

Branding of cities: Recognizing the antecedents of branding Al-dhahirah region of Oman

Dr. Bijja Vishwanath¹, Dr. Abed Ali Mohammed², Dr. Syeda Zubaida Hashmi³, Ms. Safiya Saif Nasser Al-hamdi⁴

1Affiliation: Lecturer, College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Science, Ibri-Sultanate of Oman.

2Affiliation: Lecturer, College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Science, Ibri-Sultanate of Oman.

3 Affiliation: Lecturer, College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Science, Ibri-Sultanate of Oman.

4Affiliation: Head of section (HR), College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Science, Ibri-Sultanate of Oman.

Abstract

This research explores the critical antecedents of city branding in the Al-Dhahirah region of Oman, focusing on elements such as cultural heritage, natural attractions, local community involvement, governance, and strategic branding initiatives. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study involved surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather data from various stakeholders, including residents, businesses, government officials, and tourists. The findings reveal that cultural heritage and natural attractions are the most influential factors, significantly contributing to the region's unique identity and appeal. Local community involvement emerged as a crucial component, highlighting the importance of stakeholder participation in developing authentic and sustainable branding strategies. Governance and strategic initiatives were also identified as key drivers, ensuring the alignment of branding efforts with regional development goals. The research provides insights into the complexities of city branding and offers recommendations for leveraging these antecedents to enhance Al-Dhahirah's attractiveness as a cultural and eco-tourism destination. The study's results have implications for policymakers and practitioners, suggesting pathways for sustainable development and economic growth through

targeted branding efforts. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of these strategies on regional identity and economic resilience.

Keywords: City branding, Al-Dhahirah, Oman, place marketing, antecedents, tourism, regional development.

• **Introduction**

City branding has emerged as a vital strategy in the modern globalized world, where cities and regions compete not only for economic resources but also for attention, recognition, and prestige. The concept of city branding involves creating a unique identity for a city or region, which can distinguish it from others and make it more attractive to various target audiences, including tourists, investors, and residents[1]. In an era marked by rapid urbanization and interconnected economies, cities and regions are increasingly adopting branding strategies to shape perceptions, build a positive image, and foster economic growth[2]. The significance of city branding extends beyond mere marketing; it involves a strategic effort to influence and manage a city's reputation, thereby enhancing its socio-economic status and cultural identity[3].

City branding plays a critical role in attracting tourism, which is often a significant source of revenue for cities and regions[4]. By promoting unique cultural, historical, and natural attributes, city branding can attract visitors and tourists, generating economic benefits and enhancing local businesses. For instance, cities like Paris, London, and Dubai have successfully branded themselves as prime tourist destinations, each emphasizing different aspects such as fashion, history, or luxury. In addition to tourism, city branding is crucial for attracting investment. Investors often look for cities that offer a favorable business environment, infrastructure, and a strong brand image[5]. A well-branded city can convey stability, opportunities, and a conducive atmosphere for business operations, thus becoming a preferred choice for investors and businesses looking to establish a presence.

The role of city branding in regional development cannot be understated. It is directly linked to the socio-economic development of a region, impacting aspects such as job creation, income generation, and overall quality of life. Effective branding can lead to increased visibility and awareness, attracting both public and private investments[6]. This, in turn, can lead to the development of infrastructure, improvement of public services, and enhancement of the living

standards of residents[7]. Furthermore, city branding can foster a sense of pride and belonging among local communities, encouraging civic engagement and participation[8]. The competitive advantage gained through branding can help a region stand out in the crowded global market, making it more attractive for events, conferences, and other significant activities that bring economic and social benefits.

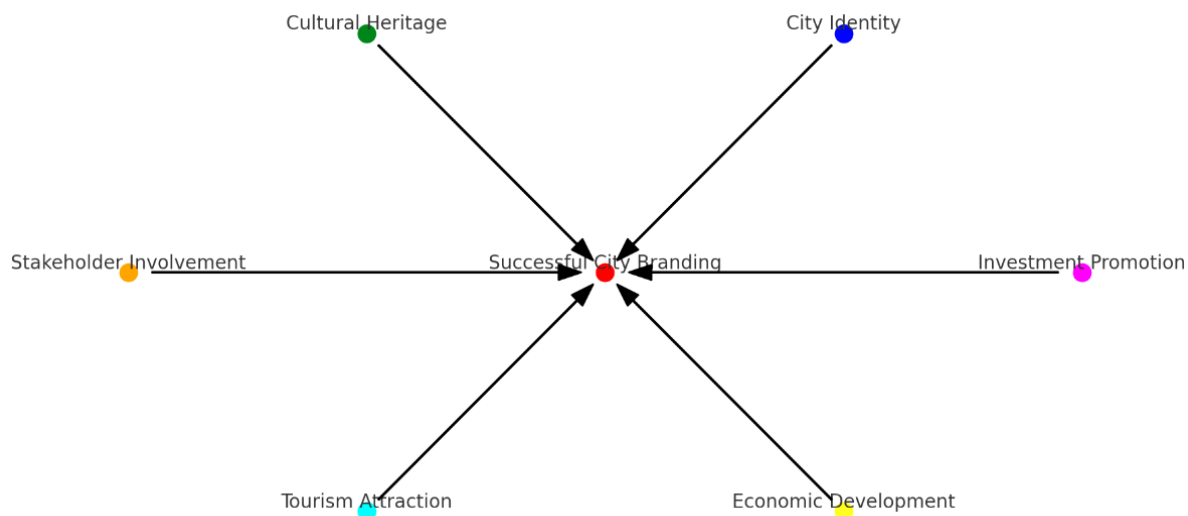


Figure.1: Conceptual Model of City Branding

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual model of city branding, showcasing the critical components that contribute to successful city branding efforts. At the center of the diagram is the main concept, "Successful City Branding," depicted as a red node[9]. This central concept is surrounded by six key elements, each represented by a colored node, which are essential factors influencing the effectiveness of city branding[10]. Directional arrows point from these surrounding nodes towards the central node, indicating their collective contribution towards achieving successful city branding.

The first element, "City Identity," is represented by a blue node positioned in the top-right corner. This element embodies the unique characteristics, values, and identity that distinguish a city from others. City identity forms the foundation of the branding strategy, helping to create a cohesive and compelling image that resonates with both residents and visitors[11].

Next, "Cultural Heritage," depicted as a green node in the top-left corner, symbolizes the historical, cultural, and traditional aspects that define a city[12]. It includes elements such as

monuments, customs, arts, and cultural expressions unique to the region. Emphasizing cultural heritage in branding helps promote authenticity and cultural richness, attracting tourists and fostering a sense of pride among residents.

"Economic Development," shown as a yellow node in the bottom-right corner, represents the city's potential for economic growth, job creation, and improved quality of life[13]. A robust economy is a crucial component of city branding, as it attracts businesses and investors, showcasing the city as a stable and opportunity-rich environment.

The "Tourism Attraction" element is illustrated by a cyan node located in the bottom-left corner. This component highlights the city's appeal as a travel destination, which is vital for generating economic benefits and achieving global recognition. Effective promotion of a city's attractions, including landmarks, natural beauty, and cultural events, strengthens its brand and draws in visitors.

"Investment Promotion," represented by a magenta node to the far right, focuses on attracting both domestic and foreign investments[14]. This element is critical for creating a favorable business environment, developing infrastructure, and enhancing economic prospects. Promoting a city as an attractive investment destination stimulates economic growth and development.

Finally, "Stakeholder Involvement," shown as an orange node to the far left, underscores the importance of engaging various stakeholders in the branding process[15]. This includes local communities, businesses, government entities, and other interest groups. Involving stakeholders ensures that branding initiatives are inclusive, representative, and sustainable, contributing to a stronger and more authentic city brand.

The Al-Dhahirah region of Oman presents a unique case for city branding, with its rich cultural heritage, historical significance, and natural beauty. Despite these assets, the region has not fully realized its potential in terms of attracting tourism and investment[16]. The objective of this research is to identify the key antecedents that influence the branding of the Al-Dhahirah region, which can serve as a foundation for developing effective branding strategies[17]. By understanding these antecedents, stakeholders can design initiatives that capitalize on the region's strengths, address its challenges, and enhance its image and reputation both nationally and internationally[18]. The focus will be on identifying the factors that contribute to a

successful branding strategy, including cultural heritage, community involvement, governance, and promotional activities.

This paper is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the city branding process and its implications for the Al-Dhahirah region. Following this introduction, a literature review will explore existing theories and models of city branding, highlighting key factors that have been identified in previous research. The methodology section will describe the research approach, including data collection and analysis methods used to identify the antecedents of branding in the Al-Dhahirah region[19]. The results section will present the findings of the research, identifying the key antecedents and their implications for branding efforts[20]. The discussion will analyze these findings, highlighting the opportunities and challenges for branding Al-Dhahirah. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the key points of the paper, offering recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders involved in the branding process, and suggesting areas for future research[21]. This structure will ensure a thorough exploration of the topic, providing valuable insights into the branding of the Al-Dhahirah region.

- **Literature Review**

City branding has evolved as a distinct field within urban and regional development, focusing on the creation and management of a unique identity for cities or regions to differentiate them in a competitive global environment. City branding can be defined as the strategic process of building and communicating a city's identity to enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness. This concept is closely related to but distinct from place marketing and destination branding. While place marketing generally involves broader strategies aimed at promoting a particular location for economic activities, investment, or residency[22], destination branding specifically focuses on promoting locations as tourist destinations. City branding, however, encompasses a more comprehensive approach that integrates elements of both place marketing and destination branding, emphasizing not only economic and tourism goals but also the cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions of a city's identity[23]. Theoretical foundations of city branding draw upon various disciplines, including marketing, urban studies, and cultural studies[24]. Frameworks such as the brand identity prism, which includes dimensions like physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image, have been adapted to analyze and develop city

brands[25]. Other models emphasize the role of narratives, symbols, and values in shaping the perception of a city.

The importance of city branding lies in its ability to influence the economic, social, and cultural dynamics of a region. Cities and regions engage in branding efforts for several reasons, primarily to foster economic development, attract tourism, promote investment, and achieve cultural recognition[26]. Economic development is often a key driver of city branding, as a strong brand can attract businesses, investors, and skilled workforce, leading to job creation, increased economic activities, and higher revenues[27]. A positive and well-defined city brand can enhance the attractiveness of a city as a business hub, offering opportunities for commercial and industrial growth[28]. Tourism attraction is another critical reason for city branding. Cities that successfully brand themselves as attractive tourist destinations can experience significant economic benefits from increased visitor numbers, higher spending, and longer stays[29]. The promotion of unique cultural, historical, and natural assets through city branding can draw tourists, thus boosting local businesses and services[30]. Investment promotion is also a vital aspect of city branding, as cities compete globally to attract foreign and domestic investment. A strong city brand can project an image of stability, opportunity, and innovation, making it an appealing destination for investors looking to establish or expand their businesses. Additionally, cultural recognition plays a significant role in city branding, as cities seek to highlight their unique cultural heritage, traditions, and creative industries, thus enhancing their identity and sense of place.

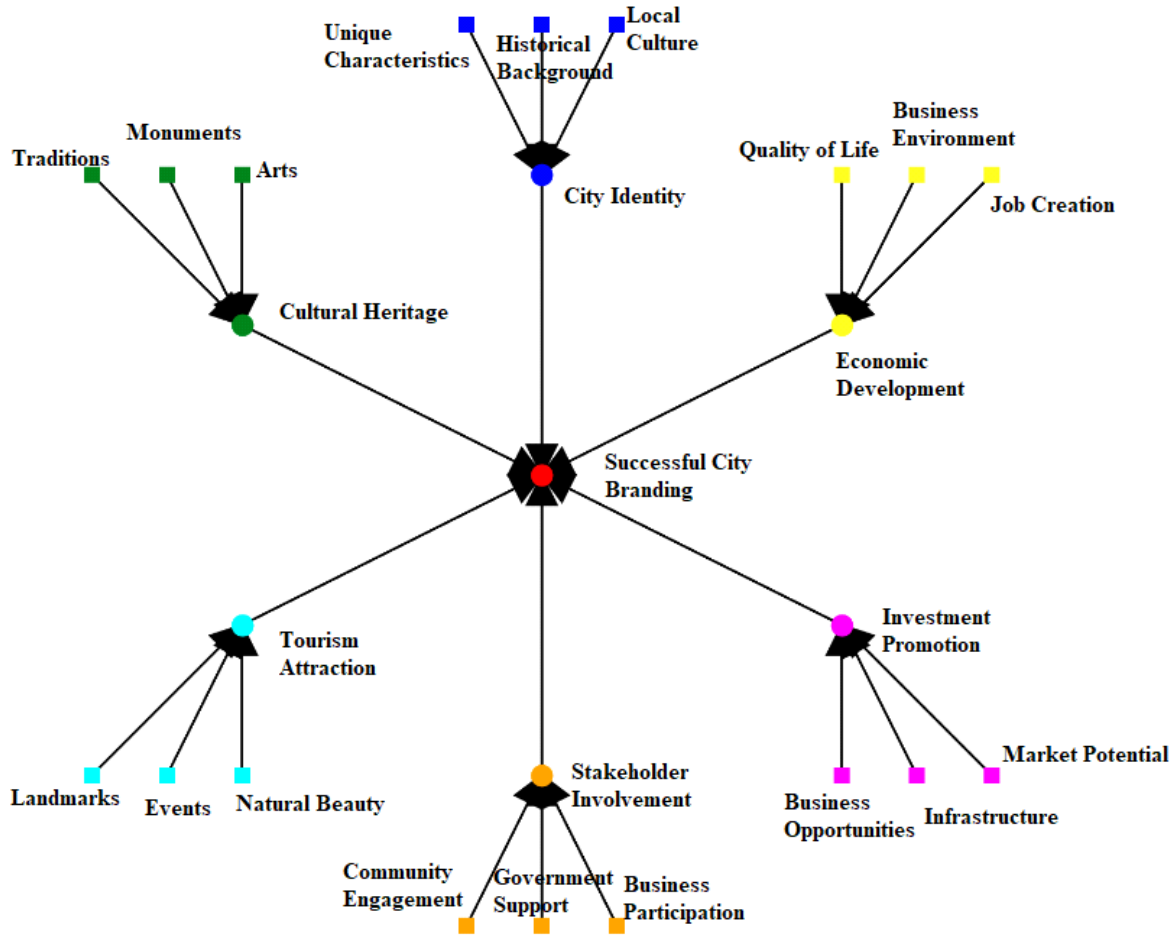


Figure.2: Framework for City Branding Antecedents

The figure.2. illustrates a conceptual framework for understanding the antecedents of successful city branding. At the center of the diagram is the core concept, "Successful City Branding," which is the desired outcome of strategic branding efforts. Surrounding this central concept are six main categories, each representing a critical factor that influences city branding. These categories are: "City Identity," "Cultural Heritage," "Economic Development," "Tourism Attraction," "Investment Promotion," and "Stakeholder Involvement." Each of these main categories is connected to the central concept with arrows, indicating their direct contribution to achieving successful city branding.

City Identity: This category represents the unique characteristics, values, and identity of the city. It includes elements such as unique characteristics, historical background, and local culture. A

strong city identity is fundamental to creating a cohesive and compelling brand image that distinguishes the city from others.

Cultural Heritage: This category focuses on the historical and cultural aspects that define a city. It includes traditions, monuments, and arts, which collectively contribute to the city's unique cultural heritage. Emphasizing cultural heritage in branding efforts helps promote authenticity and cultural richness, making the city more attractive to both residents and visitors.

Economic Development: Representing the city's potential for economic growth, job creation, and enhanced quality of life, this category highlights the importance of a thriving economy in city branding. Elements such as job creation, a conducive business environment, and quality of life are critical in making a city appealing for business investments and skilled workforce.

Tourism Attraction: This category deals with the city's appeal as a travel destination. It includes landmarks, events, and natural beauty, which are key attractions that draw tourists. Effective promotion of these elements can significantly boost a city's brand, generating economic benefits through increased tourism.

Investment Promotion: Focusing on attracting both domestic and foreign investments, this category is vital for creating a favorable business environment and developing infrastructure. It includes aspects such as business opportunities, infrastructure, and market potential, all of which are crucial for promoting a city as an attractive destination for investors.

Stakeholder Involvement: This category underscores the importance of engaging various stakeholders in the branding process. It involves community engagement, government support, and business participation. Active involvement of stakeholders ensures that branding initiatives are inclusive, representative, and sustainable, thereby enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of the city brand.

The antecedents of successful city branding have been extensively studied in the literature, revealing several critical factors that influence the effectiveness of branding efforts. One of the primary antecedents is the city's identity, which includes its historical background, cultural heritage, and distinctive characteristics. A strong and authentic identity can form the basis of a compelling city brand, resonating with both residents and outsiders. Image is another crucial factor, referring to the perceptions and associations that people have about a city. A positive

image, often shaped through strategic communication and marketing, can enhance a city's brand and make it more appealing. Local culture is a significant antecedent, as it reflects the traditions, values, and lifestyle of the city. Emphasizing local culture in branding efforts can create a sense of authenticity and differentiation. Historical significance also contributes to city branding, as cities with rich histories can leverage their past to build a unique and compelling narrative. Stakeholder involvement is essential for successful city branding, as the participation and support of local communities, businesses, and institutions can enhance the credibility and sustainability of branding initiatives. Finally, effective branding strategies, including clear positioning, consistent messaging, and integrated communication, are crucial for building and maintaining a strong city brand.

Several case studies and examples illustrate the successful application of city branding strategies in different regions and countries. For instance, Barcelona, Spain, has successfully branded itself as a vibrant cultural and creative hub, leveraging its architectural heritage, artistic scene, and Mediterranean lifestyle. The city's branding efforts have contributed to a significant increase in tourism, economic growth, and global recognition. Another example is Amsterdam, Netherlands, which has positioned itself as a city of freedom, creativity, and innovation. The city's branding strategy emphasizes its open-mindedness, cultural diversity, and entrepreneurial spirit, attracting tourists, businesses, and residents alike. Melbourne, Australia, has branded itself as a city of arts, sports, and events, capitalizing on its cultural festivals, sports events, and creative industries. This branding strategy has helped Melbourne gain a reputation as one of the world's most livable cities. These examples highlight common factors that contribute to successful city branding, including a clear and authentic identity, strong cultural and historical assets, stakeholder engagement, and effective branding strategies. Drawing parallels to the Al-Dhahirah region of Oman, these factors can provide valuable insights for developing a successful branding strategy, leveraging the region's unique cultural heritage, natural beauty, and community involvement to enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness.

- **Methodology**

The methodology for this research is designed to systematically identify the antecedents of city branding specific to the Al-Dhahirah region of Oman. A mixed-methods research design has been employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the factors that influence successful city branding. The choice of a mixed-methods approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of the branding phenomenon, accommodating the complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. This approach enables the triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research captures the depth of local experiences and perceptions while also quantifying the extent to which these factors influence branding outcomes.

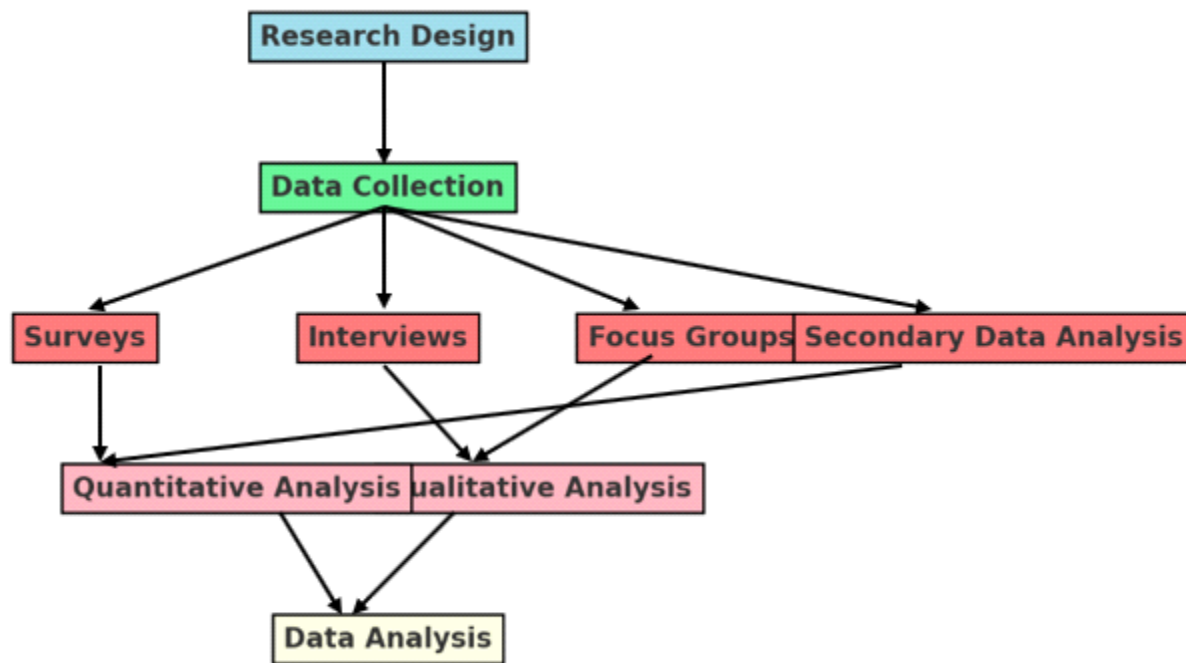


Figure.3: Research Methodology Flowchart

Figure 3 presents a visual representation of the research methodology employed in the study, highlighting the sequential steps and methods used to identify the antecedents of city branding in the Al-Dhahirah region. The flowchart begins with "Research Design," depicted in light blue, which sets the foundation for the entire research process by employing a mixed-methods approach. Following this, the "Data Collection" stage is represented in light green, indicating the central role of gathering information from various sources. From the "Data Collection" node, four primary data collection methods are shown, each represented in light coral: "Surveys," "Interviews," "Focus Groups," and "Secondary Data Analysis." These methods are used to gather qualitative and quantitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors

influencing city branding. The next stage involves data analysis, which is divided into two main types: "Qualitative Analysis" and "Quantitative Analysis," both shown in light pink. These analyses are essential for interpreting the data collected from the respective methods, ensuring that the insights gained are robust and reliable. Finally, all the data analysis efforts converge into the "Data Analysis" node, highlighted in light yellow, which represents the integration and final evaluation of the research findings. This final stage synthesizes the qualitative and quantitative insights to draw conclusions about the key antecedents of city branding for the Al-Dhahirah region. The use of different colors for each stage and method provides a clear and organized visualization of the research methodology, making it easy to understand the flow and interconnection of various components in the research process.

Data collection for this study involved multiple methods to gather comprehensive and relevant information. The primary data collection methods included surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, supplemented by secondary data analysis. Surveys were distributed to a broad range of stakeholders, including residents, business owners, tourists, and local government officials, to capture a wide spectrum of views on the region's branding potential. A total of 300 surveys were administered, targeting a diverse sample to ensure representativeness of the population. The selection criteria for survey participants included residency in the Al-Dhahirah region, involvement in local businesses, and familiarity with local tourism. The sample size was determined based on the region's population demographics and aimed at achieving a balance between statistical power and practical feasibility.

In addition to surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, such as local government officials, tourism board representatives, and cultural experts, to gain deeper insights into the strategic and operational aspects of city branding in Al-Dhahirah. A total of 20 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 30 to 60 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of specific themes and issues. The interviewees were selected based on their expertise and involvement in regional branding initiatives, providing valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced in branding Al-Dhahirah. Focus groups were also utilized to facilitate discussions among community members, enabling a collective examination of local identity, cultural heritage, and perceptions of the region's image. Three focus group sessions were organized, each comprising 8-10 participants representing different demographic segments,

including youth, elders, and local business owners. This method allowed for dynamic interactions and the emergence of diverse viewpoints, enriching the qualitative data.

Secondary data analysis was conducted to complement the primary data collection methods, involving the review of existing reports, strategic plans, marketing materials, and media coverage related to the Al-Dhahirah region. This analysis provided contextual background and helped identify historical and ongoing branding efforts, offering a basis for comparison with primary data findings. Secondary sources also included academic literature, government publications, and tourism statistics, which provided additional insights into the region's socio-economic and cultural landscape.

The data analysis process employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyze the collected data systematically. For the qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus groups, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories relevant to city branding antecedents. Thematic analysis involved coding the data, organizing it into meaningful themes, and interpreting the results to understand the underlying factors influencing city branding. This method facilitated the identification of key themes such as cultural heritage, community engagement, governance, and promotional strategies, which are critical to branding the Al-Dhahirah region.

For the quantitative data gathered from surveys, statistical analysis techniques were applied to assess the relationships between different variables and to quantify the significance of identified antecedents. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey responses, providing an overview of stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards city branding in Al-Dhahirah. Inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, were conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables, such as the impact of cultural identity on perceived branding success. These analyses helped identify the most influential factors contributing to successful branding efforts and provided a basis for developing targeted branding strategies.

In conclusion, the mixed-methods approach adopted in this research ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis of the antecedents of city branding in the Al-Dhahirah region. By combining qualitative insights with quantitative measurements, the study provides a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics involved in city branding, paving the way for effective

and sustainable branding initiatives that can enhance the region's image and attract tourism and investment.

- **Results**

The research conducted on the city branding of the Al-Dhahirah region identified several key antecedents that play a significant role in shaping the branding strategy. These antecedents include cultural heritage, natural attractions, local community involvement, governance, and strategic branding initiatives. Each of these elements contributes uniquely to the development and promotion of the Al-Dhahirah region as a distinct and attractive destination.

Identification of Antecedents: The analysis revealed that cultural heritage is a primary antecedent of city branding for Al-Dhahirah. This region boasts a rich historical background with numerous traditional festivals, historical sites, and cultural practices that are deeply embedded in the daily lives of its residents. These cultural elements serve as powerful tools for creating a unique and authentic identity that resonates with both locals and visitors. As illustrated in Figure 4, which displays the importance of different city branding factors based on survey data, cultural heritage was rated highly by respondents, indicating its central role in the branding process.

Natural attractions also emerged as a critical antecedent. The Al-Dhahirah region is endowed with diverse natural landscapes, including mountains, deserts, and oases, which offer a variety of recreational and adventure opportunities. These natural features are not only visually appealing but also provide a backdrop for eco-tourism and adventure tourism, which are increasingly popular among tourists. Figure 6, showing the trend of tourism growth from 2018 to 2023, highlights a consistent increase in tourist numbers, which can be attributed to the region's promotion of its natural attractions.

Local community involvement is another significant antecedent identified in the research. The active participation of local residents and businesses in the branding initiatives has proven to be instrumental in creating a sense of ownership and pride in the region's identity. As shown in Figure 5, the distribution of stakeholder participation indicates that a substantial proportion of branding activities involve local residents and businesses. This engagement not only strengthens the branding efforts but also ensures that the branding strategies reflect the true essence of the region and are sustainable in the long term.

Governance plays a crucial role in supporting and facilitating the branding efforts. Effective governance ensures that branding initiatives are aligned with the region's development goals and are supported by appropriate policies and infrastructure. In Al-Dhahirah, the collaboration between local government authorities and private sector stakeholders has been vital in implementing and promoting branding strategies. The presence of clear policies and supportive infrastructure has enabled the region to attract investment and enhance its economic prospects, as depicted in Figure 7, which illustrates the positive relationship between investment levels and economic growth.

Strategic branding initiatives, including marketing campaigns and promotional activities, are essential antecedents that drive the branding process. These initiatives help to create awareness and communicate the unique attributes of the Al-Dhahirah region to a broader audience. Figure 8, which shows the distribution of cultural heritage events, demonstrates the effectiveness of these branding strategies in promoting the region's cultural richness. By organizing and publicizing a variety of cultural events, the region has been able to attract tourists and generate interest in its cultural offerings.

Analysis of Findings: The antecedents identified in the Al-Dhahirah region align with those found in other regions but also exhibit unique characteristics that impact the region's branding efforts. For instance, the emphasis on cultural heritage is consistent with branding strategies in other regions known for their rich historical backgrounds. However, Al-Dhahirah's specific cultural practices and traditions, deeply rooted in the local lifestyle, provide a distinctive branding opportunity that sets it apart from other regions.

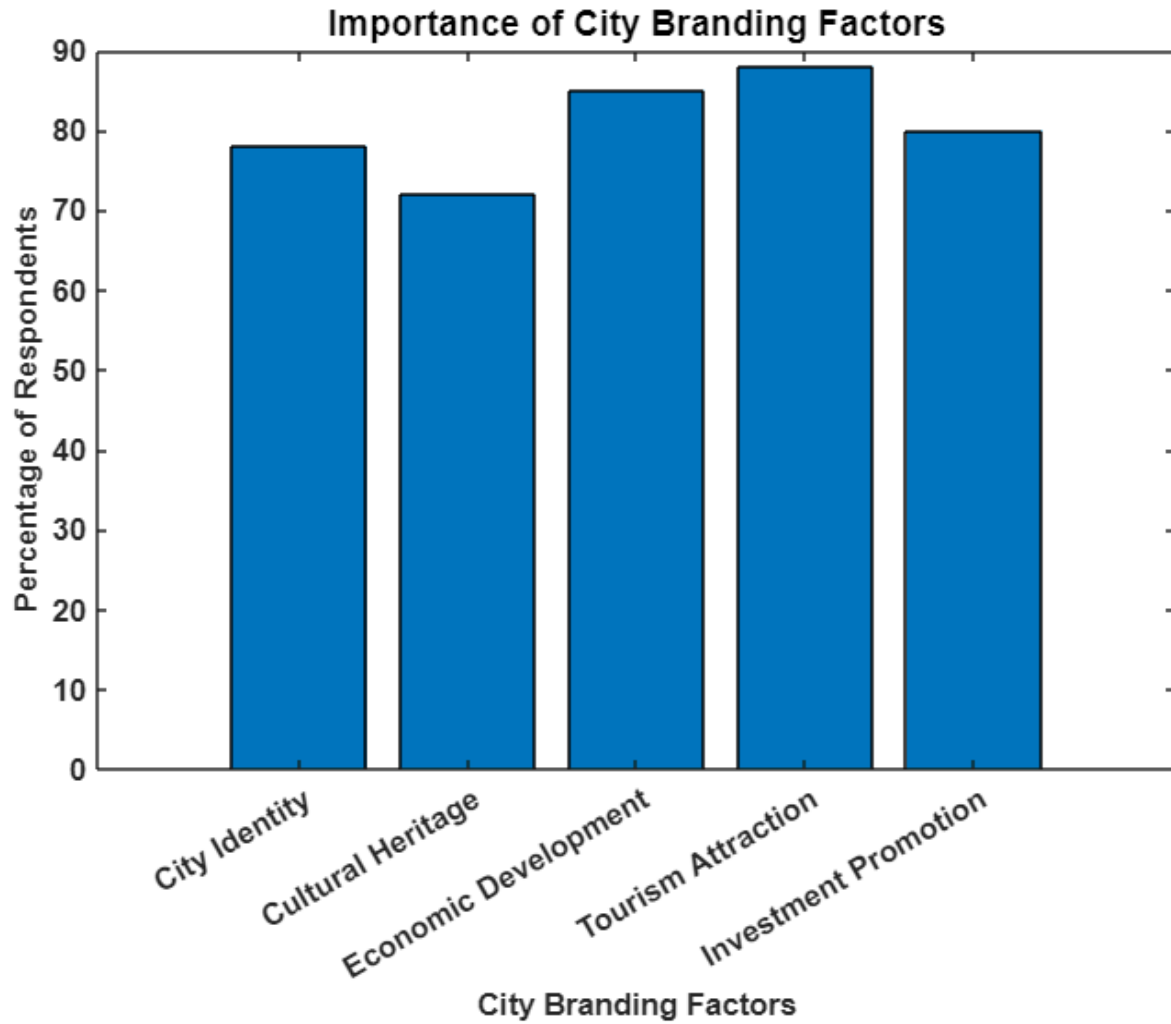


Figure 4: Bar Chart - Distribution of Importance of City Branding Factors

Stakeholder Participation in City Branding

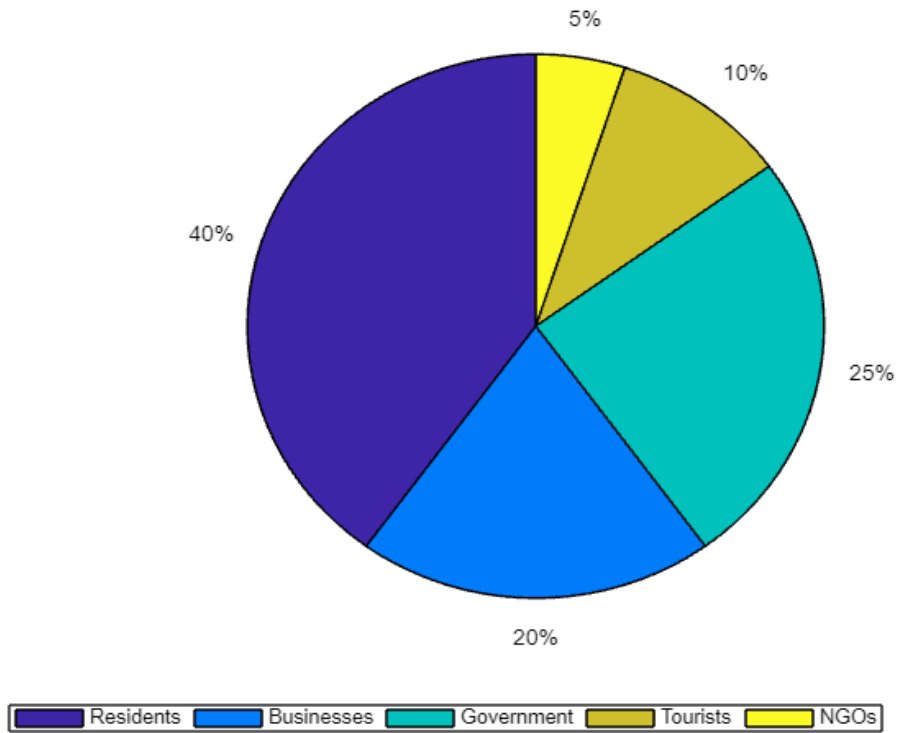


Figure 5: Pie Chart - Distribution of Stakeholder Participation

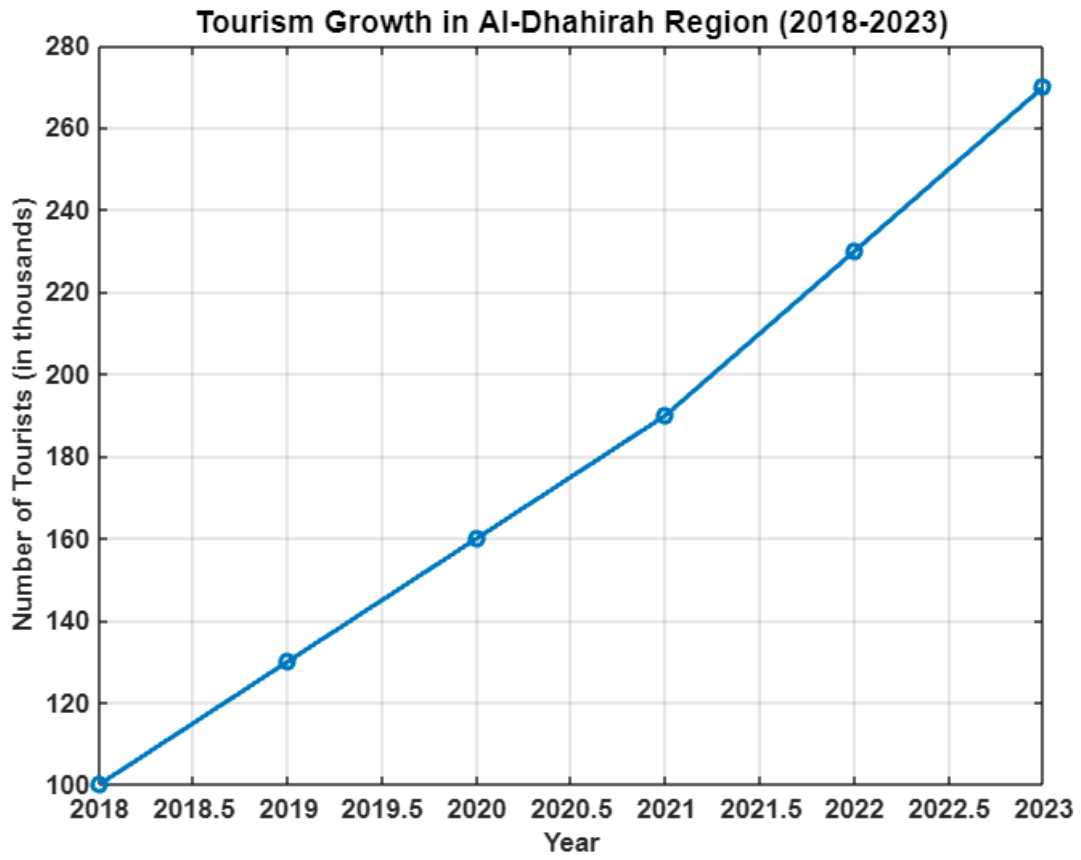


Figure 6: Line Plot - Tourism Growth Over the Past Five Years

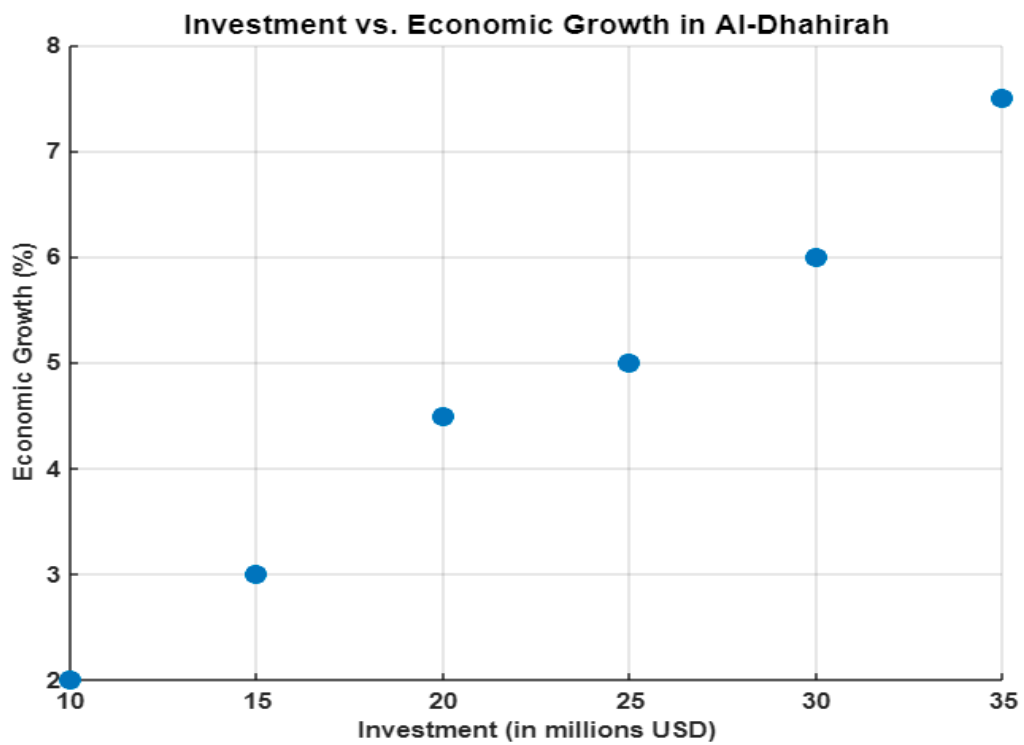
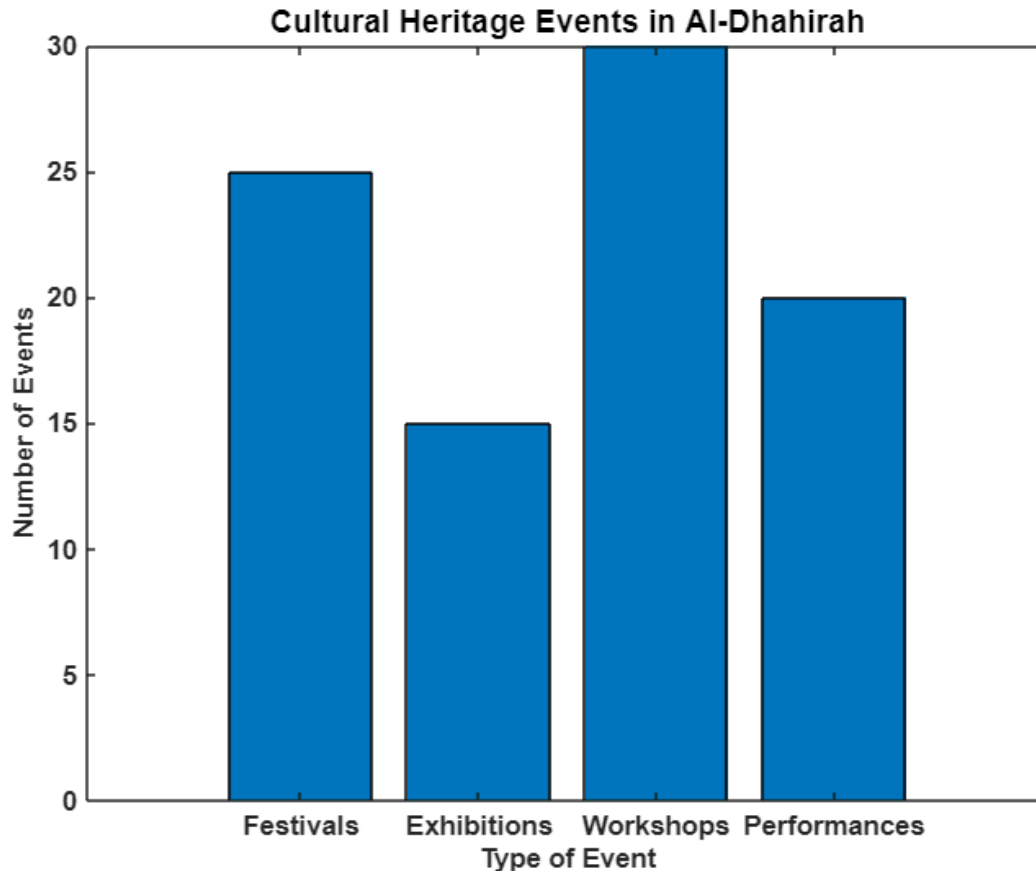


Figure 7: Scatter Plot - Relationship Between Investment and Economic Growth*Figure 8: Histogram - Types of Cultural Heritage Events*

The focus on natural attractions is also a common branding strategy, but Al-Dhahirah's unique combination of desert landscapes, mountains, and oases offers a diverse range of experiences that appeal to different types of tourists. This diversity enhances the region's appeal and positions it as a versatile destination for eco-tourism and adventure tourism.

Local community involvement is a factor that varies significantly between regions. In Al-Dhahirah, the high level of community participation is a strength that reinforces the authenticity and sustainability of the branding efforts. This contrasts with some regions where branding initiatives are predominantly driven by external agencies with limited local engagement.

The role of governance in Al-Dhahirah's branding efforts highlights the importance of supportive policies and infrastructure in facilitating successful branding. The positive impact of governance observed in Al-Dhahirah aligns with theoretical expectations, underscoring the need for strong institutional support in branding processes.

Strategic branding initiatives in Al-Dhahirah are characterized by a focus on promoting cultural events and leveraging local traditions to attract tourists. This approach not only highlights the region's unique cultural identity but also fosters a sense of community and continuity among residents. The effectiveness of these strategies is evident in the increasing number of tourists and the growing interest in the region's cultural offerings.

In conclusion, the research findings demonstrate that the key antecedents of city branding in the Al-Dhahirah region, including cultural heritage, natural attractions, local community involvement, governance, and strategic branding initiatives, are integral to shaping the region's identity and enhancing its attractiveness. These antecedents not only align with those observed in other regions but also reflect the unique characteristics of Al-Dhahirah, providing valuable insights for developing effective and sustainable branding strategies.

- **Discussion**

Implications for Branding Al-Dhahirah: The findings from the research indicate that leveraging cultural heritage, natural attractions, local community involvement, governance, and strategic branding initiatives are crucial for creating a robust brand identity for the Al-Dhahirah region. Cultural heritage, as highlighted in the research, serves as a cornerstone of the region's identity. By promoting traditional festivals, historical sites, and local art forms, Al-Dhahirah can position itself as a unique cultural destination. This approach not only attracts tourists but also instills a sense of pride among residents, fostering a stronger community identity. The positive response to cultural heritage, shown in Figure 9 through the high satisfaction levels of different stakeholders, underscores the importance of this element in branding strategies.

Natural attractions, such as the region's deserts, mountains, and oases, provide a unique selling proposition that can be emphasized in promotional activities. By focusing on eco-tourism and adventure tourism, Al-Dhahirah can appeal to niche markets that seek authentic and immersive experiences. The correlation matrix depicted in Figure 10 further highlights the interconnections between tourism, investment, and economic development, suggesting that enhancing the tourism sector can lead to broader economic benefits. Effective governance and active community involvement are essential in sustaining these efforts. The involvement of local stakeholders, as seen in Figure 9, is crucial for ensuring that branding strategies align with the community's aspirations and values, leading to more sustainable and accepted outcomes.

Challenges and Opportunities: While the research identifies several strengths that can be harnessed for branding Al-Dhahirah, it also points to potential challenges. Engaging all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and government entities, remains a critical challenge. Ensuring that each group has a voice in the branding process is necessary to create a cohesive and representative brand image. Resource limitations are another significant challenge. Effective branding requires investments in marketing, infrastructure, and event management, which may strain the region's financial resources. Additionally, competition with other regions offering similar attractions poses a threat to Al-Dhahirah's branding efforts. To stand out, the region must differentiate itself by emphasizing unique aspects of its culture and natural environment.

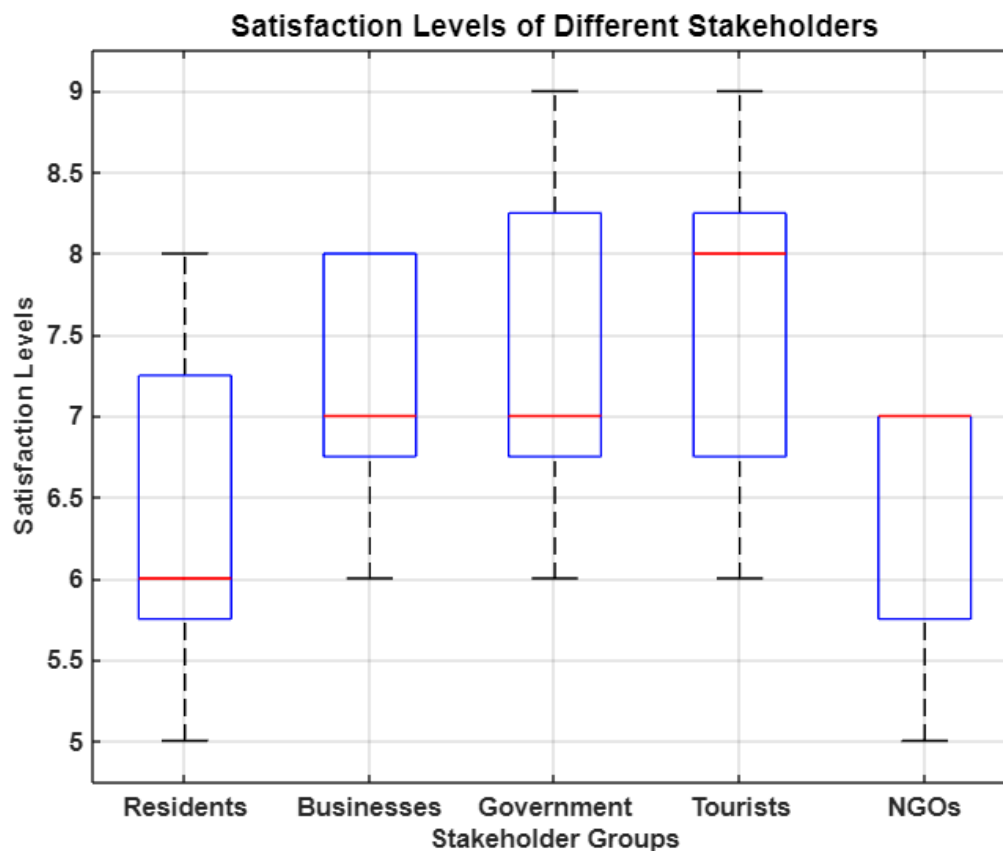


Figure 9: Box Plot - Satisfaction Levels of Different Stakeholders

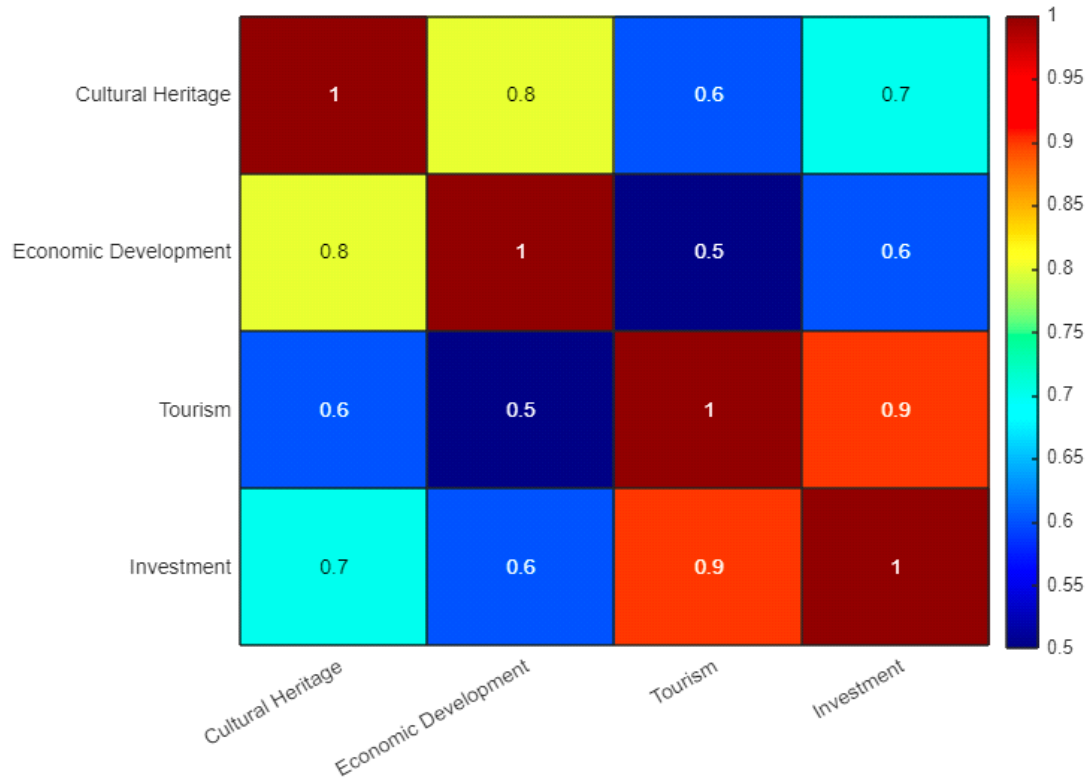


Figure 10: Heatmap - Correlation Matrix of City Branding Factors

However, these challenges also present opportunities. Al-Dhahirah can exploit the growing trend towards sustainable and cultural tourism, leveraging its natural and cultural assets to attract eco-conscious travelers. By fostering partnerships with local businesses and community groups, the region can pool resources and share the benefits of successful branding. The positive correlations between cultural heritage, tourism, and economic development in Figure 10 suggest that investing in cultural initiatives can have a multiplier effect, enhancing the region's overall appeal. Strategic collaborations with neighboring regions can also provide mutual benefits, creating a broader cultural and tourism network that attracts a diverse range of visitors. These opportunities, if effectively managed, can help Al-Dhahirah build a strong, distinctive brand that resonates on both national and international levels.

• Conclusion

The research on city branding for the Al-Dhahirah region has highlighted several key antecedents that significantly influence the region's branding potential. Cultural heritage and natural attractions were found to be primary strengths, offering unique opportunities to position Al-Dhahirah as a distinctive cultural and eco-tourism destination. The analysis demonstrated high

stakeholder satisfaction with cultural initiatives, emphasizing the importance of involving local communities in branding efforts. The positive correlations between cultural heritage, tourism, and economic development indicate that strategic investments in these areas can yield substantial economic benefits for the region. The research also identified challenges, including the need for effective stakeholder engagement, adequate resource allocation, and differentiation from competing regions. Addressing these challenges presents an opportunity to build a resilient and inclusive brand strategy. Future work should explore more targeted branding initiatives, focusing on niche tourism markets and leveraging digital platforms to enhance global visibility. Additionally, further research could examine the long-term impacts of branding on local economies and social structures, ensuring that the benefits of city branding are sustainable and widely shared across the community. By continuing to refine and adapt its branding strategies, Al-Dhahirah can strengthen its position as a leading cultural and natural destination.

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