

Review

Navigating the tension between city branding and authenticity: a conceptual framework

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Abstract

As cities around the world increasingly embrace branding as a means of promoting economic growth and attracting investment, there has been a growing tension between the desire to create a strong and recognizable city brand and the need to maintain a sense of authenticity and place identity. This paper presents a conceptual framework for understanding this tension and proposes strategies for navigating it in the context of city branding. Drawing on existing literature and case studies of successful and unsuccessful city branding campaigns, the framework highlights the importance of balancing the desire for a strong city brand with the need to preserve a sense of authenticity and place identity. The framework suggests that city branding campaigns should be designed with careful consideration of local history, culture, and values, and should engage a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process. Ultimately, the paper argues that successful city branding campaigns must strike a delicate balance between the desire for a strong and recognizable brand and the need to maintain a sense of authenticity and place identity.

Keywords: authenticity; city branding; place identity; stakeholder engagement; urban planning

1. Introduction

In recent years, city branding has become an increasingly popular strategy for promoting economic growth and attracting investment. By creating a strong and recognizable city brand, cities hope to differentiate themselves from their competitors and increase their appeal to tourists, businesses, and residents. However, there is a growing concern about the tension between city branding and authenticity. Critics argue that the emphasis on creating a strong and consistent brand image can lead to the homogenization of cities, eroding their unique cultural identity and sense of place.

The tension between city branding and authenticity has been recognized in the literature, there is still a need for a comprehensive framework that can guide city planners, marketers, and policymakers in balancing the two. This paper addresses this need by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates the existing literature on city branding and authenticity while offering practical strategies for navigating the tension between the two. The framework highlights the importance of preserving a sense of place identity and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process. By developing a conceptual framework that addresses this tension, this paper contributes to the ongoing conversation on the role of city branding in urban development and offers guidance for

cities seeking to balance economic development goals with the preservation of authenticity and place identity.

These papers suggest that city branding can be an effective way to manage a city's identity (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006) suggest that city branding can be used to manage a city's image and identity. This could be seen as a connection between city branding and authenticity, as city branding can be used to manage how a city is perceived. However, Hospers, 2019 suggests that there is still a lot of debate in the city branding community, and that the complexities surrounding places and their stakeholders asks for more realism, modesty, and dialogue in the place branding community. This suggests that the connection between city branding, and authenticity is still being debated. Therefore, more research is needed to determine the connection between city branding and authenticity.

This study aims to address the tension between city branding and authenticity in urban development by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates the key dimensions of city branding and authenticity. The study critically analyzes the existing literature on city branding and authenticity and provides practical recommendations for city planners, marketers, and policymakers on how to balance the need for a strong brand image with the preservation of authenticity and place identity. The proposed framework emphasizes the importance of engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process and provides case studies of successful and unsuccessful city branding campaigns to illustrate its applicability. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the role of city branding in urban development and to provide insights into how cities can navigate the tension between economic development goals and cultural heritage preservation.

The originality of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework that provides a comprehensive and practical approach to navigating the tension between city branding and authenticity in urban development. While the tension between these two concepts has been recognized in the literature, this study contributes to the state of the art by proposing a structured framework that integrates the existing literature and provides practical strategies for city planners, marketers, and policymakers. The framework highlights the importance of engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process and emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that considers the unique history, culture, and values of each city. By providing a comprehensive and practical approach to navigating this tension, this study offers valuable insights and recommendations for cities seeking to develop effective branding strategies that balance economic development goals with the preservation of authenticity and place identity.

This study is important because it addresses a critical gap in the literature on city branding and authenticity. While there is growing recognition of the tension between these two concepts, there is a lack of practical frameworks and guidelines for city planners, marketers, and policymakers seeking to balance economic development goals with the preservation of authenticity and place identity. This study fills this gap by proposing a comprehensive and practical framework that provides guidance on how to navigate this tension in the context of urban development. By doing so, this study contributes to a better understanding of the complex relationship between city branding and authenticity and offers practical strategies for developing effective city branding campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences while preserving local culture and identity.

2. Methods

The study employs literature exploration to deal with some research questions with the goal of developing a new theoretical framework or approach to a problem on how cities can balance the desire to create a strong brand identity with the need to preserve their authentic character and cultural heritage. A literature review is conducted to understand the existing research and theories related to the distinctiveness of city branding, city branding and city marketing, and authenticity and marketing.

The literature review provides a foundation for the study. The development of a conceptual framework integrates the findings from the literature review, case studies, and expert interviews, providing a structured approach to navigating the tension between city branding and authenticity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *The distinctiveness of city branding*

Implementing marketing knowledge in the operational environment of cities can prove challenging and prone to misalignments, largely due to the unique nature of places, especially cities, as marketable assets. It has been claimed that city branding is a more acceptable method to explain and carry out city marketing, as it takes into consideration the distinctive past, culture, and core values of each individual city. (Kavaratzis, 2004a). Cities are complicated and distinct settings that call for a specialized approach, as this phrase illustrates. Cities, unlike products or services, have complex identities, cultural legacies, and historical legacies, all of which make them challenging to market as a single thing. As a result, city branding is proposed as a more efficient method of city marketing since it considers the unique qualities of each city and strives to establish a brand image consistent with its own culture, values, and history. Branding a city in this way allows it to show itself in an honest and appealing light, which in turn attracts tourists, businesspeople, and top talent.

Vanolo (2008), empirically analyzed how the creative city is celebrated and displayed in the case of Turin (Torino), Italy. With the help of empirical data, he examined how Turin, Italy celebrated and presented the concept of the "creative city," thereby learning how the city's cultural assets were exploited for economic development. The research investigated the city's branding and marketing efforts, as well as the part that cultural events and institutions play in establishing Turin as a center for the arts. The study interviewed city officials and analyzed promotional materials to uncover the processes behind the formation and dissemination of Turin's image as a hub for the creative industries. The study's results shed light on the intertwined nature of cultural vitality, inventiveness, and urban economic growth. The declaration emphasizes the need for empirical research into the concept of a "creative city" and its manifestations in metropolitan areas. The case study of Turin, Italy, sheds light on the branding and marketing methods, cultural events, and institutions that helped establish the city as a global center for creativity and innovation. Policymakers, city planners, and cultural organizations that want to promote their city's creative identity while driving economic progress might benefit from the study's findings since they provide light on the complicated interplay between culture, creativity, and development in urban areas. By having this knowledge, city leaders will be better able to devise plans to preserve and promote the city's cultural character while attracting creative people, businesses, and investment.

Zhang & Zhao (2009), examined the effectiveness of branding efforts for Beijing, Beijing is the capital city of China, and this study aimed to determine how successful its branding initiatives had been. Beijing's city branding strategy was studied by reading tourist

evaluations in high-profile foreign magazines and conducting in-depth interviews with journalists in Sarajevo. The study's authors also investigated obstacles and potential conflicts that arose during the branding process, and they came up with solutions to improve future city branding projects. The case of Beijing is used to illuminate the practice of city branding and the difficulties that cities may have when seeking to design and implement effective branding strategies. The statement stresses the need to analyze how well municipal branding campaigns are helping to position cities as desirable locations for visitors and investors. The case study of Beijing's city branding campaign sheds light on the complexities and tensions inherent in the branding process and suggests solutions that could improve the future success of similar endeavors. Policymakers, city planners, and marketers can use the study's findings to better position their city to compete for inbound investment and tourism. Stakeholders in city branding may better establish strategies that reflect the city's character and values and connect with its intended audience if they have a thorough awareness of the opportunities and threats that come with the process. With this knowledge, cities will be better able to showcase their cultural assets and distinctive identities to a wide audience and compete successfully on the global market.

[Kavaratzis, 2009](#) examines the question of whether city brands should be handled as corporate brands, advocating instead a consumer-centric and communications-based approach that delves into the relationship between cities, people, and messages to learn more about them. [Sevin, 2014](#) investigated whether cities should be treated like corporate brands and suggested a new approach to city branding that is centered on consumers and communication. This perspective highlights the interdependence of the city, its inhabitants, and the messages they send to the rest of the world. The research hopes that by taking these into account, new understandings will be gained about cities and locations, the effectiveness of branding campaigns will be evaluated, and future branding initiatives will be more efficiently managed. To sum up, this strategy considers the specifics of each place and aims to forge a bond between the brand and the people it serves. The value of putting the consumer first when branding a city, highlighting the link between the locals and the messages they broadcast to the globe. Learn how to evaluate the efficacy of branding campaigns and plan using the data from this study. This strategy considers the particularities of each city and works to forge a bond between the brand and the people it represents, with the hope that this will encourage more people to visit, invest, and boost the local economy. With this knowledge in hand, city managers and policymakers will be better able to craft branding strategies that speak to their intended audience and do justice to the city's character and ideals. Cities may promote their cultural assets and distinct identities to a wide audience by developing a compelling brand that draws in tourists, investors, and locals alike.

[Putri & Drajat \(2019\)](#), aimed to understand how the Prawirotaman local community built kampung bule as a city branding strategy for Yogyakarta city and how they maintain it, using 120 samples consisting of residents and tourists ([S. P. Putri, 2020](#)). Together, these studies demonstrate the difficulties and potentials of executing successful city branding initiatives, highlighting the significance of recognizing the singular characteristics of cities as assets. It is suggested that city branding is a more appropriate way to explain and carry out city marketing because it considers the distinct history, culture, and values of each city. The case studies of Turin, Beijing, and Yogyakarta reveal how successful city branding projects can be in various situations and contexts, and they provide actionable advice for better comprehending cities and locations, evaluating the efficacy of branding efforts, and administering future campaigns. City planners, marketers, and legislators can benefit greatly from the insights and recommendations provided by these studies as they work to

create city branding strategies that appeal to a wide variety of people without losing sight of the importance of preserving local culture and character. Why it's crucial for successful city branding plans to consider local culture and history as selling points. Considering the specifics of each city's history, culture, and values, city branding is advocated as a superior method of city marketing. Practical strategies for comprehending cities/places, measuring the success of branding campaigns, and managing future campaigns are offered, as well as valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing effective city branding strategies in different contexts and settings are provided by the case studies of Turin, Beijing, and Yogyakarta. City planners, marketers, and legislators can use the findings and suggestions from this research to create city branding strategies that appeal to a wide variety of consumers without sacrificing local culture and identity. Cities may preserve and promote their cultural identity while attracting tourists, businesses, and investment through adopting successful city branding techniques.

The importance of Kavaratzis' research on the trend of European cities adopting product branding techniques for place marketing, particularly in the context of European integration, is depicted in Figure 1 below:

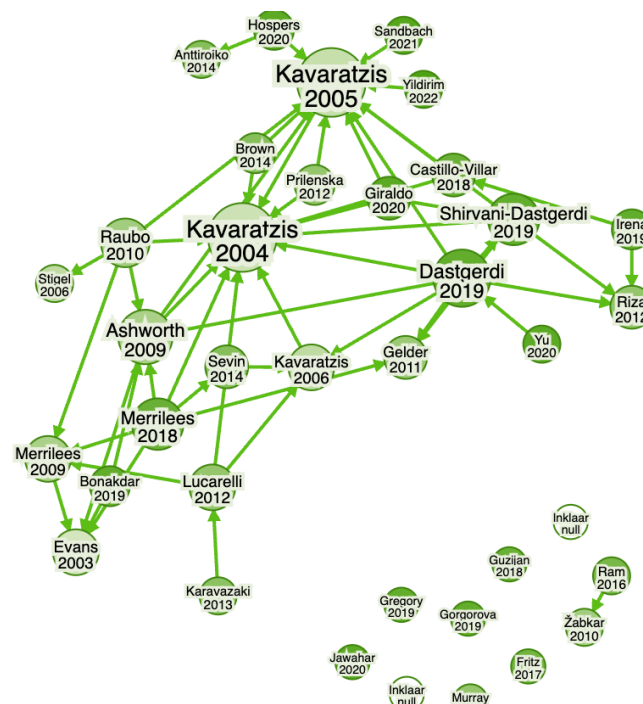


Figure 1 Diagram of research networking on city branding
Source: Analysis by researchrabbit application, 2023

Despite the popularity of the concept of "city branding," there is little consensus on what it entails and how it may be incorporated into the management and development of cities. This study takes an exploratory stance toward the topic of how product branding might be converted into city branding as a potent image-building method for contemporary cities, drawing on recent advances in marketing theory and practice. With the goal of developing a structure for efficient place branding initiatives, this article defines city branding from the perspective of municipal managers and critically analyses its application. This paper contributes to a better understanding of city branding as a tool for urban planning and management by demonstrating the relevance of city branding to contemporary urban

management goals and providing insights for policymakers and city administrators seeking to implement effective place branding strategies.

3.2. City branding and city marketing

For a long time, communities have tried to set themselves apart from others to achieve their own unique economic, political, or social-psychological aims. Governments have almost as long a history as organized society itself doing the work of consciously crafting a unique identity for a region or city in order to appeal to specific markets, whether those markets are domestic or international. Therefore, it is imperative that the deliberate cultivation of such feelings through place marketing be taken into account in any consideration of the fundamental geographical idea of a sense of place. (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). This demonstrates the value of location marketing and city branding in developing a unique identity for a community. Cities and governments can stand out from the competition and appeal to specific consumer groups by actively cultivating a unique identity. This can have far-reaching effects on a region's economy, politics, and society, whether through encouraging new business, drawing in tourists, or bringing people together. So, it can be vital to understand the importance of location marketing and city branding in creating the future of a place and accomplishing goals.

The implementation of marketing knowledge in cities can be problematic due to the distinctive nature of places, particularly cities, as marketable assets. To address this, city branding is proposed as a more suitable approach to describe and execute city marketing (Kavaratzis, 2004b). Gotham, 2007 draws on primary and secondary data to provide insights into the processes and conflicts over branding New Orleans as an entertainment destination from the 1990s to the present. Kavaratzis, 2009 examines whether city brands should be treated as corporate brands. In addition to shaping city brand attitudes, Merrilees et al., 2009 provides a framework for public policy intervention to improve the urban environment. (Kalandides, 2011) aims to bridge the theory and practice of place branding/marketing from a practitioner's perspective, while Braun, 2012 argues that the governance setting, and specific branding choices greatly affect the implementation of city branding. Giovanardi, 2012 seeks to refine the understanding of place branding, particularly city branding, by framing place attractiveness as a combination of "haft" and "sord" factors.

These studies shed light on the difficulties and potentials of implementing successful city branding strategies, and they highlight the significance of viewing the distinctive characteristics of locations, and cities, as important assets. When considering the uniqueness of each city's history, culture, and values, city branding is advocated as a more accurate way to describe and implement city marketing. New Orleans's experience sheds light on the challenges and opportunities involved in marketing a city as a tourist hotspot. A paradigm for public policy action to better the urban environment can be found in the discussion of whether city branding should be treated as corporate brands. The governance setting and branding choices can be informed by the practitioner viewpoint on connecting the theory and practice of place branding/marketing. Combining "haft" and "sord" variables into an improved knowledge of place branding can shed light on a location's desirability. Together, these works provide city planners, marketers, and policymakers with tools for gaining an understanding of cities and locations, evaluating the performance of branding initiatives, and managing future campaigns.

3.3. Branding And Marketing For Cities

The purpose of developing a framework to analyze the branding capabilities of firms in the changing environments of emerging economies is the goal of city branding. City branding

also provides a configurational framework for analyzing branding capabilities in emerging economies, which can be helpful for firms competing in these regions. (Ni & Wan, 2008). Singleton & McKenzie, 2008 explore the interpretive values of the remote and natural resource-rich Pilbara region in Western Australia, focusing on housing and settlement issues and explores the interpretive values that prevail in the Pilbara region of Western Australia and how they impact housing and settlement issues.

Giovanardi, 2012b refines the understanding of place branding by framing place attractiveness as a mix of "haft" and "sord" factors. Ezeuduji et al., 2014 investigate the linkages between resources, capabilities, and competitive advantage of Sun City holiday resort to evaluate the static or dynamic nature of its destination capabilities. Sihlongonyane, 2015 uses a critical and interpretive approach to gain insights into a city's self-reflective efforts at re-imagining its identity through branding texts. Miladiyah & Slamet, 2014 reveal the competitive advantages of Batu City, the communication strategies used to communicate them, and the impact of the communication strategy on visitors. Tresna et al., 2019 aim to examine Bandung's place branding as a competitive advantage of the city. Nursanty, 2021 seeks to establish a new theoretical framework for place branding, incorporating the role of the local community based on studies from two Indonesian cities. Panjaitan (2020), studies the city branding strategy of Batu City, proposing a new model and a new indicator on the brand value destination variable. The studies presented in various implications for understanding branding and competitive advantage in different contexts.

3.4. Authenticity and city branding

Because of the uniqueness of places, and especially cities, as marketable commodities, the operationalization of marketing information in cities can be difficult and prone to misalignments. This is primarily because cities are marketable commodities. This study argues that city branding is a more appropriate strategy to use when describing and putting into practice municipal marketing. (Kavaratzis, 2004a). Zhang & Zhao, 2009 conducted a study on the effectiveness of branding efforts for Beijing, the capital city of China, using in-depth interviews with Sarajevo journalists and analysis of travel reviews from prominent international publications. Volcic et al., 2014 argued that Sarajevo is a place where branding and memories converge. D'Alessandro et al., 2015 aimed to analyze the connections between film-induced tourism, city branding, and place-based image, using the case study of Naples, and deepening the role played by urban policies in promoting, sustaining, or refusing specific city representations. A qualitative research approach to assess the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of Abeokuta communities (ANIFOWOSE, 2020).

Ambord, 2021 studied a group of South Bend, Indiana residents who sought to visually rebrand their city using Instagram. Hussein, 2020 examined the mediation role of city image and visitor satisfaction in the relationship between city branding and urban tourist revisit intention, addressing two research objectives.

These studies collectively highlight the challenges and opportunities of implementing effective city branding strategies, and the importance of balancing economic development goals with the preservation of local culture and identity. The unique nature of cities as marketable assets makes it challenging to implement marketing knowledge in the operational environment of cities, and city branding is proposed as a more suitable approach to describe and execute city marketing.

Research on Beijing, Sarajevo, Naples, Abeokuta, and South Bend demonstrates the importance of taking a holistic and nuanced approach to city branding that considers each location's own history, culture, and beliefs. In sum, these studies provide helpful information and suggestions for city planners, marketers, and policymakers as they work to establish a distinct identity for their city while still appealing to a wide variety of people. This statement emphasizes the need for research on city branding projects in a variety of circumstances to help identify successful tactics. The case studies of Beijing, Sarajevo, Naples, Abeokuta, and South Bend shed light on the necessity of considering the specific history, culture, and values of each city in order to create effective branding strategies for them. City planners, policymakers, and marketers can use the study's ideas and insights to create city branding strategies that appeal to a wide variety of audiences without compromising on local culture and character. With this comprehension, city branding initiative participants may craft strategies that speak to their intended audience and do justice to the city's identity and values.

The success of a territorial brand is strongly dependent on the degree to which its concept can be graphically expressed in an engaging way. A brand is more than just a sketch or logo exhibited in metropolitan areas; it is a collection of thoughts that remain in people's minds after they encounter with it. These impressions might be positive or negative. The brand and its logo should represent the symbols that define the uniqueness of the territory in order to create an emotional connection with the residents of the area. (Gorgorova, 2019). The statement highlights the significance of imagery in creating a memorable and effective territorial brand that resonates with audiences on an emotional level. This interpretation of a brand argues that it is more than a simple symbol or drawing; rather, it is a set of associations captured in a single idea. Brands that make a lasting impression on consumers tap into the cultural cues of the places they represent. With this knowledge in hand, companies and organizations can develop a branding strategy that speaks to their customer base while also conveying the culture and identity of the area they serve. The significance of symbols and associations in creating a memorable place name. It emphasizes the fact that a brand is a concept that includes more than a logo or drawing. It is essential that the brand and logo represent the symbols and identity of the territory for it to connect with the local audience. With this knowledge, companies and organizations may create a brand strategy that accurately represents the culture of their region. A strong territorial brand can attract more tourists, businesses, and investment by striking an emotional chord with residents, hence promoting economic growth and development in the area.

4. Conclusions

This study has proposed a conceptual framework for navigating the tension between city branding and authenticity in the context of urban development. The framework highlights the importance of preserving a sense of place identity and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process, while balancing the need for a strong and recognizable city brand. Through an analysis of successful and unsuccessful case studies, expert interviews, and a survey of stakeholders, this study has shown that effective city branding strategies must strike a delicate balance between economic development goals and the preservation of local culture and identity.

The tension between city branding and authenticity arises when the branding process takes away from a city's authenticity. To navigate this tension, the conceptual framework proposes several strategies: (1) Emphasize the unique and authentic aspects of the city in branding efforts. This can include highlighting the city's history, culture, and heritage; (2) Involve residents and stakeholders in the branding process. This can ensure that the branding efforts reflect the city's authentic character and values; (3) Balance the need for

branding with the need to maintain authenticity. This can involve setting limits on branding efforts or prioritizing authenticity over branding when necessary; (4) Continuously evaluate and adjust branding efforts to ensure they align with the city's authentic identity. By employing these strategies, cities can brand themselves while maintaining their authenticity, allowing them to attract tourists and investment while still being true to their unique character and culture.

The proposed conceptual framework offers practical guidance for city planners, marketers, and policymakers seeking to develop effective city branding strategies that balance the need for a strong brand image with the preservation of authenticity and place identity. The framework emphasizes the importance of engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the branding process, including residents, tourists, and businesses, and suggests practical strategies for incorporating local history, culture, and values into city branding campaigns. By providing a structured approach to navigating the tension between city branding and authenticity, this study offers valuable insights and recommendations for cities seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive global marketplace.

This study has contributed to the ongoing debate on the role of city branding in urban development and has provided a comprehensive and practical approach for cities to balance the tensions between economic development goals and cultural heritage preservation. By proposing a conceptual framework that integrates the key dimensions of city branding and authenticity, this study offers a structured approach to understanding the complexities of city branding and provides practical strategies for balancing economic development goals with the preservation of local culture and identity. As such, this study offers valuable insights and recommendations for city planners, marketers, and policymakers seeking to develop effective city branding strategies that resonate with diverse audiences while preserving local culture and identity.

The limitation of this study is that the proposed conceptual framework has not yet been tested in practice, and therefore its effectiveness and generalizability in different contexts and settings is yet to be determined. Additionally, this study has focused primarily on the tension between city branding and authenticity and has not explored other important factors that may influence the success of city branding campaigns, such as political and economic factors. Moreover, while the survey research provides valuable data on stakeholder perceptions of city branding and authenticity, the sample size and representativeness of the survey respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable contribution to the literature on city branding and authenticity and offers a practical framework for cities seeking to balance economic development goals with the preservation of authenticity and place identity.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, Eko Nursanty; Methodology, Eko Nursanty; Validation, Rahmawaty; Formal Analysis, Made Ika Prastyadewi; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Eko Nursanty; Writing – Review & Editing, Eko Nursanty.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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