



The Role of City Brand Equity Effectiveness in Baghdad's Branding

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City Branding, Brand Equity, Approaches to City Brand Equity, Baghdad Branding.

ABSTRACT

Urban branding has emerged as a contemporary strategy that significantly enhances the competitive advantage and global positioning of cities. This study examines the role of branding in attracting diverse stakeholders, such as residents, investors, and tourists, by analyzing the process of building brand equity in the context of implementing urban branding in Baghdad. The study employed a quantitative approach, focusing on data collection techniques centered around a survey directed at experts in urban design and development from various departments of architecture and engineering in Iraqi universities, as well as urban development experts from outside Iraq. The study's results demonstrated the feasibility of applying the brand equity approach to the city of Baghdad, utilizing six procedural steps across four levels. The first level (Identity Awareness) includes the first procedural step, known as the emergence of branding. The second level (Brand Meaning) comprises two procedural steps: Performance and Experience. The third level (Brand Response) includes two procedural steps: feelings and judgments. Finally, the fourth level (Relationships) encompasses the sixth step, Echo. The research aims to develop a distinctive brand for the city of Baghdad that enhances its competitive ability and revitalizes its global position.

الكلمات المفتاحية

توسيم المدينة، استحقاق التوسيم، نهج استحقاق وسم المدينة، وسم مدينة بغداد.

المخلص

برز التوسيم الحضري كاستراتيجية معاصرة تساعد بشكل كبير في تعزيز الميزة التنافسية والموقع العالمي للمدن. تبحث هذه الدراسة في دور التوسيم في جذب أصحاب المصلحة المتنوعين، مثل السكان والمستثمرين والسياح، من خلال فحص عملية بناء قيمة التوسيم في سياق تطبيق التوسيم الحضري في مدينة بغداد. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج كمي، مع التركيز على تقنيات جمع البيانات من خلال استطلاع موجه إلى خبراء العمارة والتطوير الحضري من مختلف أقسام الهندسة المعمارية في الجامعات العراقية، وكذلك خبراء التنمية الحضرية من خارج العراق. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة إمكانية تطبيق نهج استحقاق التوسيم على مدينة بغداد، من خلال تطبيق ست خطوات إجرائية ضمن أربعة مستويات، المستوى الأول (الوعي بالهوية)، يتضمن الخطوة الإجرائية الأولى، والمعروفة بظهور التوسيم. المستوى الثاني (معنى التوسيم) يتضمن خطوتين إجرائيتين، الأداء والتجربة. المستوى الثالث (استجابة التوسيم)، يتضمن خطوتين إجرائيتين المشاعر والأحكام. وأخيراً، المستوى الرابع (العلاقات) يتضمن الخطوة السادسة، الصدى. ومن ثم يهدف البحث إلى تطوير علامة تجارية مميزة لمدينة بغداد تساهم في تعزيز قدرتها التنافسية وتنشيط مكانتها العالمية.

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1. Introduction

Amid the rising global competition, cities continuously strive to develop their strategies and enhance their competitive capabilities to strengthen their position on the global map and achieve sustainable development for their residents (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Consequently, place marketers are increasingly focusing on establishing the city as a brand and promoting it to various target groups (Zenker & Martin, 2011, p. 32). City branding refers to the production and circulation of attractive urban images (or, more precisely, imageries: ideas, stereotypes, mental associations, etc.) (Vanolo, 2008). This is to become an attractive tourist destination, a vibrant workplace, a rich cultural hub, and much more. City branding has been introduced as a new and innovative development strategy that cities must adopt to succeed in this competitive environment, which has primarily evolved through marketing strategies aimed at enhancing and promoting the city's reputation, much like products. Kotler asserts that "places are products whose identities and values must be designed and marketed" (Kotler & Turner, 1997). Although city promotion dates back to the 19th century, the emergence of concepts such as place marketing, place branding, and city branding is relatively new in the academic world (Gomez et al., 2015).

From the above, we conclude that contemporary cities are seeking new ways to develop and improve, aiming to transition from a local level to global competition. This competition among cities aims to achieve a distinguished reputation and fame, attract more tourists, investors, companies, a qualified workforce, and new citizens. Therefore, the research hypothesizes: "The role of brand equity values in building a distinctive brand for the city of Baghdad."

Consequently, the following sections aim to define the concept of city branding and delve into identifying the brand equity approach in cities, clarifying its key levels and procedural steps.

2. City Branding

This section will explain the concept of city branding and its origins, while also highlighting its connection to the idea of place branding. Branding was originally linked to consumer products, but the concept has been applied to places since the late 1990s. Cities around the world have begun engaging in branding to gain a competitive advantage and enhance their cities' reputations among various communities (Nelson, 2015, p. 193).

The concept was first formulated by British scholar Simon Anholt in 1996, who is credited with its creation and application to places. He observed that the reputation of cities functions similarly to the branding of companies and products, which is essential for progress, prosperity, and effective management in urban areas. Many cities have sought to establish entirely new branding identities, much like large corporations sometimes revamp or completely replace their images and re-launch themselves as new brands (Hedberg, 2001, p. 35). Branding is a collection of images, characteristics, or emotions that consumers associate with a specific symbol, product, service, organization, or place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). According to West (1997), cities "have attempted to reinvent or reorganize themselves by adopting marketing techniques directly derived from branding techniques" (West, 1997, p. 11).

The concept of urban branding emerged as part of the broader "family of place branding." Braun emphasized that place branding is like a family tree, with its members (city branding, national branding, country branding) serving as branches (Braun, 2012, p. 257). It can encompass various types of places and different spatial scales; in practice, it can be applied to neighborhoods, regions, tourist destinations, cities, rural areas, countries, states, and nations (Oğuztimur, 2017, p. 145).

Branding has become a priority for urban management in recent years due to its growing recognition as one of the most valuable intangible assets (Leone et al., 2006). It is also being adopted in areas and cities through branding strategies such as labeling goods or services. Cities and destinations differ in art, culture, landscapes, and food. These distinctive features are used to create brand images and associations (Kemp et al., 2012). Although city branding is more challenging than branding goods and services due to the presence of a large number of stakeholders, it aims to create a sense of uniqueness that distinguishes one place from another, thereby achieving brand equity.

We will clarify the dimensions of urban branding. Simon Anholt (2006) proposed a six-dimensional model (Hexagon Branding) to measure the effectiveness of city branding, which helps in establishing a strong image of the city as a positive and effective entity to attract investments, tourists, and new visitors.

A strong image influences the behaviors and attitudes of target audiences, helping to eliminate previous negative perceptions. Anholt surveyed 30 cities to identify their characteristics and explored significant global contributions in culture, science, and urban management (Anholt, 2007, pp. 60–65); Widyaningrat (2019, p. 17); and Chan, Suryadipura, and Kostini (2021, p. 332). The model evaluates the image and reputation of cities based on six dimensions, including:

- Presence refers to a city's status and recognition within the international community, as well as its level of global recognition among citizens. It measures the city's contribution to cultural development and governance, reflecting public awareness of its global contributions.
- Place: Assesses the perception of a city's physical aspects and how people evaluate the material features of a city, including its actual beauty and climate. It describes perceptions about the city's environment, cleanliness, and the attractiveness of its buildings and public spaces.
- Potential: Considers the evaluation of economic and educational opportunities available for visitors, businesses, and immigrants, such as the ease of finding jobs, the city's appeal for tourism, or the availability of higher educational qualifications (Al-Saadi et al., 2022).
- People: Evaluates the city's residents' level of hospitality and their capacity to facilitate cultural exchanges. It examines whether newcomers can easily integrate into a community that shares their language and culture and whether they feel secure.
- Pulse or Enthusiasm: Measures the city's vibrant lifestyle and how easily people can access attractions and activities. It represents the city's ability to offer a range of interesting activities, both in the short term and the long term.
- Prerequisite: Describes the community's capacity and basic city attributes, such as comfort, availability of accommodation, and access to infrastructure like schools, hospitals, transportation, and sports facilities.

From the above, it can be considered that city branding is a "comprehensive strategic approach to highlight the city's identity and enhance its competitiveness in attracting various resources, thereby improving its reputation and image on a global scale. It represents the promise and shared idea that brings together individuals and organizations interested in a place, focusing on what makes it unique and distinctive. To generate emotional and cognitive associations, we need a comprehensive and authentic approach that reflects an effective branding for the city". Accordingly, the study examined brand equity approaches and explored the city branding approach as outlined in the following paragraph.

3. Brand Equity

The paragraph addresses the definition of "Brand Equity," then derives an approach to the city branding process based on key proposals from marketing and business management studies, and applies it to the branding of Baghdad.

The development of brand equity enhances a city's value by influencing consumer behavior and fostering connections with various stakeholders. Additionally, brand equity is considered an intangible resource that can produce revenue exceeding that of physical assets, thereby contributing substantial financial benefits to the city (Motion et al., 2003).

Agarwal and Rao (1996) define brand individuality as a fundamental aspect of customer-based brand equity. Uniqueness refers to the extent to which customers perceive a brand as distinct from its competitors. This distinctiveness can manifest in various ways, such as differences in product features, marketing strategies, or brand personalities, which set the brand apart from its rivals (Agarwal & Rao, 1996). Ashworth (2009) suggests that one of the goals of city or place branding is to discover or create distinctiveness, making the city unique compared to others (Ashworth, 2009). In the evaluation stage of city branding, Anholt (2007) proposed a method for measuring the impact of branding on cities using the hexagon branding model, which encompasses six dimensions: Presence, Place, Pre-requisite, People, Pulse, and Potential (Anholt, 2007, pp. 59–61).

Brand equity is utilized in business, marketing, and advertising to create added value and maintain continuity and reputation. This concept distinguishes a product, place, or city from others (Kenton, 2023, p. 1). There has been a clear focus on city branding studies regarding their external relevance, i.e.,

understanding how the destination brand influences the behavior of tourists or visitors (Pike, 2020), with the intention of generating revenue for the region (Morgan & Pritchard, 2002).

Consumers place trust in branding and thus assume that the product will meet their expectations. Today, consumers evaluate a product not only based on its functional value but also on its ability to deliver unforgettable experiences (Govers & Go, 2009), which is known as brand equity. Consequently, the brand becomes a promise, assuring consumers that they made the right decision. One can argue that the value of a product depends on how consumers connect with the brand. Branding literature emphasizes that consumers can make a product, service, person, or even a place a brand. Brand equity relies on consumer perception, which is relatively unrelated to functional attributes (Anholt, 2006), in addition to the emotional impact of branding. Branding enables us to convey specific aspects of ourselves to our community, sending a message—a value through which consumers can identify themselves. Strong brands have a unique personality, offering not just a product or service, but an unforgettable experience and a unique feeling. Just like major brands, major cities around the world also have branding personalities, meaning they offer an experience, a feeling, a promise (Anholt, 2006, p. 18). Hence, the next section of the research will focus on defining the approach to brand equity in the city.

4. City Brand Equity Approach

The research outlines that the approach to brand origins, based on intellectual associations derived from marketing and business management studies, involves acquiring impactful mental associations over time through direct or indirect physical or symbolic interactions with the brand. Unique added values in city branding are linked to the concept of equity, where consumers place trust in the brand and expect it to meet their expectations. Consumers evaluate a product not on its functional value, but on its ability to deliver unforgettable experiences (Govers & Go, 2009). This is known as Brand Equity, which becomes a promise to consumers that aids their decision-making. Thus, brand equity depends on consumers' connection to the brand. Literature highlights that consumers can create a brand for a product, service, person, or place, with brand equity relying on consumer perception and emotional feelings (Anholt, 2006, p. 4). Branding conveys a message that adds value and enhances the brand's effectiveness and recognition. Strong brands offer a unique personality, providing not just a product or service, but an unforgettable experience and a distinct feeling (Abdulla et al., 2023). Like major brands, major cities also have distinct branding personalities, which create a unique experience and atmosphere.

From the above, it is evident that the concept of branding encompasses two important aspects: the product's attributes, specifically its external characteristics related to tangible and intangible features, and the value of brand equity. Thus, brand equity can be defined as "a strategic process involving creating a unique identity and effectively communicating it to the target audience to add value, ultimately achieving reputation and business success, as well as playing a significant role in decision-making, reducing risks, and setting consumer expectations." The significance of brand equity includes:

- **Competitive Edge:** Effective branding provides a significant competitive advantage, helping the product stand out in its field.
- **Perception:** Branding conveys specific attributes to consumers, such as superiority or ease of use, influencing their purchasing decisions.
- **Value:** Branding represents valuable assets that can significantly impact reputation and shareholder value.

Kevin Lane Keller proposed a model illustrating brand value based on the impact of mental associations, emphasizing the importance of creating positive associations with products. The model relies on a hierarchy of brand value, starting with brand identity and differentiation, leading to resonance (Keller, 2001), as shown in Figure (1).

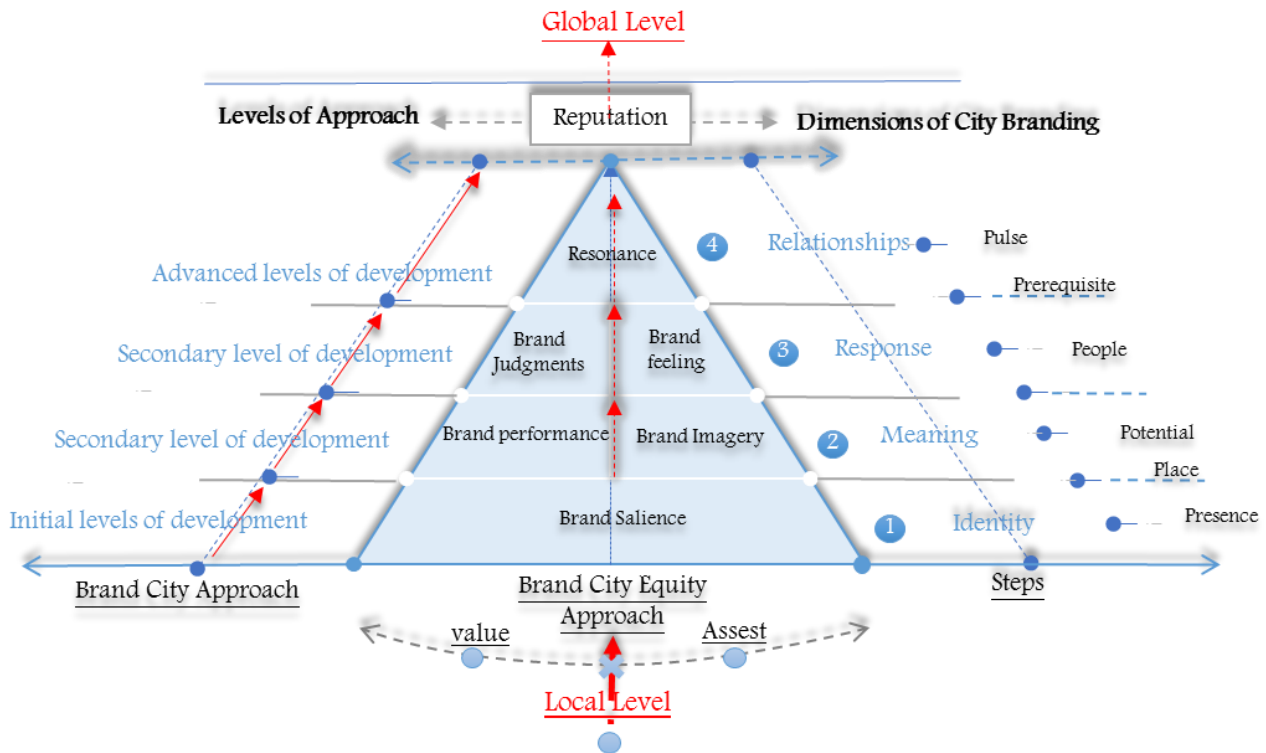


Figure 1. The conceptual model/brand equity approach is based on mental associations with the brand. Source: (Authors).

4.1. Brand Identity

The first stage involves creating a distinctive brand by defining the essence of the brand identity and its connection to city images. City images provide a sense of identity, well-being, and belonging, forming the basis of memory systems and creating a memorable place (Boyer, 2011, p. 70). Brand awareness involves coherently linking messages and images so that consumers can recognize (Keller, 2001, pp. 8–10), including:

- Brand Salience: The prominence of the brand in memorable situations and its standing in the mind, offering depth and breadth (Riza et al., 2012).

4.2. Brand Meaning

The second step is to establish brand meaning in customers' minds through strategic linking of tangible and intangible brand associations, focusing on performance and imagery (Kuhn et al., 2008, p. 5):

- Performance: The brand's ability to deliver strong value and positive experiences
- Brand Imagery: Refers to the external attributes of the product or service related to how it meets customers' psychological and social needs (Keller, 2001, p. 11).

4.3. Brand Response

The third step involves deriving appropriate customer responses to brand identity and meaning through emotions and judgments based on specific associations. This includes:

- Brand Judgments: Personal opinions and evaluations of the brand, focusing on how customers form various types of opinions from brand associations. The most important components for enriching and revitalizing heritage products through leadership are achieved by indicators of social participation in decision-making processes and urban interventions, along with stakeholders' synergy to maintain and recall the essence of Baghdad and the spirit of place.
- Brand Feelings: Emotional responses to the brand reflect how customers connect with the product on an emotional level, which can vary from mild to intense and may be either positive or negative.

4.4. Brand Relationships

The final stage focuses on the highest level of brand identification that customers achieve. It represents the nature of the relationship and the degree of "resonance" with the brand, characterized by the intensity or depth of the psychological connection (Keller, 2001, p. 15). Each step depends on the successful completion of the previous one, following a hierarchical sequence from bottom to top (Brand Identity - Brand Meaning - Brand Response - Brand Relationships). These steps comprise six foundational elements of brand building (Salience, Performance, Imagery, Judgments, Feelings, and Resonance), aiming to reach the pinnacle of the pyramid (Resonance).

5. Research Methodology

The research employs a quantitative approach, which enables the achievement of logical and accurate scientific results. Using questionnaires in this study, we will explain how to utilize the results of analyzing the brand equity model to enhance Baghdad's reputation.

5.1. Sample

The questionnaire was directed to a group of experts from various architecture departments within Iraqi universities, as well as experts from outside Iraq and the Baghdad Municipality, who have extensive experience in urban development and design in Baghdad. The questionnaire was distributed in the form of a Google Form to a specific sample of 21 participants with a significance level of 5% and an interpretive power (80%). All forms were obtained and analyzed in accordance with the subsequent steps.

5.2. Measurement Techniques

Following this quantitative approach, the research aimed to gather perceptions from diverse local and international respondents regarding awareness of identity, the meaning of branding, brand response, and relationships. The data collected through the questionnaire were then analyzed using Smart-PLS techniques to test the research hypothesis and draw conclusions about the relationship between city branding and city brand equity.

The findings from the exploratory study were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with Smart-PLS 4 software. This is based on analyzing the questionnaire data using Partial Least Squares analysis through two models:

- The Structural Model analyzes the relationships between variables by constructing a visual path diagram that illustrates the strength of the connections. This model provides a structural representation of how the variables are linked, as shown in Figure (2).
- The Measurement Model evaluates the questions to assess their validity and effectiveness in measuring the variable. This model ensures that the questions accurately capture the intended construct and provide reliable data for analysis, as shown in Table (1).

By employing these two complementary models, SmartPLS 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire data, examining both the relationships between city branding and city brand equity (structural model) and the appropriateness of the measurement instrument (measurement model). This approach allows for robust conclusions to be drawn from the exploratory study.

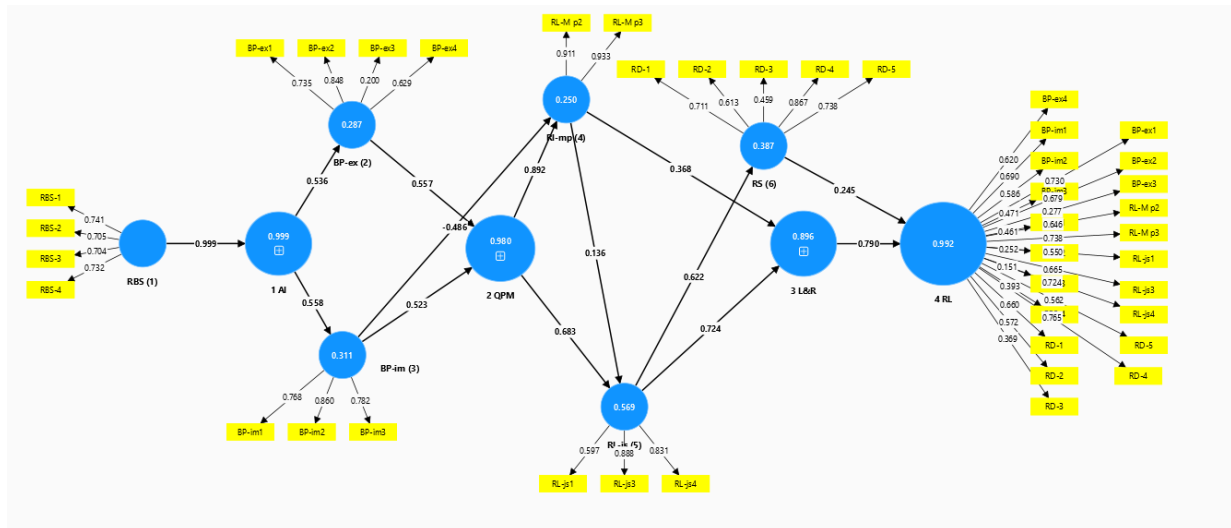


Figure 2: The structural model with the path coefficient values between branding and brand equity in the city.
Source: (Authors by SmartPLS 4 Outputs).

5.3. Finding

The interpretation of the finding is based on the path coefficients, which are crucial elements in the Smart-PLS program and path analysis. The analysis will emphasize the strength and direction of the relationships between variables within the structural model, while assessing the P-values, effect size (magnitude), and T-value. This will be demonstrated as follows:

5.3.1. First, the strength of the relationship between levels of city brand equity

Strength has a high and weak impact, as shown below:

5.3.1.1 High Effect (Path Coefficient Value Greater than 0.5)

The results indicate three relationships with a high impact within the global community perspective:

- An extremely high effect of the first step (recognition in the emergence of branding) at the first level (identity awareness), where the path coefficient value was 0.999, representing the highest impact from the experts' perspective, as shown in Figure (3).
- An extremely high effect of the second level on the fourth step (superior preference), where the path coefficient value was 0.892, representing the second-highest impact from the experts' perspective, as shown in Figure (3).
- A high effect of the third level relationship (response and loyalty) on the fourth level (relationships and connections), where the path coefficient value was 0.790, resulting in a high impact on city popularity.
- A high effect of the fifth step on the third phase, where the path coefficient value was 0.724.
- There is a moderate effect of the fifth step (branding judgments) on the sixth step (differentiation echo), with a path coefficient value of 0.508.
- Finally, a moderate effect of identity awareness was observed on both the second and third steps for branding Baghdad city, with path coefficient values of 0.536 for the second step and 0.558 for the third step.

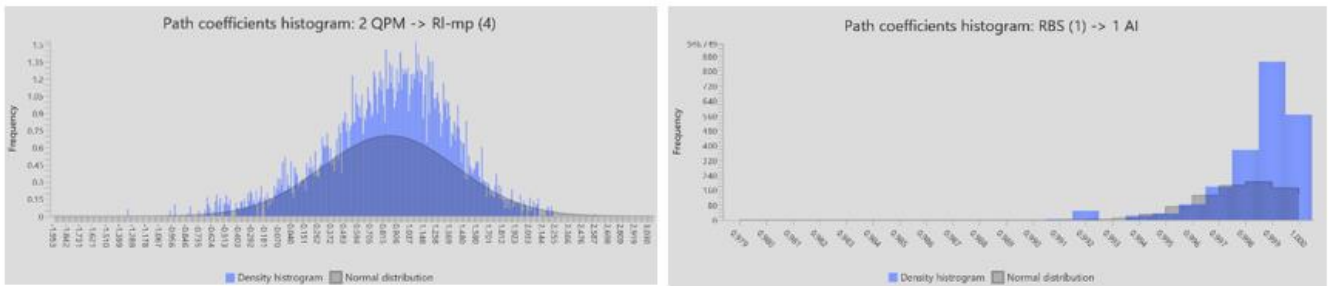


Figure 3: The Histogram on the left illustrates the strongest positive relationship, demonstrating the impact of the first step (recognition in the emergence of branding) at the first level (identity awareness). The Histogram on the right indicates a positive relationship showing the second level on the fourth step (superior preference).

5.3.1.2 Weak impact

A path coefficient value between (0.1-0.3) indicates that the research identified the fourth step's effect on the fifth step with a path coefficient value of (0.136), as illustrated in Figure (4-34). Additionally, there is a weak effect of the sixth step on the fourth level, where the path coefficient value was (0.245), as shown in Figure (4-35). as shown in the Figure (4)

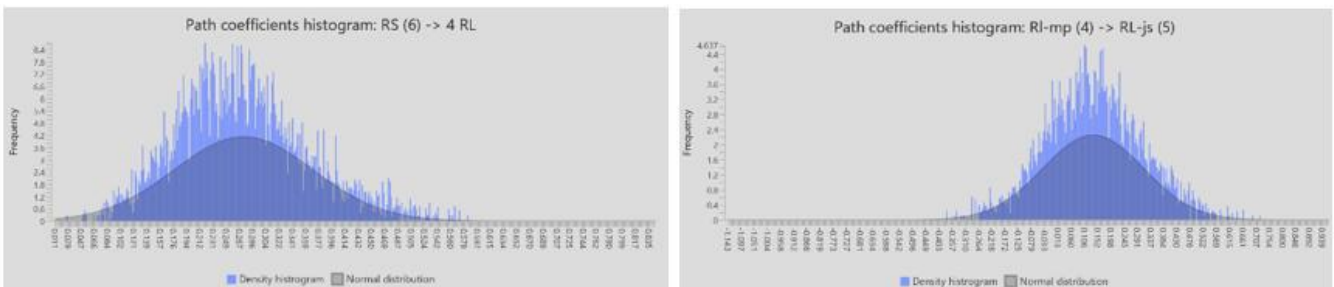


Figure 4: The Histogram on the left illustrates the weak relationship, the sixth step on the fourth level. The chart on the right indicates a weak relationship showing the effect of step four on step five.

5.3.2. Second, Magnitude

All study findings indicate positive relationships as a result of the positive values of the path coefficients shown in the table, this means that as the independent variable's effect increases, the effect on the dependent variable also increases. as in the relationship between the impact of city brand equity on the city branding, which shows that the greater the influence of city brand equity, the greater its reputation.

5.3.3. Third, (T values) Values of (T) that are greater than (1.96) and less than (2.58) represent a weak relationship. Accordingly, two relationships were identified, as shown in Table (1).

- The first represents the effect of the second level (perceived quality of meaning) on the fourth step (superior preference) within the third level, where the value was 1.573.
- The second is the relationship of the sixth step (differentiation echo) on the fourth level, where the value was (2.535). Thus, both relationships are statistically significant at a 5% significance level.

Meanwhile, all other relationships with (T-statistics) values indicate that they are strong and have a positive effect since they are greater than (2.58), except for the relationship of the fourth step (superior preference) on the fifth step (branding judgments), where the value was (0.768), and the relationship of the third step (impression) on the fourth step (superior preference), which is less than (1.96). Therefore, the effect or relationship between impression and superior preference may be weak or nonexistent, as shown in Table (1).

Table 1. Presents Path coefficient values & (T) values & (P) values. Source: (Authors by SmartPLS 4 Outputs).

	Path coefficient	T value	P values
AI – BP-ex (2)	0.536	2.678	0.007
AI – BP-im (3)	0.558	3.465	0.001
2QPM – RL-js	0.683	4.144	0.000
2QPM – RI-mp (4)	0.892	1.573	0.116
BP-ex(2) – PQM	0.790	8.814	0.000
3L&R – 4RL	0.557	6.281	0.000
BP-im(3)– PQM	0.523	5.715	0.000
BP-im(3)– RI-mp (4)	-0.486	0.744	0.457
RBS (1) – 1 AI	0.999	511.839	0.000
RL-JS(5) – 3 L& R	0.724	6.756	0.000
RL-JS(5) – RS (6)	0.622	4.531	0.000
RS (6) – 4 RL	0.245	2.535	0.011
RI-mp (4) – 3 L&R	0.368	2.989	0.003
RI-mp (4) – RL – JS (5)	0.136	0.768	0.442

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research concluded that Baghdad's brand salience has a strong connection with the expert sample. Baghdad is globally acknowledged and boasts a distinct, inherited collection of assets, history, traits, and culture that highlights and differentiates it on various levels, fostering connections among its people and places. The historical center is highly respected and esteemed by Iraqi and international experts. The perception is that Baghdad is a city with diverse visible historical symbols, resonating with some of the richest civilizations in the world. Iraq experienced its golden age due to the spread of its historical culture. The existing tourism potential in the historical center is a key factor in the perception of local experts. Overall, the economic and educational opportunities available to visitors do not stand out in comparison to those of major cities.

The attractive urban environment positively influences the feelings of preference for labeling the city of Baghdad, generating a strong sense of pride and helping to reimagine the city's historical ties as a dazzling image of distinction. The role of events within the historical public space in generating a sense of admiration for the unique heritage context and engaging society in building effective and successful urban branding, and their role in the success of urban development plans that reflect their values, needs, and aspirations, as well as the role of urban development plans. The company is involved in both the public and private sectors to ensure the success of the branding process. In addition to the city's susceptibility to evolution and continuous renewal, it helps to extend the city's influence beyond its national borders. Therefore, identity serves as the foundation for both branding and recognition. It generates various visual representations over time, rooted in its origins. The relationships formed between these representations establish a unique brand equity in the city of Baghdad, ultimately enhancing its overall branding.

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