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Academic Research Paper

From the circuit to the territory: tribal mobility and creation of value for the destination in the MotoGP-Ducati case

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Abstract: *Purpose* - Motorsport events generate large visitor flows and destination experiences that extend beyond the circuit. This exploratory single-case study examines how an organised brand community transforms MotoGP-related travel into a collective, ritualised and spatially distributed practice, and how this practice activates perceived and practice-based pathways of destination value rather than directly measuring economic impact. *Design/methodology/approach* - The study adopts an interpretive case-study design focused on Ducati Official Club (D.O.C.) members. Data were collected through participant observation during World Ducati Week 2024 and the 2025 MotoGP Grand Prix of San Marino and the Rimini Riviera, 23 semi-structured interviews with D.O.C. members, and supporting documentary evidence from public Facebook pages/groups and motorcycling forums. Thematic analysis was combined with within-case descriptive indicators derived from the research database; these indicators are used only to contextualise recurrence within the case and are not inferential statistics. *Originality/value* - The article sharpens the concept of tribal mobility, defined as a brand-mediated process through which community practices coordinate routes, social encounters, symbolic consumption and place meanings around sport events. The contribution is not simply that Ducati fans travel to MotoGP events, but that an organised brand community can operate as a social infrastructure linking sport passion, event participation and destination value pathways. *Practical implications* - The results suggest that destinations may enhance the value captured from major sporting events by co-designing itineraries and touchpoints with brand communities, facilitating safe social spaces and waypoints, and integrating local routes, gastronomy and heritage into branded experiences. The paper also stresses the need for destination governance and risk management,

including traffic, parking, noise, resident well-being and sustainable motorcycle mobility.

Keywords: *sports tourism; tribal marketing; brand community; motorsport events; destination value*
JEL Codes: Z32; M31; L83

1. Introduction

Sports tourism has become an established field of inquiry, as sport-motivated travel has expanded beyond elitist mega-events to include diverse forms of participation, motivations for visiting, and nostalgia-driven mobility (Gibson, 1998; Hinch & Higham, 2001; Weed, 2009). Within this context, recurring attention has been paid to the ability of sporting events to attract visitors, to shape the image of the destination and to stimulate repeat visits through experience and attachment to the place (Getz, 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Motoring events are a distinctive case: they combine a high-intensity live show with the involvement of specific materials (vehicles, clothing, soundscapes) and with forms of collective enthusiasm that often spill over into broader travel practices (e.g. motorcycle itineraries, visits to factories and museums, thematic rallies).

The boundary between sport consumption and tourism consumption is increasingly porous. Ferrucci et al. (2021), in a study of amateur cycling, show that sport consumption may include durable goods, recurrent spending, event participation and tourism experiences, while Ferrucci et al. (2022) highlight passion as an activator of sport-related consumption. This perspective is particularly relevant for motorsport, where travel, accommodation, food and beverage, merchandising, itineraries and brand rituals can become interdependent components of an experiential sport-tourism system.

In Italy, MotoGP events such as the Italian Grand Prix at Mugello and the MotoGP Grand Prix of San Marino and the Rimini Riviera attract very large crowds. For example, the Mugello Circuit recorded 166,074 spectators over the course of the three-day race weekend in 2025 (ANSA, 2025) and the Misano World Circuit Marco Simoncelli in turn recorded 174,821 attendances in the same year (Motor Valley, 2025). In parallel with the race weekends, Ducati, one of Italy's most iconic motorcycle brands, cultivates an organised network of enthusiasts through the Ducati Official Club (D.O.C.) programme, which offers members dedicated events and benefits (Ducati Motor Holding S.p.A.). The flagship gathering is World Ducati Week (WDW), a multi-day brandfest hosted at the Misano World Circuit and structured around on-track and off-track activities (Ducati Motor Holding S.p.A.). These contexts make visible an important phenomenon for tourism studies: to what extent branded collectives can mediate the relationship between sporting events and territories.

The knowledge gap addressed in this paper is twofold. Event-tourism and event-leverage studies (Getz & Page, 2016) have examined impacts, destination image and strategic leveraging, but they have paid less attention to how visitor mobility, symbolic consumption and place meanings are socially organised by brand communities. Conversely, tribal marketing (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova & Cova, 2002) and brand-community research (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009) have explained shared rituals, bonding value and community practices, but have less frequently considered how these practices become spatially and territorially consequential for destinations. The concept of tribal mobility is introduced to bridge this gap.

In this article, tribal mobility is defined as a brand-mediated form of sport-tourism mobility in which fans do not simply travel to attend an event, but collectively coordinate routes, accommodation,

meeting points, rituals, symbolic consumption and place meanings through the social infrastructure of a brand community. It differs from sport-event tourism because the object of analysis is not only the event visit; from motorcycle tourism because the focus is not simply the vehicle-based journey; from brand-community engagement because the emphasis is placed on spatial practices and destination effects; and from event leverage because it identifies a community-based social mechanism through which leveraging may occur.

This article asks the following research question: how do the practices of the Ducati brand community shape MotoGP-related travel experiences and contribute to the creation of value for the destination? The work focuses on (i) how fans organise mobility and participation through community rituals, (ii) how community dynamics influence symbolic and territorial consumption, and (iii) what implications emerge for destination management, tourism marketing and event governance.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical framework on sports event tourism, consumer tribes, brand communities and the Ducati/Ducatisti case context. Section 3 describes the qualitative research design and analytical procedure. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 discusses the implications for theory and destination management. Section 6 concludes with limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Sports tourism, event tourism and destination value pathways

Sports tourism is commonly conceptualised as a form of temporary mobility in which sport is the primary motivation, or at least a relevant motivation, for travel, including both active participation and spectator enjoyment of events and related forms of tourist consumption (Gibson, 1998; Hinch & Higham, 2001; Van Rheenen et al., 2017). The sports tourism experience is not limited to the event itself, but takes shape through the interaction located between sporting activity, place and temporality of the journey, generating specific configurations of mobility, sociality and consumption (Weed & Bull, 2004; Weed, 2009). In an event-based perspective, the literature on event tourism highlights how planned events can function as attractors, catalysts, territorial animators and image builders for destinations, especially when they are integrated into broader strategies of development, branding and event portfolio management (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016; Ziakas, 2023; Bazzanella et al., 2023).

Beyond functional motivations, travel for sporting events is increasingly interpreted as a phenomenon of the experience economy, in which visitors seek immersive atmospheres, memorable encounters, emotional involvement and opportunities for situated socialisation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Kim, 2018; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022). In fact, the literature on memorable tourism experiences shows that emotionally intensive, socially significant and memory-activating tourist experiences influence not only satisfaction, but also the image of the destination, word of mouth, intention to return and behavioural loyalty (Kim, 2018; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Hosany et al., 2022). From an experiential marketing perspective, brands and destinations can therefore design experience systems that activate cognitive, affective, sensory, relational and behavioural components, connecting visitors to the place, people and symbols that represent it (Schmitt, 1999; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Lv et al., 2020).

Motoring and motorcycle contexts are particularly suitable for these experiential logics, as they combine sporting spectacle, material culture, soundscapes, aesthetics of the vehicle, bodily driving

practices and forms of collective belonging. In these contexts, the journey becomes an integral part of the tourist experience, not just a transfer towards the event: the route, the road, the vehicle, the clothing, the sound and the group dimension contribute to transforming mobility itself into an experiential and symbolic resource of the destination (Scuttari, 2019; Gronau & Große Hokamp, 2022). This standpoint is particularly relevant for motorsport, where the sensory intensity of the event and the relationship between the vehicle used and the territory can be translated into destination products such as motorcycle itineraries, thematic rallies, visits to museums and places of the brand, gastronomic experiences and routes related to local motor culture.

In the literature on sporting events, ample space has been devoted to the measurement of economic and socio-economic impacts, often in terms of attendance, visitor spending, temporary employment, media returns and territorial visibility (Preuss, 2005; Bazzanella et al., 2023). Research on sport-tourism events also shows that perceived event impacts are multidimensional, combining community development and pride, economic benefits, traffic problems, security risks, environmental concerns and perceived costs (Perić, 2018). This reinforces the need to distinguish measured impacts from perceived and practice-based value pathways.

A key distinction is required between measuring event impacts and understanding value-creation pathways. Economic and socio-economic impact studies often focus on attendance, visitor spending, temporary employment, media visibility and territorial exposure. By contrast, event-leverage approaches shift attention towards the ex-ante design of partnerships, conditions and tactics that may help destinations retain and distribute benefits (Chalip, 2004, 2006; O'Brien & Chalip, 2008; Ziakas, 2023). For the purposes of this study, destination value is therefore understood not as a measured economic impact, but as a set of perceived and practice-based pathways involving mobility coordination, territorial consumption, symbolic place-making, repeat intention and destination image reinforcement. In sporting events, this includes actions aimed at extending stays, stimulating off-site spending, connecting visitors to local products and narratives, distributing flows across the territory, and strengthening connections between the event, the identity of the destination, and the host community.

Destination image studies also indicate that experiences during events can influence tourists' perceptions and behavioural intentions, including return, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kim, 2018; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). However, the mechanisms by which event experiences are incorporated into broader destination practices depend on social processes: how visitors coordinate travel, how they choose accommodations and itineraries, how they attribute meaning to places, and how they build relationships that persist beyond the time of the event. Mobility research suggests that tourism is increasingly intertwined with a mobile social life, in which travel is used to maintain, intensify and perform social networks (Larsen et al., 2007). In motorsport, this reticular mobility is particularly salient, as participation is often collective, ritualised and linked to material cultures such as motorcycles, clothing, accessories, memorabilia and brand symbols.

2.2. Consumer tribes and tribal marketing

Neo-tribal theory argues that contemporary sociality is characterised by the proliferation of elective, affective and temporary groupings that coalesce around shared lifestyles, tastes, practices and symbolic resources (Maffesoli, 1996). In marketing and Consumer Culture Theory, this perspective

has been used to describe consumer tribes as fluid collectives in which membership does not depend on formal boundaries or stable memberships, but on participation in rituals, shared emotions, common languages, and practices of mutual recognition (Cova & Cova, 2002; Cova et al., 2007; Goulding et al., 2013). More recently, consumer tribes have also been interpreted as socio-material assemblages of people, objects, technologies, places, skills and meanings, capable of dispersing and reconstituting themselves over time through recurrent practices and shared points of passage (Canniford, 2011; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). This reading allows us to avoid a static conception of the tribe as a simple market segment: tribal membership is rather a collective performance, continuously produced through practices, symbols and interactions.

The concept of linking value is particularly relevant for this perspective: products and brands generate value both through individual utility or symbolic meaning, and through the social ties they facilitate between consumers (Cova, 1997; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Tribal marketing, therefore, consists in designing and sustaining conditions that make possible community interactions, shared rituals, collective experiences and spaces of recognition in which consumers can build identity and belonging (Canniford, 2011; Taute & Sierra, 2014). The most recent empirical literature on brand tribalism shows that dimensions such as sense of community, symbolic lineage, tribal advocacy, brand pride and collective identification can influence brand relationships, loyalty, word of mouth and other supportive behaviours, especially in contexts with high identity expressiveness such as sports, experiential tourism and motorcycle clubs (Sierra & Taute, 2019; Gonçalves Filho et al., 2022; Nagore et al., 2023).

In tourism contexts, these ideas imply that travel can be understood as a community practice through which consumers coordinate mobility, occupy spaces, stage rituals and attribute meaning to the places visited. The perspective of consumer tribes is particularly useful for special interest tourism, where visitors are not simply united by individual motivation, but by passions, codes, norms, emotions and collective mechanisms that guide tourism behaviour (Pforr et al., 2021). In addition, digital platforms, forums and social media can function as infrastructures of coordination and visibility: they do not always produce cohesive communities in the strong sense, but often generate "brand publics" and distributed discursive spaces in which participants exchange information, organise practices and reinforce the symbolic salience of the brand (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Jeong et al., 2020).

Applied to motorsport, tribal perspectives help explain why the sporting event is often only one component of a larger experiential constellation. Fans can travel to watch the race, but also to participate in community rituals, group outings, gatherings, symbolic consumption practices, identity exhibitions and moments of temporary sociality. In the case of motorcycles, the tribe is built through a particularly intense combination of material objects, corporeality, soundscapes, clothing, itineraries, brand memory and peer recognition.

However, the tourism implications of tribal marketing remain under-specified. Existing work explains why consumer collectives form and how they maintain bonds, but less often how these bonds organise mobility and territorial consumption around sport events. Tribal mobility addresses this limitation by specifying a spatial and processual mechanism: brand-mediated tribal practices move across territories, connect people to places and influence how event experiences are extended beyond the central venue.

2.3. Brand communities, Ducati and destination value co-creation

Brand communities are specialised, non-geographically constrained communities structured around a brand and characterised by shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Subsequent research has shown that these communities, in addition to strengthening the consumer-brand relationship, are configured as a broader relational system that includes brand, product, company, other consumers and shared consumption practices (McAlexander et al., 2002). Identification with the community can shape engagement, loyalty, and behavioural intentions, but it can also generate regulatory pressures and compliance expectations towards members (Algesheimer et al., 2005). In this sense, brand communities must be understood as collectives capable of producing, negotiating and circulating brand meanings.

A central contribution of the literature is the idea that value is created through a repertoire of community practices, social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use, through which members share knowledge, build status, celebrate the brand and strengthen collective identity (Schau et al., 2009). The most recent research on engagement in online brand communities has further clarified that community participation combines cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, and that these dimensions can translate into trust, advocacy, ongoing participation, brand loyalty and co-creation of value (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dessart et al., 2015; Baldus et al., 2015). In particular, online brand communities and social media brand communities expand the reach of traditional communities, because they allow members to coordinate practices, tell experiences, make identity symbols visible and sustain relationships even outside physical meetings (Wirtz et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014; Kamboj et al., 2018). In this framework, co-creation is not reducible to collaboration between business and consumer since it also emerges as a platform for engagement, experiential domains and multi-actor interactions in which consumers actively contribute to the value of the brand (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017; Kaur et al., 2020).

For tourism marketing, brand communities may be interpreted as intermediaries of experience and potential actors in destination value co-creation. They can organise trips, curate itineraries, legitimise meeting places, circulate practical information and provide social scripts through which visitors interpret places. In this sense co-creation emerges from multi-actor engagement involving tourists, brands, local operators, circuits, accommodation providers, municipalities and residents (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017; Rather et al., 2019, 2022).

The Ducati case is especially appropriate for examining these processes. Ducati is not only a motorcycle manufacturer but a symbolic universe that combines Italian engineering, racing heritage, design, sound, technical tradition and brand rituals. Its fan community, commonly referred to as the Ducatisti, is institutionally supported through the Ducati Official Club (D.O.C.) network and reinforced by events such as World Ducati Week.

The Ducati context has been examined in previous studies as a particularly relevant example of identity-intensive brand communities. Morandin et al. (2013) show that participation in Ducati motorcycle communities supports the processes of attribution of meaning and identity construction, while Marchi et al. (2011) illustrate how Ducati online communities can mobilise competent users and collaborative behaviours. Marzocchi et al. (2013) also highlight that loyalty can be driven by identification with the community itself, mediated by shared affects and experiences. The Ducati case can be interpreted in light of these studies, which indicated that tourism experiences are shaped by community dynamics as much as by the functional attributes of the brand: it is not only the performance of the product that generates value, but also the way in which the product becomes a support of

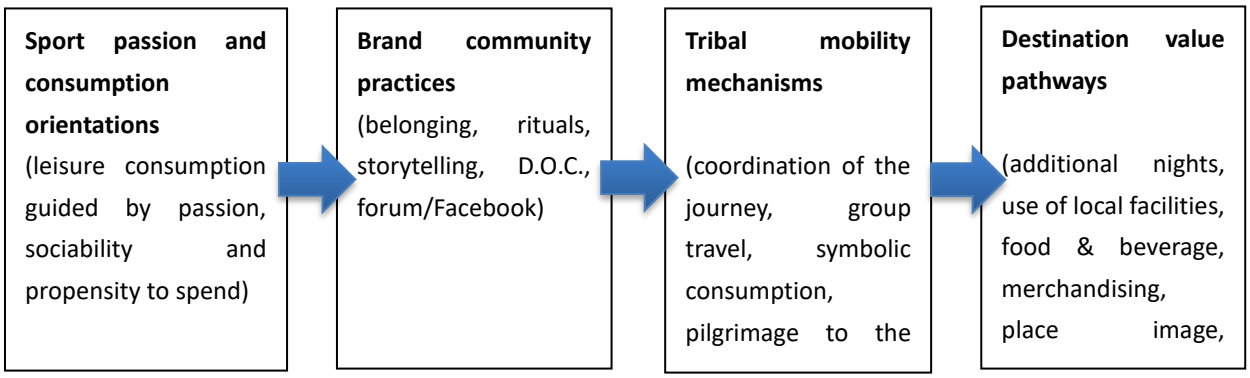
belonging, mutual recognition and ritual participation.

In terms of destination, brand communities can operate as intermediaries of the experience: they organise the trip, curate itineraries, disseminate practical information, legitimise meeting places and provide social scripts that help visitors interpret territories through brand lenses. This function is particularly relevant in contemporary tourism contexts, in which tourist engagement can affect experience, co-creation of value, return intent and word of mouth (Harrigan et al., 2017; Rather et al., 2019; Rather et al., 2022). In addition, research on destination brand communities shows that destination-related digital communities can evoke emotions, stimulate co-creation intentions, and influence visit intent (Cheung et al., 2021).

The present study extends this line of inquiry by asking how Ducati community practices become tourist practices and how they may produce destination value-creation pathways.

Figure 1 summarises the conceptual framework. Sport passion and consumption orientations feed brand community practices. These practices structure tribal mobility mechanisms, which in turn indicate potential destination value pathways. The arrows should be read as processual links rather than causal effects measured statistically.

Figure 1. From sport consumption and passion to tribal mobility and destination value-creation pathways



Source: our own elaboration

3. Materials and methods

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach and a single-case study design (Yin, 2014). This design is appropriate because the aim is not to estimate the prevalence of behaviours among all MotoGP spectators, but to understand how meanings, practices and mobility are socially organised within a specific brand community.

The case is the Ducati Official Club (D.O.C.) community, investigated in relation to MotoGP and Ducati-related events in Italy. The empirical design combines three sources: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and supporting digital/documentary material. These sources were used to distinguish observable practices from attributed meanings and to triangulate evidence without treating the digital material as a stand-alone netnographic dataset (Jick, 1979; Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010).

Table 1. Data corpus and analytical role.

Data source	Size and period	Analytical role	Analytical note

Participant observation	Two events, six field days: WDW 2024 and San Marino/Rimini Riviera MotoGP 2025	Reconstruct visible practices of mobility, ritual space use, symbolic consumption and destination use	Observation is used to support behavioural and spatial claims, not to estimate prevalence
Semi-structured interviews	23 D.O.C. members, July-September 2025	Interpret meanings of Ducati attachment, community belonging, MotoGP rituality and travel consumption	Convenience and snowball recruitment are treated as case-study constraints
Public Facebook material	14 items from public pages/groups, October-November 2025	Observe travel coordination, event anticipation, shared clothing, emotional attachment and collective invitations	Used as supporting documentary evidence, not as a full netnography
Forum material	10 items from public motorcycling/MotoGP forums, October-November 2025	Observe accommodation advice, camping, event comparisons, symbolic narratives and controversy	Public material was anonymised and interpreted in aggregate

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research database.

Fieldwork was conducted at World Ducati Week at the Misano World Circuit (26-28 July 2024) and at the MotoGP Grand Prix of San Marino and the Rimini Riviera (12-14 September 2025). Each event was observed for three days. Observations were conducted in both covert mode, where the researcher participated without disclosing the research role, and overt mode, where the researcher declared the research role and interacted openly. No personal identifiable information was collected in covert observation; notes were stored and analysed in aggregate form.

Twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with D.O.C. members between July 2025 and September 2025. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling at Ducati-related gatherings. The sample is intentionally focused rather than representative: it includes highly engaged members of the community, most of whom are male, geographically concentrated in Perugia and Rome, and Ducati owners. These features strengthen the analysis of the core brand community but limit generalisation to casual MotoGP spectators or to less engaged tourists.

The interview guide focused on: (a) participation in D.O.C. activities; (b) motivations and practices related to MotoGP and Ducati-related travel; (c) perceptions of community, belonging and boundaries; (d) the role of MotoGP and rider loyalty; and (e) symbolic consumption, merchandising and in-destination practices. Interviews were conducted in Italian as short event-based conversations, most lasting approximately 10-20 minutes. Interviews were not audio-recorded; instead, detailed anonymised notes were taken during and immediately after each conversation and then organised into thematic transcripts and illustrative quotations were translated into English for publication. Translation was carried out with attention to preserving meaning rather than literal wording. Information power was considered sufficient because the aim was narrow, the sample was specific, the interviews were

focused on a shared experience, and later interviews largely confirmed the main themes while adding nuance on community boundaries and rider loyalty. The study does not claim statistical saturation; rather, it claims adequate information power for an exploratory interpretive case study.

The analysis was also informed by digital and documentary material collected between October and November 2025. The digital material was selected from public Facebook pages/groups and motorcycling forums dedicated to Ducati, WDW, MotoGP and specific Ducati models. Inclusion criteria were relevance to at least one of the following themes: travel coordination, accommodation or transport advice, event rituals, brand attachment, symbolic consumption, MotoGP controversy and comparison between destinations. The material was used as documentary support following netnographic sensitivity to online traces (Kozinets, 2015), but the study does not claim to be a full netnography because the dataset is limited and was not designed for systematic online ethnography.

The analysis followed an abductive thematic procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First-order codes were developed from repeated reading of interview notes, field notes and digital excerpts. These codes captured empirical expressions such as sound, family, Ducati without MotoGP, Marquez controversy, travel companions, camping, clothing and WDW rituals. They were then grouped into second-order themes including embodied brand attachment, community membership, territorial coordination, negotiated loyalty and destination affordances. Finally, these themes were connected to the aggregate construct of tribal mobility. Initial coding was conducted by one researcher, and the coding structure was subsequently reviewed reflexively within the author team. An audit trail of coding decisions, theme labels and illustrative evidence was maintained. Descriptive frequencies are reported only as within-case indicators. They summarise the recurrence of selected responses among the 23 D.O.C. interviewees and should not be interpreted as inferential statistics or as representative of the wider MotoGP tourist population (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Table 2 – Sample and recruitment profile.

Context	Date	Interviews	Participants	Recruitment	Notes
Raduno DOC Umbria	14 June 2025	15	D.O.C. members, mostly from Perugia	Convenience and snowball sampling	Event-based interviews during a regional Ducati gathering
Central Italy Ducati Week	19 July 2025	8	D.O.C. members, mostly from Rome	Convenience, snowball and visible Ducati clothing	Event-based interviews in a Ducati-related gathering

Source: authors' own elaboration from fieldwork records.

At the individual level, the sample included 13 participants aged 40-60 and 10 aged 20-40; 22 men and 1 woman; 15 participants from Perugia and 8 from Rome; 22 Ducati owners and 1 non-owner. All participants were members of the D.O.C. These characteristics are analytically relevant because they indicate a highly involved, male-dominated and geographically concentrated community sample.

4. Results

The results are presented in two complementary blocks. Field observations and digital material

reconstruct visible practices of mobility, coordination and destination use. Interviews clarify the meanings participants attribute to those practices, including sensory attachment, community belonging, rider loyalty and symbolic consumption. This structure responds to the need to distinguish observed behaviour, participant interpretation and author analysis. This distinction does not imply a rigid separation between sources, but a complementary function between them. Observation and digital traces show how the community acts in the tourist space; the interviews explain why these practices are relevant to the Ducatisti and how they contribute to the construction of tribal mobility.

4.1. Observable practices: field observation and digital material

The field observations and digital material show that the Ducati community operates as a practical infrastructure for travel coordination. Public Facebook and forum items include requests for WDW travel companions, exchanges about hotels and campsites, advice on reaching Mugello and Misano, and discussions about evening events and accommodation constraints. Table 3 summarises the main evidence from observation and digital material. These traces suggest that the community does not merely express identity; it reduces travel uncertainty and directs participants towards specific places, routes and services.

The community also performs itself visibly in event spaces. Ducati clothing, D.O.C. symbols, group parking practices, informal meeting points and admiration for iconic models such as the 916 and Panigale made the brand community visible beyond the race itself. Field notes from WDW recorded welcome kits, collective dinners and initial distinctions between insiders and newcomers, while observations at the Misano MotoGP highlighted widespread Ducati apparel and conversations around Bagnaia, Stoner, Marquez and Ducati's racing identity[1].

The comparison between Mugello and Misano indicates different destination affordances. Mugello appears in digital material as a more immersive and festive destination, centred on camping, noise, night-time atmosphere and prolonged proximity to the circuit. The recurring expression "at Mugello you do not sleep" conveys an event experience that exceeds the race schedule. Misano, by contrast, appears more integrated with the Riviera tourism system, with references to Cattolica, Gabicce, Rimini, rail connections, e-bikes and accommodation distributed along the coast. The same motorcycling passion is therefore translated into different forms of stay, mobility and local consumption depending on the destination context.

Table 3. Evidence from field observation and digital material.

Observed practice	**Empirical evidence**	**Source**	**Meaning for the destination**
Travel coordination	Requests from travel companions; Advice on hotels, campsites, Airbnbs and coastal	Forum/ Facebook	The community reduces uncertainty and channels

[1] In this article, Bagnaia refers to Francesco “Pecco” Bagnaia, Italian MotoGP rider and Ducati world champion in 2022 and 2023; Stoner refers to Casey Stoner, Australian rider who won Ducati’s first MotoGP world title in 2007; Márquez refers to Marc Márquez, Spanish MotoGP champion and Ducati factory rider in the period considered. These names are treated here not as individual biographical cases, but as symbolic references through which interviewees discussed Ducati’s racing identity, brand pride and rider loyalty.

Observed practice	Empirical evidence	Source	Meaning for the destination
	resorts		visitors towards specific services and locations.
Accommodation and logistics	Suggestions on Cattolica, Gabicce, Rimini, e-bike, station; Minimum stay issues	Forum/ Facebook	Event value is extended through extra-circuit hospitality and mobility services.
Identity performance	Ducati clothing, D.O.C. Symbol, iconic models and group visibility	Field observation	The brand becomes a device of visibility and recognition in the tourist space
Community rituals	WDW invitations, collective dinners, meeting points, rallies	Field observation/Facebook	The destination functions as a temporary stage for community performance
Mugello/Misano affordances	Mugello as ritual-camping immersion; Misano as a Riviera-based distributed experience	Forum/ Observation	Destinations activate different forms of tribal mobility

Source: Our processing of field observations and digital material.

4.2. Interview-based meanings

Before discussing the qualitative themes, Table 4 reports selected descriptive indicators from the interview database. These figures are within-case descriptive indicators only. They contextualise the sample and should not be read as statistically generalisable findings.

Table 4. Descriptive within-case indicators emerging from the interviews (n = 23).

Indicator	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
Participation in D.O.C. activities (community intensity)	Regular participation	19	82.6%	The sample consists mainly of active community members; participation in the D.O.C. provides an empirical basis for tribal mobility. Less frequent participants still maintain an operative link with the community.
	Occasional participation	4	17.4%	
Perceived community dimension / group belonging	Integral part	9	39.1%	The community is perceived as a strong and recognisable space of belonging. Belonging is not read only as motorcycle ownership, but as participation in a shared world. The relational dimension contributes to the construction of the community as a Ducati family. Interpersonal relationships strengthen the continuity between passion, club and travel experience. A limited perception of closure also emerges, helping
	Inclusive	5	21.7%	
	Welcoming	4	17.4%	
	Friendly	4	17.4%	
	Closed	1	4.3%	

				to avoid an overly celebratory reading of the community.
Perceived importance of MotoGP for Ducati	High	18	78.3%	MotoGP is perceived as a central component of Ducati identity and as a lever of symbolic involvement. For a marginal share, MotoGP plays an intermediate role in relation to the brand, the motorcycle and the community. A minority attributes less importance to MotoGP than to the direct relationship with Ducati or with the motorcycle.
	Medium	1	4.3%	
	Low	4	17.4%	
Perceived influence of the D.O.C. on destination experience and tourism consumption	High	12	52.2%	Community dynamics significantly orient mobility, place choice, local consumption and travel practices. The influence of the community is present but not totalising. Some participants maintain more individual experience, or one less mediated by the club.
	Medium	7	30.4%	
	Low	4	17.4%	
Symbolic consumption, merchandising and in-destination practices	Yes	18	78.3%	Symbolic consumption is widespread and supports the interpretation of merchandising as an identity marker and device of belonging. A minority participates in the community without necessarily translating the bond into the purchase of clothing or merchandising.
	No	5	21.7%	

Source: our elaboration on qualitative interviews.

4.2.1. Embodied and biographical attachment to Ducati

The bond with Ducati emerges first and foremost as an embodied, sensory and material relationship. Interviewees do not describe the brand merely as symbolic belonging, they describe a physical experience of the vehicle, centred on sound, riding style, aesthetics and engine response. One participant explained the attraction through the sound of the machine: “I approached Ducati because of the roar” (I17). Another recalled the sensory intensity of the motorcycle at home: “when he turned on the bike my windows shook” (I04). The motorcycle is also personified and incorporated into biographical narratives. Some participants give the motorcycle a proper name, including “La Signora” (I09), “Elisabetta” (I12), “Furia” (I13), “Panigalina” (I19), “Queen” (I21) and “Falchetto”, “Demon” and “Dorian” (I22). One recurring expression in the database is that the Ducati is a “companion of life” or has a “soul”. Digital material reinforces this pattern, with posts describing the motorcycle through the language of affection and long-term intimacy, such as “290 thousand km of love, only me and her”. That mobility is not only functional movement but embodied movement rooted in body, machine, sound and memory.

4.2.2. Community membership and porous boundaries

Community belonging is described through a family vocabulary. Participants refer to the D.O.C. as a "small family" (I02), a "great family of Ducatisti" (I21) and a space in which they feel recognised through shared symbols, events, badges, clothing and narratives. The research database classifies 18 participants as expressing high community attachment and 5 as expressing medium attachment, confirming that the sample is strongly embedded in the Ducati community.

At the same time, the community boundary is porous. The observations and interviews show that possession of a Ducati is important but not always the sole condition of belonging. One participant explicitly noted that "it is not necessarily the case that you have to own one" to feel part of the Ducati world. Field observation also recorded the presence of participants attracted by Ducati and MotoGP despite not owning a Ducati. This avoids reducing the brand community to product ownership: belonging is performed through passion, participation and ritual recognition.

4.2.3. MotoGP, Marc Márquez and negotiated loyalty

MotoGP is central to the Ducati identity perceived by the interviewees. 19 of the 23 participants treated MotoGP as relevant to Ducati, and 18 stated that "Ducati would not be the same without MotoGP". The race weekend is described as a ritual culmination of brand identity, where sport performance, Italian engineering, shared narratives and community pride become visible.

The signing of Marc Márquez is analytically relevant because it introduced tension into an otherwise strongly loyal community. Some participants interpreted the signing as a betrayal of previous sporting attachments: "I felt betrayed, but it does not change my relationship with Ducati" (I04). Others separated rider preference from brand loyalty, summarised by the phrase "what matters is that Ducati wins, not the rider" (I22). This variation matters because it shows that tribal loyalty is not linear or uncritical. Rather, it is negotiated around sporting performance, brand pride and personal rider evaluations.

4.2.4. Symbolic consumption and tourism practices

Symbolic consumption, in particular the purchase of Ducati merchandising and clothing, was a qualifying part of the experience. Purchases are described not only as individual consumption, but also as identity markers, souvenirs of ritual participation and resources for impression management within the community. Interviews also indicate that travelling with the club increases the likelihood of visiting specific locations, using recommended itineraries, choosing local restaurants and accommodations, and extending the experience beyond the race schedule. The evidence does not measure spending or overnight stays, but it shows how the community can orient accommodation choices, local mobility and off-circuit consumption. This supports a cautious interpretation: the D.O.C. does not automatically generate measurable destination value, but it activates mechanisms through which value may be created and captured locally.

4.3. Integrative synthesis: Tribal Mobility as a process

Across the different sources, Ducati-related tribal mobility emerges as a process that links passion, community practices, travel coordination and place meanings. Observational and digital evidence show the practical level: travel organisation, use of spaces, distribution of flows and visible

consumption in destinations. Interviews show the symbolic level: sensory attachment to the bike, community belonging, MotoGP rituals and identity consumption.

This process can be summarised as follows. First, passion and brand attachment provide motivation. Second, the D.O.C. and wider Ducati community provide social infrastructure. Third, this infrastructure coordinates mobility, rituals and symbolic consumption. Fourth, these practices indicate potential destination value pathways through accommodation, food and beverage, local routes, place image, social touchpoints and repeat engagement.

Table 5. Data structure: themes, evidence and theoretical contribution.

Aggregate dimension	**Second-order themes**	**Empirical evidence**	**Contribution to the thesis of the paper**
Embodied brand attachment	Sound, aesthetics, riding, motorcycle personification	Unmistakable roar; motorcycles with proper names; Ducati as a companion or object with soul	Explains why travel is rooted in sensory and biographical relationship with the medium.
Community membership	D.O.C. family; inclusiveness; porous boundaries	Small family; great family of Ducatisti; participation even beyond ownership	Shows how the community organises identity and mobility beyond product possession.
Territorial coordination	Forums, Facebook, logistics tips, group travel	Camping Mugello; Cattolica/Gabicce/Rimini; e-bikes; WDW travel companions	Shows how the community channels mobility and destination use.
Negotiated loyalty	Rider vs brand; Màrquez case; Ducati pride	I felt betrayed; what matters is that Ducati wins, not the rider	Avoids an overly celebratory reading and shows the brand community as a space for identity negotiation.
Destination affordances	Mugello ritual-camping; Misano and Riviera diffused	At Mugello you don't sleep; Misano as accessible and coast-integrated	Links brand-community practices to destination management.

Source: Our own elaboration on observations, digital material and interviews.

5. Discussion and implications

The study contributes to sports tourism research by showing that the relationship between sport events and destinations may be mediated by organised brand communities. D.O.C. members do not travel only to watch the race; they enact tribal mobility, a form of collective movement structured by rituals, symbols, social ties and brand-mediated obligations. This extends activity-place-time frameworks (Hinch & Higham, 2001) by bringing community practices to the foreground as organisers of mobility.

The contribution to tribal and brand-community marketing lies in specifying a spatial and destination-related outcome of community practices. Existing studies have shown that brand communities create value through social networking, celebration, impression management and brand use (Schau et al., 2009). This study shows how such practices can become territorial: they coordinate routes, accommodation, meeting points, symbolic consumption and meanings of place. Tribal mobility

is therefore not a replacement for brand-community engagement or event leverage; it is a process concept that connects them.

The specific theoretical contribution does not simply consist in observing that Ducati fans travel for MotoGP, but in showing that the brand community functions as a social infrastructure of mobility, consumption and place-making. Tribal mobility connects three levels: community practices (rituals, symbols, belonging), movement mechanisms (coordination of travel, choice of accommodation and itineraries, socialisation in transit) and trajectories of territorial value (local spending, extension of experience beyond the circuit, reinforcement of the image of place).

From a consumer culture perspective, the results are consistent with neo-tribal accounts of affective and fluid collectives (Maffesoli, 1996) and with the notion that value is generated through social ties (Cova, 1997). The D.O.C. provides waypoints, regular gatherings, branded events, and shared travel scripts, that sustain community identity and intensify event experiences (Canniford, 2011; Goulding et al., 2013). In terms of brand community, the results echo evidence that community involvement can drive loyalty and behavioural outcomes (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Marzocchi et al., 2013) and illustrate how value is created through social networking, celebration and impression management practices (Schau et al., 2009).

For destination research, the findings support a cautious pathway interpretation. The evidence does not measure economic impact, visitor expenditure or overnight stays. It identifies mechanisms through which organised brand communities may contribute to destination value: coordinated mobility, distributed territorial consumption, symbolic place-making, destination image reinforcement and post-event engagement. This distinction responds to the need to avoid treating value creation as an established outcome when the evidence is qualitative and case-based. A key implication is that the valorisation of sporting events can be strengthened when destinations actively collaborate with organised communities of fans. Chalip's (2004, 2006) leverage approach suggests that the benefits depend on deliberate strategies that connect the event to the host territory. The results specify one of these strategies: valuing brand communities as intermediaries of the experience capable of mobilizing visitors, extending stays and taking care of off-track consumption. In line with research on destination image (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), community-led experiences can reinforce meanings of place and potentially support intentions of return, although this relationship requires further verification.

The practical implications for destinations and stakeholders of the events include the following actions. First, co-design community itineraries with local clubs and stakeholders (hotels, restaurants, museums, motorcycle itineraries), linking race participation to place-based experiences. Second, develop and report community touchpoints (meeting points, parking and services for motorcyclists, social spaces) that facilitate safe and pleasant group interaction. Third, integrate local culture into branded experiences (e.g. gastronomy, crafts, heritage storytelling), thus translating brand passion into territorial enhancement. Fourth, implement visitor management measures that address congestion, safety and sustainability – especially for motorcycle mobility – so that community-led growth remains compatible with the well-being of residents.

For DMOs and municipalities, the results suggest the creation of MotoGP/Ducati friendly maps with motorcycle parking, meeting areas, panoramic routes, affiliated restaurants, workshops, water points and evening services. For hotels, campsites and B&Bs, the opportunity emerges for flexible packages for motorcyclists and D.O.C. groups, especially when minimum stays reduce the possibility of participation in one-night events. For circuit and organisers, it becomes useful to integrate official communication and information generated by the community, making evening events, accesses,

mobility alternatives and extra-circuit services visible. For Ducati and D.O.C., clubs can be involved as territorial intermediaries through agreements with museums, restaurants, Motor Valley, villages and motorcycle routes. Finally, for residents and administrations, it is necessary to manage traffic, noise, night safety and parking, so that tourist development does not produce conflicts with the host community.

The study has several limitations. It focuses on one brand community and on highly involved D.O.C. members; the sample is predominantly male, geographically concentrated in Perugia and Rome, and composed mainly of Ducati owners. These characteristics are appropriate for examining the core community but limit the transferability of findings to casual MotoGP spectators, non-Ducati fans or other motorsport brands. The digital material is used as supporting evidence rather than as a full netnographic dataset. The descriptive frequencies are within-case indicators and do not imply statistical representativeness. Moreover, the study does not include direct measures of expenditure, overnight stays, mobility flows or resident perspectives. As a result, destination value is discussed in terms of mechanisms and pathways rather than measured impacts.

Future research could compare multiple motorsport brands and destinations, combine qualitative analysis with post-event surveys, use mobility and accommodation data, include stakeholder and resident interviews, and examine how digital communities shape pre-event planning and post-event engagement. Comparative work on Mugello and Misano would be especially valuable for understanding how different destination affordances support different forms of tribal mobility.

6. Conclusion

This article examined Ducati-related MotoGP tourism in Italy through the combined lenses of sports tourism, tribal marketing and brand-community theory. Its aim was to understand how the Ducati brand community shapes event-related travel and how these practices indicate pathways through which destinations may capture value beyond the circuit.

The main finding is that the Ducati community functions as a social infrastructure of mobility and place-making. It coordinates travel, stages rituals, makes belonging visible, channels symbolic consumption and mediates the meanings attributed to Mugello, Misano and Ducati-related places. The concept of tribal mobility captures this process and distinguishes it from generic sport-event travel, motorcycle tourism or brand-community engagement alone.

The study's primary theoretical contribution is therefore the conceptualisation of tribal mobility as a process linking sport passion, brand community practices, territorial movement and destination value pathways. Secondary contributions concern the extension of sport consumption research towards collective mobility and the application of tribal marketing to destination experience design.

The Ducati case shows how a brand community can transform a sporting event from a punctual moment of spectacle to a distributed territorial experience, in which mobility, rituals, consumption and narratives of place are co-produced by fans.

For destinations, the findings indicate that value is more likely to be captured when destinations engage the communities that already organise visitor behaviour. Co-designed itineraries, community touchpoints, motorcycle-friendly services and integrated local experiences can extend the event footprint. These actions should be accompanied by governance measures addressing congestion, safety, noise, resident well-being and sustainability.

The framework remains case-specific and exploratory. It offers analytical transferability rather than statistical generalisation. Its usefulness should be tested through comparative, mixed-method and

stakeholder-based research across other sport-tourism communities and event destinations.

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Conflict of interest
All authors declare no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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