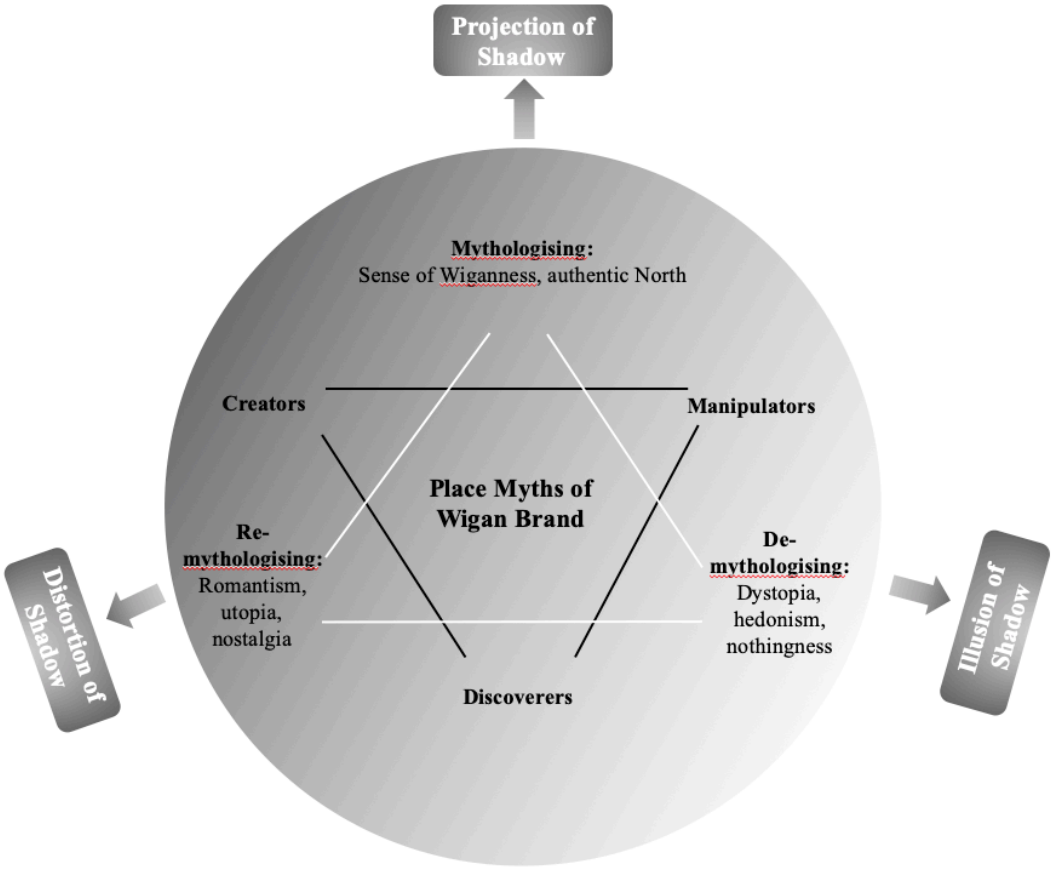


Figure 5.1. Shadowy Perspective of the Place Brand Mythmaking.

After identifying the key mythmakers for place brands (i.e. creators, persuaders and discoverers), and the intricate relationships between them, the second question the study asks is how the place brand myths are created and negotiated by these place mythmakers. In order to develop an in-depth understanding of this question, the study selects one of the key mythmakers of the Wigan brand, The Lathums, as an analytical lens - the rationale is discussed in Section 2.1.1 and Section 3.6. Through analysis of the narratives, actions and ideologies of the band and beyond, which were deeply embedded in the culture, history and identity of the Wigan brand, the study unravels the enigmatic, evolving and intricate mythmaking process of Wigan. The analysis of the empirical data suggests that there were three phases in the mythmaking process – mythologising, remythologising and demythologising. Drawing on a shadow metaphor, these three phases are further examined and conceptualised through

different characteristics of shadows, including projection, distortion and illusion in this study (See Table 2.1).

The mythologising phase was analogous to the primary feature of shadow - shadow is commonly seen as the projection of an illuminated object, thing or person. Similarly, the findings suggest that the stories of a place brand were mythologised as a result of their projection onto 'others'. Just as with consumer brand myths, believable place brand myths, such as the indie music myth, working-class myth in Wigan, did not emerge from commercial or political campaigns. Instead, in order to create resonant and compelling place myths, the participants drew on cultural, historical and social references from the powerful 'others' (Holt, 2004; 2006). As discussed in Section 4.2, the participants in this study demonstrate how they borrowed and enshrined the traditions, identities, and activities from the 'mother' North and the 'big brother' Manchester in order to make Wigan myths more relevant and influential. By empirically analysing the ways in which the participants differentiate southern England from Wigan, the study also suggests that the mythical projection on 'others' was not limited to cultural alignment, but also included social and geographical differentiation and division (Essebo, 2019; Shields, 1991). The findings also showed that, either through alignment or differentiation/division, the projection onto 'others' often led to problems to the place brands such as the loss of local identity and pride (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2001; Wulf, 2016), or the disputes around place brand authenticity (Hornskov, 2007).

The remythologising phase in place brand mythmaking was conceptualised by the distortion feature of shadow – the images and meanings of shadows can be distorted from the original shapes, with the manipulation of lights, air, surfaces, human eyes, and culture. Following this feature of shadow, as well as the analysis of the empirical research on Wigan, the study identifies how place brand myths could be altered and distorted from their 'origins'. Through the analysis of the ways that the stereotypical Wigan myths were adjusted and refined

by different participants, the study suggests that the myths, and especially the unpleasant myths, about a place brand could be filtered and reintroduced through mythmakers' romantic views, nostalgic memories (Goulding et al., 2018), and intimate relationships (Maclaran et al., 1999; Maclaran and Brown, 2005). The findings also suggest that the remythologising phase often co-emerges and co-exists with the mythologising phase, as they were formed by different and sometimes conflicting views and actions on the entrenched place myths. While mythologising focused on highlighting, enshrining and maintaining the stereotypical myths, remythologising was about breaking them down, contributing to new interpretations and possibilities of the place (Craig and Tian, 2008).

Demythologising referred to the phase in which the Wigan myths were perceived by many participants as little more than political lies or ambition, or romantic aspirations manufactured by individuals seeking self/social redemption or escape. This demythologising phase of a place brand was examined through an often-overlooked characteristic of shadow - - illusion. When light sources are absent, shadow becomes a visual and mental illusion. Similarly, like illusional shadows, in the demythologising phase participants regarded myths in relation to a place brand as delusional and hollow, and they questioned their existence and meaning (Bultmann, 1984). The demythologising phase stood out as relatively unorthodox, compared to the two above-mentioned phases, as the essential elements (e.g. cultural heritage, history, people, events), considered crucial for mythologising and remythologising a place brand, were absent. By revealing the deceptive nature of long-standing myths, the demythologising phase also enabled the formation of more genuine, varied and inclusive place brand myths that better capture the hidden secrets of a place that may have been generally disregarded or neglected (Arefi, 1999; Auge, 1995).

It is worth noting that there was no specific sequence or priority as between these different phases of place brand mythmaking. Instead, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, the shadowy

perspective of place brand mythmaking developed in this study was designed to facilitate open and flexible discussions - it provided a shadowy framework for interpreting the myths as they develop and evolve, not only forward but also towards different directions and levels. This means that the place brand myths can be constructed through projection, distortion or illusion simultaneously, depending on the viewpoints of the mythmakers and other internal and external elements. Ultimately, this shadow-informed three-phase process of mythologising, remythologising and demythologising unravelled the open and fluid nature of the place brand mythmaking process. This adaptability enabled the stories of a place brand to remain sensitive and relevant to the constant historical, cultural, and social change (Jensen, 2007; Stoica et al., 2021).

6.2 Research contributions

The research findings presented above make significant contributions to the academic understanding of the meaning and nature of place branding by providing a comprehensive analysis of the Wigan myths. Specifically, the study offers theoretical contributions by introducing a shadow metaphor that demonstrates the fluid and formless nature of myth and mythmaking in the context of place branding. Moreover, by developing an MDA-informed grounded theory analytical approach, along with the theoretical lens of the shadow metaphor, the study presents methodological contributions that enable the interpretation and analysis of the multi-faceted and ever-changing place brand mythmaking process. The study also has managerial implications for place brand managers and policy-makers who are interested in developing organic and authentic place brand stories and images. To provide an in-depth overview, the theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions of the findings are discussed in detail below.

6.2.1 Theoretical contributions

Fluid place myths/place brands

The main contribution of this thesis is to enhance the academic understanding of the fluid nature of the place branding process. By introducing and applying the novel shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens, the thesis delineates the evolution of Wigan's place myths, demonstrating how they are not immutable but subject to shifts in perspectives. The study suggests that the shadow metaphor, with its profound ability to shift 'reality' in varied forms—whether as distinct projections, distorted shapes, or simply as figments of illusion—aptly captures the ever-changing essence of the Wigan myths. These place myths manifest in various forms, such as tangible representations of Northern England's culture and pain. By changing perspectives, these myths can also transform into a blend of nostalgic sentiment and utopian dreams, or fleeting and superficial illusions that lack depth and substance.

Existing studies have suggested that place brands are not merely static and controllable products (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kotler et al., 1993); instead, they are constructed in a dynamic and open-ended process (Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Kemp et al., 2012; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). In their recent conceptual paper, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021) especially highlight that the construction of place brands is an interwoven process involving interactions between different stakeholders. From this perspective, place brands should be considered multifaceted and elusive, rather than static and finite. Building upon this stream of literature, this study empirically reveals such conceptualisation of place brands as elusive constructs through the examination of the fluid and complex Wigan myths.

Diving deeper into the Wigan brand's myths through the theoretical lens of the shadow metaphor, however, this thesis goes beyond examining the multiplicity and ambiguity of place brands identified in previous studies. It posits that place brands are not only diverse in their

representations and therefore lacking definite and singular identity (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013), but they are also living entities, evolving in response to shifts in individual perspectives, societal values, cultural narratives, and economic and political conditions (Gao et al., 2012; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). From this perspective, while previous studies have highlighted a departure from a static understanding of place brands by embracing the complexity and variability in perception (See Cassinger and Eksell, 2017; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2021), this study argues further for the understanding and investigation of place brand's potential and capacity for change and evolution over time.

Through adopting the shadow metaphor as a theoretical perspective, this study deciphers the intricate and evolving interactions between people, cultures, and stories of Wigan. As such, it argues that the shadow metaphor conceptualises the essence of place branding as fluid and ephemeral. Using the shadow metaphor as a theoretical underpinning for conceptualising such place branding phenomenon, therefore, also effectively addresses the call by Kalandides and Kavaratzis (2009) for filling the distinct gap between theory and practice in the field of place branding by moving away from technical analysis (how to do it) towards theoretical development ('what it is that we are dealing with in the first place').

The fluid view of the mythical stories of the Wigan brand, informed by the shadow metaphor, also redefines the significance and implications of the 'dark' images of place brands. Much like shadows, while some might regard the inherent darkness of shadows as something sinister or vicious, others might find a unique elegance and beauty within it (Tanizaki, 2001). Similarly, this thesis reveals that even the stigmatised Wigan myths - represented by empty cultural references and demolished historical heritage - can lead to alternative meanings of the town that many appreciate. Such 'dark' sides of a place have long been perceived as contributors to the negative reputation and stigmatised image of place brands. Consequently, they need to be intentionally filtered or selectively presented (Arsel and Thompson, 2011;

Coyle and Fairweather, 2005; Hall, 2014; Stoica et al., 2021). However, drawing on the inspiration from the shadow metaphor, this study argues that place brands are not the end results of commercial and political purifications; instead, they are created through a process of creation, transformation and evolution. During this organic process of meaning-making and transformation, a range of ambiguous (Brown et al., 2013) and sometimes 'unpleasant' or 'unexpected' place meanings emerge and co-exist. However, as the findings suggest, the perceived 'dark' images are not static; their significance and forms can transition between shadow and illumination, malevolent to divine, depending on what is absent and present in the eyes of the viewers (Goulding et al., 2018). Therefore, this study argues that in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of a place, it is essential to embrace these different manifestations and formats of place brand meanings, even those considered less 'desirable' by some.

The analysis of the fluid Wigan myths also enriches the academic understanding of the nature of marketplace myths. The focal point of the previous studies has been on myths shaped and manipulated by commercial media, such as advertisements (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Scott, 1994; Stern, 1995), books (Holbrook and Grayson, 1986) and films (Brown and Petterson, 2010; Brown et al., 2013). The plots of these stories are generally pre-written, sequential and finished. They are also, according to Scott (1994), "highly fanciful, advancing their claims through dramatic settings, provocative narratives, imaginary characters, exaggerated pictures, and figurative language" (461). In contrast to these constructed and mediated marketplace myths, the Wigan myths examined in this study emerge more naturally and evolve in response to individual, societal, political, and economic changes. Like shadows, they are inherently fluid, formed and reformed by the vicissitudes of life and the world around us. Compared to the commercially mediated myths, Wigan myths are lived and experienced in everyday life. They lack sequence or mediated coherence preferred by authors, instead

following the flow and change in life, which makes them undisciplined, ongoing and everchanging (Boje, 2001; Chalquist, 2009). This view advances scholarly attention regarding marketplace myths from marketing-driven discourses towards prioritising more genuine and authentic narratives and experiences in everyday life.

'Playing' with place brands

Adopting a shadow metaphor, this study also offers a deeper comprehension of the roles of and interrelations between different stakeholders in place making by highlighting the evolving nature of stakeholders' perspectives. While existing place branding studies, particularly those focused on inclusive and participatory place branding literature, have underscored the tight-knit interactions within stakeholder groups (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Cassinger and Thelander, 2018; Eshuis and Edwards, 2013; Kavaratzis et al., 2018), there remains a tendency to treat these groups as separate entities with static, often opposing perspectives. The conceptual frameworks proposed by scholars such as Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) and Kavaratzis and Hatch (2021) further conceptualise this distinction and division between different stakeholders in place branding. These studies typically demonstrate the dualistic nature of the place branding process by distinguishing consumer experiences from the brand manager's roles. As a result, consumers contribute to elusive interpretations of the place brand, while brand managers decipher and organise these multifarious consumer experiences (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2021). Even in the realm of participatory or inclusive place branding literature that emphasises 'decentralised' and 'democratic' relationships between various stakeholders, the distinct and unbridgeable roles, intentions, and influences in place branding continue to be pronounced (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Cassinger and Thelander, 2017; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).

In contrast to this bifurcated perspective, this study proposes a more integrative theoretical framework that dissolves the boundary between the production and consumption of place brands through the empirical analysis of the Wigan myths. The findings suggest that different place brand mythmakers are not confined by rigid and oppositional roles and perspectives, but they also transition between different groups, such as persuaders and discoverers, adopting diverse viewpoints as they engage in the place brand mythmaking process in different ways. Such fluid and unbounded perspectives of stakeholders can be explained by the metaphor of 'shadow makers' (Kite, 2017) or 'shadow players' (Sorensen, 2008) who create and recreate shadows in various ways without being restricted by the predesigned and rigid stances. Instead, their views on and engagements with shadows are subject to evolution, influenced by their changing preferences, expectations and emotions.

In this shadow making process, 'shadow makers' or 'shadow players' such as people, lights and objects do not act as rivals adhering to and competing for their distinct interests and benefits, but as collaborative partners who spontaneously 'play' with the shapes and meanings of shadows (Stoichita, 1997). In a similar way, place mythmakers are envisioned not as competitors but as collaborative 'shadow players' in an ongoing place narrative performance, where the conventional distinctions of roles and expectations are replaced by fluid interactions in telling various stories of a place (Jain et al., 2022; Lichrou et al., 2010). By removing the conventional distinction and division of different stakeholders, this study goes beyond the ingrained top-down versus bottom-up dichotomy in place branding studies (Björner and Aronsson, 2022), focusing instead on the interplay of diverse and fluid perspectives, identities, and memories of stakeholders that collide, merge and adapt within the ever-changing place making process.

The intricate 'play' between the shadow makers, and in the case of this study, the place mythmakers of Wigan also illuminate the role of culture as a significant and active agent in

place branding. While place branding literature has recognised the crucial role of culture in constructing powerful place brands, its focus has primarily been on “burrowed” cultural elements such as film and artists, which are utilised for place promotion and marketing (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2014; Scaramanga, 2012), or the cultural fields in which place branding activities such as place planning and urban regeneration take place (Jenson, 2007). However, these views on culture can be seen as being superficial and simplified and do not fully capture the inherent 'cultural nature' of place branding, namely, the reciprocal relationship between place culture and place brands (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015). The findings in this study, however, argue that culture and its manifestations, such as historical events, political discourses, and cultural heritage, are far from being a mere backdrop. Instead, like shadow creators such as sunlight and opaque objects, it is the ‘creator’ that brings the story and meaning of place brands into existence.

Specifically, this study posits culture as the seminal contributor in the creation of Wigan’s place myths. It encompasses the full spectrum of cultural expression, from the often-stigmatised yet deep-seated traditions of the regional culture to the renowned popular culture, and even the nuances of mundane culture. These diverse cultural strands endow Wigan’s contemporary myths with meanings. Without such cultural fabric, the meaningful and enduring Wigan myths cannot be established nor sustained (Brown et al., 2013). It is within the diverse and dynamic cultural landscapes that the stories, identities, and meanings of place brands come to life, continually morphing to reflect the shifting societal, economic, and political landscapes, thereby ensuring their ongoing relevance and resonance (Cassinger et al., 2019; Lichrou et al., 2018; Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). By recognising its voice that endows place brands with meanings, this study reconceptualises the significance and position of culture within place branding —not as a promotional tool or static setting, but as the ‘creator’ that actively forms the meaning of a place brand.

A similar argument can also be applied to revaluating the role of cultural intermediaries in place branding. As stated by Warren and Dinnie (2018), "as cultural intermediaries, promotional actors use their taste-making proclivities to collect, curate and amplify information that portrays a place or product in its most positive light" (312). However, cultural intermediaries discussed in this study, such as The Lathums, are not merely 'promotional actors' who utilise and promote the established Wigan myth to gain commercial benefits. Rather, they are reimagined as active participants in the cultural dialogue of Wigan. They are not only promoters but also creators and definers of place cultures, contributing to the place brand's evolving story through their unique experiences, expressions and reflections. This reconceptualisation elevates cultural intermediaries from the sidelines as passive promotional instruments for place branding (Björner and Aronsson, 2022; Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2014; Warren and Dinnie, 2018) towards the view that they are essential and original authors of the place brand's meaning.

By centering the significance of culture in both creating and reimagining place brand myths, this study challenges the dominant narrative that often overlooks the perspectives of the 'underrepresented' stakeholders. It is believed that even within the context of place brand co-creation, the narratives of certain stakeholders such as cultural intermediaries and tourists are less presented, or are often selected and monitored by more 'dominant' ones such as authorities and managers (Jernsand and Kraff, 2017; Rebelo et al., 2020). Such an unequal dynamic often leads to conflict, hostility and resistance from different groups (Kavaratzis et al., 2017). This thesis, therefore, highlights the importance of building a more inclusive and equitable co-creation process in place branding. Inspired by the concept of the collaborative and symbiotic relationship between shadow makers, the study argues that the intricate place stories and meanings emerge from the interactions among a wide range of stakeholders such as residents, tourists, historians, managers, as well as culture and objects (Stoica et al., 2021). These

mythmakers are naturally intertwined and mutually influence and transform one another (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018; Su, 2018). From this perspective, this study advocates for an organic, egalitarian development of place brands that disrupts the established power dynamics in place.

The manipulatable place heritage

Through investigating place brand myths, this study also contributes to the literature on place heritage. While the research context is based on a small English town, Wigan, the study is believed to have wider implications for other places and spaces rich in, or built on, heritage. These include but are not limited to nation brands, place brands, and tourist destinations where history and past significantly shape the place's identity, culture and image, and continue to permeate the present everyday life of these places. Through the empirical analysis of the place myths of Wigan, this thesis has highlighted that "heritage, as the contemporary uses of the past" (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2011:26) plays a crucial role in creating and recreating powerful and enduring place myths.

Previous studies have shown that heritage can be manipulated (Goulding and Domic, 2008). Through the manipulation of history and heritage, the stories of a place are constructed, romanticised and contested (Chronis, 2005; Jain et al., 2012; Kerrigan et al., 2013; Lichrou et al., 2017; Park, 2016). Following in this vein, and facilitated by the shadow metaphor, this thesis further investigates how heritage is created and recreated during the process of place mythmaking. Similar to shadow makers playing with shadows by changing light sources, objects and the observer's position, mythmakers also shape and reshape place myths through manipulating a place's heritage. The analysis of Wigan reveals that the town's heritage characterised by cultural traditions, historical significance, architectural styles and more, functions as the essential ingredient, or the 'creator', of the stories about Wigan. This heritage

is then enshrined, romanticised, despised or abandoned by other mythmakers such as 'persuaders' and 'discoverers', imbuing it with diverse meanings, and eventually contributing to various Wigan myths. Using the shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens, this thesis conceptualises the dynamic and complex process of heritage formation and transformation within collective place mythmaking.

According to Jain et al. (2012), heritage place brand "acts as a nostalgia enabler, disseminating symbolic and heritage metaphors to residents and visitors" through "nostalgia-based communication" (73, 76). Nostalgia towards the past is also evident in the case of Wigan. However, the findings of this study also reveal a sense of anti-nostalgia in the place's heritage, which rejects the romantic or idealised view of Wigan's past. Instead, the anti-nostalgic view critically assesses the history or past of the town. Contrary to Chatzidakis et al.'s (2012) observation, which identified an Athenian neighbourhood as a heterotopia of revolt and resistance derived from historical political conflicts, this study identifies Wigan as a heterotopia of acceptance. In this context, participants acknowledge, embrace and live in the complexities, darkness and meaninglessness of a place's heritage. This finding expands the academic focus on the positive and cleansed heritage of a place or a tourist site (Banerjee and Mukherjee, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Rebelo et al., 2020), moving towards the view that negative attitudes and 'countermemories' (Thompson, 2004) are also significant elements and motives in understanding and creating place heritage and place myths.

This thesis also identifies the co-existence of anti-nostalgic perspectives as well as nostalgic feelings towards the place's past. Goulding et al. (2018) have demonstrated that a heritage site can be re-enchanted through the manipulation of the presence and absence of its historic and mnemonic elements. Here, the shadow metaphor provides a theoretical interpretation for understanding such interplay between the presence and absence of the certain past of a place. As this study has shown, the mythmakers of Wigan can, like manipulating

shadows, create certain shapes and meanings of the Wigan myth by adjusting the bright and dark histories of the town. By playing with 'light' and 'shadow', and seen and unseen, mythmakers are able to reshape and represent the stigmatised and unpleasant memories, while preserving and immortalising the glorious past of a place. As Suddaby et al. (2010) point out, the past is a malleable construct which "can be shaped and manipulated to motivate, persuade and frame action" (p.147). Through the dynamic interplay between the absence and presence of certain visual, historical and cultural elements, the shadow metaphor offers us a theoretical lens to understand and conceptualise such adaptability and malleability of a place's heritage, and how it can contribute to various mythical stories of a place brand.

6.2.2 Methodological contributions

They principal methodological contributions of this study lie in two domains: the development of the MDA-informed grounded theory as a methodological toolkit to examine the intricate and fluid place branding issues, and the innovative creation and application of the shadow metaphor as an alternative analytical approach to decipher the multi-author and dynamic marketplace myths. In the following sections, these significant methodological contributions is discussed in depth.

The study also develops an innovative methodological approach - the MDA-informed grounded theory, to analyse and interpret a more complex and fluid place branding process. This innovative technique overcomes the shortcomings of the traditional methodological approaches within place branding studies which can be either overly discourse-centred (Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2016; Ooi and Pedersen, 2010; Giovanardi et al., 2013), or unduly practice-based (Kalandides and Kavaratzis, 2009). It accentuates instead the dynamic interactions between everyday practices, discourses and the overarching sociocultural settings

(Scollon, 1999). Following Rodner and Kerrigan (2018), this thesis argues that, by integrating a variety of data sets such as texts, discourses, actions, objects, symbols, things, the MDA approach provides a more comprehensive methodological tool for the identification and assessment of the connections between participants' discourses, their corresponding actions and the built environment within a place branding context. Additionally, rather than strictly applying the scientific coding and theory development procedures, the MDA-informed grounded theory, derived from the empirical work conducted in this thesis, provides a more malleable and open-ended research method (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Charmaz, 2002; 2006; 2008) by highlighting the significance of adaptability and innovation in data analysis and theory development. This is considered a more suitable approach for the examination of place branding issues in a changing social, cultural and political environment than the traditional methods that concentrate on the rigid model application (Jain et al., 2022; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).

By using a music band as a lens for examining the place myths of the Wigan brand, this thesis also advances the use of cultural artefacts (e.g. music, arts, film, literature) in understanding and analysing place branding issues. Previous place branding studies have overly focused on the discourses generated by the cultural artefacts in relation to a place, while often overlooking the significance of the visual elements that these artefacts generate (Kemp et al., 2012; Leaver and Schmidt, 2009; Ooi and Pedersen, 2010). However, as pointed by Rodner and Kerrigan (2018), the discourse and visual data generated from cultural artefacts are both valuable resources and should be combined together as the unit of analysis for providing a richer context to understand and decipher complex place branding issues. By integrating textual data (such as lyrics and interviews) with visual data (such as music videos, documentaries and photos collected from the band The Lathums), the study is able to generate a multi-dimensional understanding of the mythical stories of the Wigan brand. This study

therefore uses a music band as an example to provide an analytical lens for place branding studies, which emphasises the intertextual and interdiscursive properties of cultural artefacts.

Another methodological contribution of this study is the development of the shadow metaphor as an alternative analytical approach to understand and decipher marketplace myths. While myths are expressed in advertising, media or marketing/consumer narratives, it has been criticised that the marketing understanding of myths are constrained by the structuralism tradition (Brown, 1998; Scott, 1994; Thompson, 2004). In this vein, marketing scholars primarily adopt formalistic literary theory approaches that concentrate on rigid and universal structures or forms for analysing myths in the marketplace (Brown et al., 2013; Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995). However, previous studies have shown that the meanings of myths in the marketplace are dynamic, multifaceted and ambiguous (Brown et al., 2013; Holt, 2004). As such, it can be argued that the rigid forms of structuralism and formalism do not fit into the complexity and uncertainty of the modern stories in the marketplace (Scott, 1994). Overreliance on the scientifically disciplined text can limit the possibility and plurality of the stories that a brand can tell. Although a few scholars, such as Brown (1998) and Scott (1994), have provided correctives to the structuralism culture by introducing a post-structuralism perspective into marketing literature, these methods are either radically reader-centric (reader-response theory), or author-centric (autobiographical criticism), and cannot be applied to interpret the dialogical relationship between authors and readers in mythmaking.

In contrast to the structuralism literary theory, this study argues that the shadow metaphor can serve as an alternative analytical approach for interpreting multi-authored, ambiguous and fluid marketplace myths. As discussed above, drawing on the metaphor of shadow maker and shadow making, this research has identified three types of mythmakers - creators, persuaders and discovers, and the symbiotic and fluid relationships between these place brand mythmakers. It also provides an analytical framework that helps understand and

analyse the organically formed and evolved place myths from three aspects: production, distortion and illusion. Although being categorised and labelled, the shadow metaphor as an analytical approach should not be seen as a representative model with rigid rules and structures. Rather, it is more accurate to consider it as a limitless 'network' that offers us 'thousands of entries' (Barthes, 1974) to assess meanings in discourses and actions as they form and evolve. It focuses on the open-ended ways for comprehending various roles and interests of mythmakers, and following different shapes of myths as they develop, not only forward but also from diverse directions and levels (Rosenthal, 1975). In so doing, it avoids the approach of a fixed one-size-fits-all system, and demonstrates enhanced flexibility in accommodating diverse phases and voices within the process of the production and consumption of myths.

The theorisation of the shadow metaphor also advances the understanding and application of metaphor in marketing studies. While various metaphors have been used as an analytical tool to comprehend and interpret complex marketing phenomena and concepts (Cheetham et al., 2018; Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; Hede et al., 2022), they have been considered and used too literally. Consequently, this can inhibit creativity and create barriers to thinking (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; Hede et al., 2022). In addition, metaphors in marketing research are often based on certain empirical contexts, but lack necessary theoretical underpinning for interpreting and conceptualising the concepts (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019). To address the limitations associated with utilising metaphors as a conceptual lens, this research delves into a more in-depth examination of the concept of shadow. It draws upon research on shadows from various disciplines within the social sciences, including mythology, arts, geography and psychology. It also identifies and summarises the primary authors, characteristics and phases of shadow making within the existing literature, in order to provide a more robust analytical framework informed by the shadow metaphor. Taking these innovations together, this study shows a more comprehensive methodology for the adoption,

development, application and theorisation of metaphor as both a theoretical and an analytical tool within marketing studies (Delbaere and Slobodzian, 2019; Hede et al., 2022).

6.2.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study also have implications for practitioners within the place branding sector. The main managerial implication of this study is to persuade place brand managers and marketers to acknowledge the complex and ever-changing place branding process, as well as the fluid relationships and perspectives of the stakeholders. As shown in the shadow making process, different individuals and actors (e.g. puppeteers, architects, painters, audiences, residents, buildings, sun lights) form and interpret shadows in different ways. However, their roles and perspectives are somewhat flexible and obscure (Kite, 2017). Each shadow maker can offer multifaceted perspectives on shadows depending on how he or she is positioned within the shadow making process. Furthermore, these perspectives are constantly transforming and evolving, influenced by their dynamic interactions with other shadow makers.

Inspired by the metaphor of shadow makers, this study argues that different stakeholders possess distinct interests and roles in attaching stories and meanings to a place, but a stakeholder can hold different perspectives, which can change over time, as well as being affected by other stakeholders. Therefore, it is crucial for practitioners to recognise the multiplicity and complexity of each stakeholder group. Instead of focusing solely on the hierarchical and conflictual relationship between various stakeholder groups, acknowledging the collaborative dynamics and mutual influences between different stakeholders of a place brand may be more beneficial. Recognising the symbiotic relationship between different place brand stakeholder groups can contribute to more inclusive and effective place branding strategies that meet the needs of a wide range of relevant social actors.

Through analysis of the multi-author and fluid place mythmaking process of Wigan, this study also inspires place brand managers to acknowledge and respect the power of "myth" as a useful tool for building resonant and enduring place brands. Using the metaphor of shadow to unpack the mythical stories of Wigan, this study demonstrates that myths serve as a basis for creating compelling and powerful beliefs that connect with people's emotions and values. This shows that place brand managers may establish deeper emotional and ideological bonds with their target audiences by incorporating myths and the associated symbols, tales, and cultural components into their branding strategy. This study also suggests that place myth is not a singular and static concept. Rather, it is multifaceted and dynamic as it evolves over time along with the shifting experiences, memories, interests, and imaginations of various place stakeholders, as well as the changing sociocultural environment. Different stakeholders see the myth of a place in different ways at different times. Even the dark stories about a place cannot be removed, as they also contribute to an alternative image and reputation for it. Therefore, in order to create resonant and enduring place myths and thereby powerful place brands, practitioners need to consider and develop flexible and adaptable place myths that can fit into the internal and external changes.

This study also helps place brand managers and marketers identify place branding strategies for smaller cities and regions. Using Wigan as an example, this study demonstrates that, due to geographical challenges, and to limited financial resources and social support, place branding strategies in small locations, such as a town or a village, tend to be more unstructured. For example, different interpretations of the mythical stories of Wigan emerge organically during the interactions between different stakeholder groups. Rather than being formally and systematically constructed, they spontaneously form, evolve, and collide in relation to local culture, identity and everyday experiences. This suggests that, instead of developing a one-size-fits-all place branding plan, place brand managers need to embrace spontaneity and

uncertainty when developing small regions and areas, while respecting the local authenticity and uniqueness embedded in mundane life.

6.3 Limitations and opportunities for future research

6.3.1 Methodological limitations and opportunities for future research

While this study has contributed to the extant literature and managerial practices in various ways, certain limitations should also be noted. One of the significant contributions of this thesis is to broaden marketing understandings of place brand mythmaking beyond managerial perspectives by giving equal consideration to a wide range of stakeholders. Nevertheless, due to the time and resource limitations of the study, the participants selected and interviewed were from a limited number of stakeholder groups such as tourists, residents, historians, (former) employees of Wigan Council and musicians, while the voices of other stakeholder groups were mainly collected through secondary research. Future research focusing on multi-author place brand myths may continue to explore the behaviours, experiences and attitudes of other stakeholders that have been identified, but not thoroughly explored in this study, such as journalists, artists, writers, business owners and government officials.

Furthermore, as discussed previously, this study started from an interest in a local music band, The Lathums, and therefore it used the band only as an analytical lens to understand the place branding process of Wigan. While this approach did help generate various rich data-sets, it also restricts the analysis to a single cultural intermediary group. Nevertheless, during the research process, the perspectives of other cultural intermediaries (e.g. writers, film makers)

also appeared to be crucial and interesting for place brand mythmaking. While it was beyond the scope and interest of this research, future research that is interested in the significance of cultural intermediaries in place branding may contribute to the field by considering and comparing the narratives from them, and further investigate the stories generated by different cultural intermediaries on shaping and reshaping the meaning of a place brand.

6.3.2 Theoretical limitations and opportunities for future research

The shadow metaphor was developed and used as the principal conceptual framework for interpreting and analysing the research findings in this study. Shadow is a complex concept due to its obscure and multi-disciplinary nature. In order to theorise the shadow concept, this study has primarily drawn on the interpretations of shadow from four disciplines – mythology, geography, arts, and psychology. Future research may continue to build further upon the theoretical foundation of the shadow concept by investigating other interpretations of shadows within the disciplines identified, or by considering the viewpoints on shadows in other disciplines not been incorporated in the research to date (e.g. sociology, anthropology). Future studies may also expand the understanding and use of the shadow concept by exploring its applications within broader place branding and marketing issues.

Inspired by the shadow metaphor, this study has classified the place brand mythmakers into three categories: creators, persuaders and discoverers. Similarly, the place brand mythmaking process was also divided into three phases – projection, distortion and illusion. Such categorisations were useful for recognising and analysing the different roles that mythmakers play, as well as the different stages of mythmaking within place branding. However, these classifications also restricted other possibilities – there could be other roles for mythmakers and other ways that place brand myths are formed and reformed. Although the

categorisations were used as indicators only, and it was not the study's intention to develop a rigid structure or framework for understanding place brand mythmaking, future research may enhance the theoretical models developed in this study by providing more open and flexible visual representations of the same theoretical relationships.

Several recurring themes emerged during the data analysis, but this study was unable to explore all of them in depth. For example, the analysis revealed that memory had significant impacts on participants' interpretations of and reflections on the myths of Wigan. Participants' memories about northern England, Wigan, as well as their childhood and families, directly affected how the stories of Wigan were told. Similarly, the concept of community kept appearing throughout the analysis. The various communities (e.g. sports communities, music communities, research communities) and their associated identities and cultures appeared to be crucial components of Wigan's myths. These recurrent concepts were mentioned throughout the chapters 4 and 5 on findings, but as they were beyond the scope of this research, they were not discussed in any detail. However, future studies might expand on the current findings of this study by examining the theoretical implications of these recurrent themes in greater depth. Questions that could be explored further include the following - How do people's memories affect the myths of a place brand? What is the relationship between different communities in place brand mythmaking? How do different community-dependent identities influence the myths of a place brand?

Appendices

Appendix 1: Example of Data Analysis

Step	Examples from Data	Analysis	Analytic Codes
Open coding	Interview excerpt from my participant Caroline: "That video, *How Beautiful Life Can Be*, really got me right in the heart, because it's just about all of my childhood memories of spending time with my nan around like Wigan Market and Wigan town centre in general… And that instantly triggered that memory of my nan for me because we used to go there every single Wednesday… She had her hair cut… and then we'd go around to charity shop… and then she could get her Uncle Joe's Mint Balls and Cadbury Eclairs… And it was just such a lovely video that it got me interested in the band… see such a bunch of young lads, obviously proud of where they come from… Interview excerpt from my participant Liz: "I still remember buying Uncle Joe's from the market in Wigan, where they'd have the sugar base and they bash it up with a hammer and all the jars and everything, and we used to get them in the paper bag. I've still got lots of tins and jars from Uncle Joe's in my room… It used to be Santus's and treacle toffee, liquorice, curly aniseed, whatever, whatever, whatever. And the uncle Joe's were just one of the things that they used to sell. So now they've used the uncle Joe's as their brand."	In line with the MDA informed grounded theory approach, I analysed the pictures, videos, interview transcripts and my fieldnotes; I explored the *nexus* between people's practices, discourses and their built environment; preliminary codes emerged through manual coding	Examples: "childhood", "memories", "proud of their hometown", "past", "harmonious", "community", "family like vibe", "multi-cultural", "depressing", "rundown", "damp", "dim light"

	The Lathums - *How Beautiful Life Can Be*  My field note memo: "Stepping into the Wigan market is like stepping into the past. The market's decorations are very dated, like a film set for the 1970s. The venders and shop owners are very friendly, multicultural and it has got a community-like vibe. The things they sell here are really random, ranging from tools like scissors, hammers, to clothing items like dresses and shoes, and also plants and foods. It is a massive market for a small town like Wigan. Everyone is greeting each other, from customers to shop owners. The foods there are very old fashioned too, mainly selling pies and pastries, and cash only… It was a Wednesday afternoon when I visited the market, and it was still full of families wandering around. it all appears appealing and harmonious on the surface, yet as I walk further in, I noticed lots of closed shops and the tables and chairs covered in dust. It smelled damp and the light was dim. As I went upstairs, walking across the bridge to the Gallery side (where The Lathums' practice studio is located), it was even more depressing with all the shops shut down and no customers at all."		

Conceptualisation:	Same as above	Relevant literature and theories identified and applied, or rejected.	Examples: "nostalgia", "imagined community", "utopia/dystopia"
Comparison	Interview excerpt from my participant Caroline: The Lathums really captured that Wigan Market really well… It's not the most common image of… It's actually quite bleak. They made it seem like magic… Because when you go into the actual market itself, I don't know how they've done this in the video, but like the lighting is even cheerful. Looks like it's a really bright, airy space. And it's not. It's really claustrophobic and dark… Every single time I walked in there, I ended up sneezing because of the amount of dust and the stuff. They had to run this but they made it look so lovely… I think it is an exaggeration. But I do think it captures the sense of community and locality that Wigan actually had… They've highlighted the charm of that. It's a nice portrayal of Wigan as well, because I feel like it's sort of been published in the media when it has been mentioned before, as you know, sort of oppressive, small town, working class, lots of socioeconomic problems. And I think a lot of people about put the negative stereotype about Wiganess, and The Lathums are challenging that as well… I saw the video of 'The Great Escape' as well."	I compared previous findings with other relevant data (e.g. the data focusing on the similar topic, or was generated by the same person). While some previous findings were reinforced, new findings also emerged. I have also realised that the ways that Wigan myths represented by Wigan Market were experienced, perceived and interpreted were completely different, and sometimes even on the same person. Here, I began to see multiple and shifting perspectives of Wigan myths. Therefore, I collected more data based on my new findings, and some previous codes were rejected, and new codes were identified.	Examples: "anti-nostalgia", "sense of locality and community", "small and oppressive" "working-class town", "negative stereotype about Wiganess"

Categorisation	All the data above	I compared and organised all the data above, and tried to make connections between them by putting them into different subcategories	"Enshrining the working-class community", "the significance of localness/Wiganess", "nostalgic feelings/memories towards the town", "escaping from the small and lagging hometown", "challenging the utopian fantasy of Wigan"
Axial coding:	All the data above	I organised the categories identified above into the main subthemes of the thesis, which contributed to one core category – fluid place myths of the Wigan brand	Examples: "mythologising, "remythologising", "demythologising"
Theorisation:	N/A	Based on the previous steps I developed a shadow metaphor as a theoretical lens to explain the fluid and adaptable nature of the place myths of Wigan	Place brand mythmaking as shadow making

Appendix 2: Table of Participants

Pseudonym	Role in the Place Mythmaking of the Wigan Brand	Gender	Profession	Area of Residence	Interview Duration
Angie	Armchair tourist	Female	Student/musician	Liverpool	45min
Martin	Permanent resident	Male	IT manager	Wigan	53min
Scott	Immigrant resident	Male	Engineer/artist manager	Newcastle	50min
Jenny	Cultural tourist	Female	Nursing student	Straford	45min
Luis	Cultural tourist / Independent researcher	Male	Self-employed	London	44min
Poppy	Diasporic resident	Female	Student in sports psychology	Nottingham	45min
Lily	Armchair tourist	Female	Medical student	Oxford	50min
Alex	Reunion resident	Male	Project manager	Amsterdam / Wigan	50min
Leo	Employee of Wigan Council / Immigrant resident	Male	Consultant for Wigan Council	Manchester / Wigan	55min
Lucy	Leisure tourist	Female	Student	Newcastle	42min
Tommy	Former employee of Wigan Council / Permanent resident	Male	Self-employed	Wigan	50min
Lee	Cultural tourist	Male	Record label manager	Liverpool	42min
Arthur	Cultural tourist	Male	Artist manager	Liverpool	53min
Laura	Cultural tourist	Female	Marketing manager	Liverpool	1h3m
Jack	Permanent resident	Male	Truck driver	Wigan	1h20m
James	Permanent resident	Male	Music student	Wigan	1h10m
Caroline	Diasporic resident	Female	Student	Souerthern England	1h02m
Flynn	Independent researcher	Male	Archeologist	Manchester	1h05m
Mat	Diasporic resident	Male	Self-employed	Wigan	1h10m
Chris	Immigrant resident	Male	Self-employed	Wigan / Liverpool	1h22m
Louise	Leisure tourist	Female	English teacher	Oxford born (lives in Italy)	1h03m
Ann	Cultural tourist	Female	Student	Manchester	1h
John	Armchair tourist	Male	Film producer	London	1h07m
Gill	Independent researcher / Council employee	Male	Independent historian	Somewhere near Wigan	1h07m
Jude	Immigrant resident / Independent researcher / Former employee of Wigan Council	Male	Independent historian	Wigan	3h20m
Liz	Reunion resident	Female	Teacher	London / Wigan	1h23m
Susie	Diasporic resident	Female	Part time student	Southampton	1h24m

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Title of the proposed study

The Shadowy Perspective of Place Branding: Exploring the Fluid Place Myths of the Wigan Brand

Researcher: xxx

Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with the production and consumption of brand myths by the Department of Marketing in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Statements of understanding/consent

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes (Y)**	**No (N)**
I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)		
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed, being recorded (audio) in formal and/or informal settings.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until the 10th *June, 2022* without giving any reason. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted and the pictures I provide may be used in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I give permission for the project that I provide to be deposited in University of Birmingham online storage so it can be used for future research and learning		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Birmingham.		

Name of Participant: Signature: Date:

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