

# Media Reinforcement of Architectural Perceptions for Place Branding



BanafshaQuadri Rajput, Sadia Riaz

**Abstract:** Throughout the past, architectural icons including heritage structures are served as references to create visual identity for any place branding which would reach either by books or news to the public. The mechanism of place branding is developed by every nation for its economic growth, social development, and infrastructure. A very strong strategy called media communication or advertisement leads to attitudinal effects of improved tourism, increased investors or citizens by reaching the target market. Recently media has captured our minds and is proved to be a very strong tool in reinforcing perceptions for almost every activity or routine work. However, people are misguided by their perception related to place branding due to the lack of awareness, authentic sources for information gathering and media's projected influence on their psychology. Media and advertisement has a huge impact in creating perceptions for any place in the world which need not to be proved authentic always. This study intends to address parameters that have an impact on place branding with a larger focus on iconic architectures. Study objectives include, a) proposing a conceptual framework on place branding by synthesizing literature, and b) preliminary empirical analysis to determine negative and positive implications of place branding on travelers' guided perceptions. The study uses quantitative method for primary data collection through focused group/survey, data analysis is performed in Predictive Analytical Software v. 20. Findings of the study concludes that place branding (iconic architectures) is reinforced by the media, enabling formation of perceptual influences (positive or negative experiences) – significantly correlating with tourists informed (confident) decisions to visit a destination or not.

**Index Terms:** architectural icons, media communication, place branding, visual identity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this globalized scenario, places are urged to compete with each other to publicize themselves and create their identity. This competition has given rise to various means for branding and marketing cities or places. Place branding operates as a management technology that seeks to affect this process by converting places into spaces of consumption [1].

A place brand can, thus, be defined as 'a representation of identity', creating a favorable internal (those who deliver Invalid source specifiedthe experience) and external (with tourists) image leading to brand satisfaction, name awareness, perceived quality, and other favorable brand associations [2]. Literature studies show that there are several factors responsible in reinforcing identity images for a place or a city. Out of several factors, creation of *Architectural Icons* has been observed as a most recent method adopted for placebranding which shows its existence via medium of strong media coverage.

There is gap in available literature, as it immensely fails to reflect and empirically validate the influence of place branding on travelers choice and confidence to choose a destination to visit. Taking it forward, this study aims to provide a broader vision on the perceptions that are reinforced by the tool of media for place branding. These perceptions can prove to be positive or negative when transformed into experiences. Hence, the study intends to highlight the importance of contextual sensitivity in designing of architectural icons - used by media for place branding. Perceptions are formed as result of various influences which do not always turn out with a positive feedback with brand satisfaction.

## II. STUDY OBJECTIVES

- A. To propose a conceptual framework on place branding by carefully reviewing and synthesizing current literature, and
- B. To conduct a preliminary analysis for ascertaining negative and positive implications of place branding on travelers' perception.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature identifies various metaphors in place branding as brand identity; brand image; brand personality; national branding and brand reputation. Applied feature of these metaphors are more linked with human beings to inanimate objects, products and services. Throughout the past Architectural theories and movements have been linked with values of different eras like Baroque, Modernism, post modernism that created various perceptions for public. The contemporary works by leading Architects plays a vital role to place the country on world map of architecture with their signature styles in contrast to values and perceptions [3]. The architectural perceptions for any icon or place vary on the reader and social media coverage with the number of likes defines its public acceptability [4]. Past studies on place branding highlights specific research methods such as statistical analyses with the relevant data and information collected.

**Revised Manuscript Received on 30 July 2019.**

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## Media Reinforcement of Architectural Perceptions for Place Branding

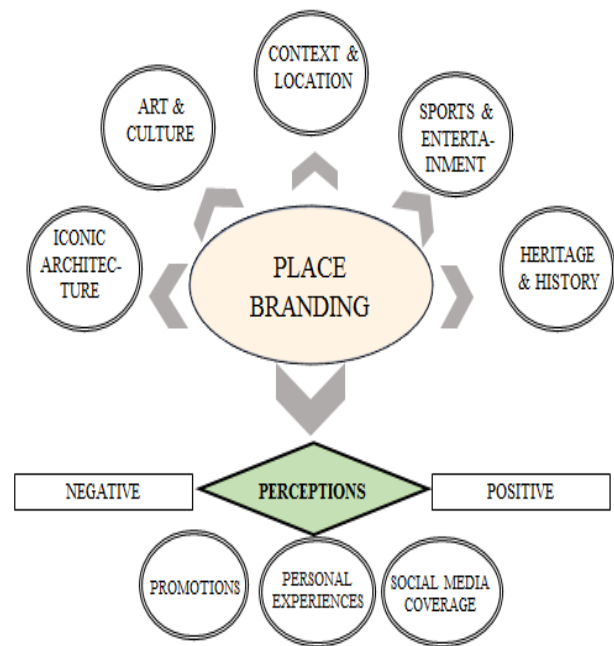
Some researchers have concluded that history, politics, sociology and national identity showcase important contribution to the practice of place branding [5]. However the traditional concept is mainly associated with nation branding. Therefore, place branding roots are deeper than its foundation pillars in its country of origin. Place branding also referred as destination marketing which special type of place marketing that can be showcased in small and backward regions to increase its popularity. Example for such type is small region Sárköz, Hungary, having negligible visibility on the world map as a region but known for its particular competence and wedding festival [6].

In the literature by [7] with 147 articles as a reference states the observation as urban, city and place branding are used interchangeably. As a result of an interdisciplinary character the medium for city branding concept is marketing focused and planning focused.

The city branding literature is clustered under four research areas: (1) city branding concept, processes and measurement; (2) branding strategies; (3) social urbanism; and (4) branding culture and tourism. This current article aims to do so by initiating a contemporary and concise review exercise on the methodologies utilized in place branding studies. Some researchers have initiated a contemporary and concise review exercise on the methodologies utilized in place branding studies [8]. An insight of key periodicals with research application and statistical data has been discussed. Place branding has a direct impact on wellbeing and satisfaction of citizens to a greater extent with the involvement of Iconic buildings. The unique picture created by such iconic structures also impacts its citizen's Quality of life and their perspectives [9]. The context sensitive Architecture is very essential in creating city identity and the through icons. The impacts of identity-based research acknowledge the impacts of symbolic brand elements for the effectiveness of the place branding. To get more clarity on the elements and their impacts on perceptions, a conceptual framework is shown in fig. 1 which covers these elements to a larger extent.

### IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual model demonstrates the framework of place branding with its various associated factors leading to formation of perceptions. Place branding can be viewed from various perspectives that vary in terms of its complexity of time and experience. The parameters considered for the study are very sensitively selected by studying its direct implications on place branding.



**Fig. 1. Elements Impacting Perceptions for Place Branding.**

**A. Architectural Icons & Landmarks** have the most contribution in perceiving any place branding. Its visual character attracts people and immediately registers in their mind. It is very much visible that every famous place/city has been benefitted by its Architectural icons which are considered to be one of the strongest tools to capture place branding. These are more contemporary in their approach with a focus on registering its identity mark. Dancing House building designed by master Architect Frank O'Ghery in 1996 is an iconic example of Architecture. This building very well integrates and is context sensitive which acts as a center of attraction for the people. It successfully creates a visual icon that plays a catalyst effect in place branding for Prague [9].

**B. Art and Cultural** factors are key players of facilitating authentic experience in the whole branding process. These are dependent of target specific audience that share common interest. Culture is absorbed as a mechanism for development of activities that increases the economic progress of a place. These include pilgrimage places, Community gathering to perform rituals, cultural festivals like Chinese New Year celebrations in Singapore & china, Diwali & Ganesh Utsav celebrations in India are few examples that attracts attention towards a place and act as a place branding tool. These image effects are very long surviving as they carry a very strong essence within them. Another interesting example is Sárköz Wedding festival is held annually in a small town of Hungary, has become a tourist attraction from many years. This festival showcases folk art, gastronomy and folk traditions of the Sárköz region, with special regard to wedding traditions. The event known till today has acted as an element to promote place branding. [6].

**C. Sports and Entertainment** has a massive impact on defining a country's image. This includes all activities that are initiated and practiced by a country as a successful model. For example various Hollywood and Bollywood award ceremonies are been hosted at various locations of the world which are sometimes unfamiliar to the common public. The Cannes film festival serves as a symbol of the Cannes place brand which lies in south of France has brought global recognition to the small town and has become a signature annual event [10]. A successful movie shooting also acts as a promotional tool to register an image for any place. Cities hosting events such as Olympics, Special Olympics, Expos, Decathlons etc are also been role players for city branding and also boosting the economy. These again have to take the path of Media as a tool to reach and publicize.

**D. Heritage & Historical Significance** immediately connects the place with its structural identity or mythological relevance. Few of dominating examples of such elements is can be seen with the place of Greece which is known for its beautiful columns, temples & optical correction. Ancient Egypt for its pyramids and imperial Rome for colosseum etc.

**E. Context & Geographical locations:** Few places are blessed naturally with their climatic conditions, scenic beauty, Mountain ranges etc which attract people and brands the place. For example country of Nepal which is surrounded by beautiful Himalayan ranges.

All of these elements have varied impact on perceptions in some or the other way. The results of perceptions prove true or false directly depend upon the kind of experience they have had. The experiences and the medium of perceiving the brand have a direct relation. If the medium has communicated the appropriate information without hype, then the expectation outline will sum to the experiences of individuals and result into a satisfaction.

**V. ARCHITECTURAL ICONS: FOCUS ON DUBAI**

Architecture of any place can be seen as promotional medium and an identity definer. It is a channel that encourages social relationships and individual enterprises, and is a symbol of territorial identity. Hence architecture must be perceived symbolically and operational dimension wise. Architectural language can be communicated through urban design, buildings or monuments which have varied perspectives in terms of creating identities from corporate to tourist. An interesting example of Dubai as a place brand is discussed with respect to its origin, development & the current image branded. Media has been utilized as a bridge in transformation of its past to the present.



1- The Frame 2-Atlantis Hotel at Palm 3- Burj al arab 4- Burj Khalifa 5- Dubai Mall fountain 6- The Museum of the Future, a vast, egg-shaped edifice ( under construction)

**Fig. 2: A glimpse of Dubai's Iconic Architecture.**

Dubai is an emirate of UAE, which seem to be strategically placed. Dubai is known as city of superlatives with the world's tallest building; the world's biggest shopping mall; the world's largest performing fountain, Fig. 2 gives a glimpse of Dubai's rich Iconic Architecture. It is a city that seeks to impress and does so with success [11]. It is impossible to imagine Dubai without the iconic structure of Burj Khalifa which is the tallest tower in the world has played a key role in increasing city's popularity. The presence of this iconic tower has pushed. Dubai to stand out on the global stage and build its place identity [12]. One year after its opening, the Burj Khalifa has established itself as one of Dubai's biggest tourist attractions and helped surrounding hotels boost business by up to 35 per cent from 2009. Similar examples can be drawn from cities like Sydney with the Opera House, Malaysia with Petronas towers etc emphasize on creating and promoting Architectural icons. Dubai could not claim any such icon until Burj Khalifa was constructed though Burj Al Arab was still playing some role but could not prove as effective [13]. Furthermore as Dubai prepares to host the next World Expo in 2020, as array of iconic Architecture is being planned to boost its identity. These major Architectural works has played a key role in generating enormous publicity for places. Such iconic buildings have huge economic impact as well as social in boosting its identity instantly. Iconic architecture has become so central to the image of the city brand that, according to Dovey, cities without icons are like corporations without logos [14].

VI. METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The study collected primary data from tourists in Dubai through listing an online questionnaire on researchers and academic scholars' websites in UAE, Pakistan, Korea, Morocco, Germany, Singapore, India and Malaysia. The questionnaire was designed, after carefully selecting constructs from the literature review that define and ascertain media's role in place branding. The questions were framed as such that respondents first provided positive and negative perceptive score on influence of place branding constructs (as experienced), followed by mean estimation and deducing overall score. Since, it is a preliminary study, therefore sample size of the study was 71. Cronbach alpha measured internal validity of the constructs and was 0.705. The questionnaire had in total 10 questions.

Participants of the study self-identified themselves as 41% annual travelers, 35% active travelers, and 15% as occasional travelers, and remaining 9% as passive travelers. 57.5% were male, while 42.5% were female travelers.

VII. TOURIST PERSPECTIVE SCORE

The questionnaire collected data on perception of tourists on constructs of place branding. All questions were rated by respondents on a "10- point Likert scale" twice, once to rate positive perception on the statement and second time to rate negative perception on the same statement. Mean difference was estimated to compute media place branding perception score on an interval/ratios scale.

Table 1: Tourist Perception Score on Media Place Branding

Perception Constructs	Positive	Negative	Media Place Branding
Arts & Culture	8.23	-3.51	4.72
Contents & Geographical Location	9.38	-5.03	4.35
Sports & Entertainment	7.55	-4.31	3.24
Iconic Architecture	8.09	-2.75	5.34
Heritage & History	9.57	-3.37	6.2

Table 1 shows that on average, Heritage & History has the highest mean perceptive difference 6.2, followed by Iconic Architecture of the destination/country with score 5.34, Arts & Culture score 4.72, and Content & Geographical location score 4.35. The least perceptive score was for the construct, sports and entertainment with score 3.24.

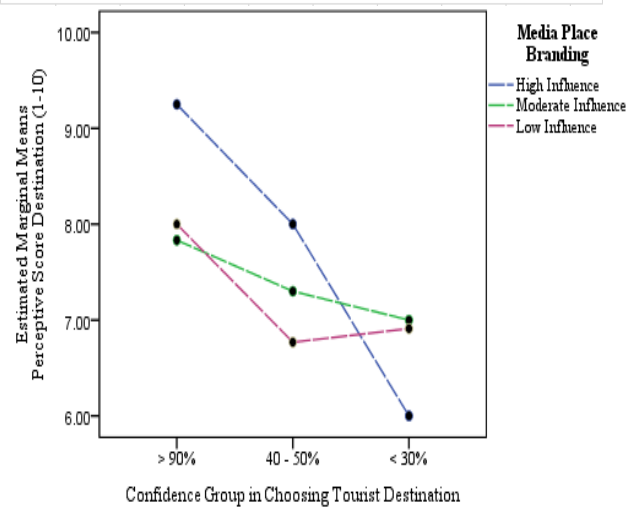
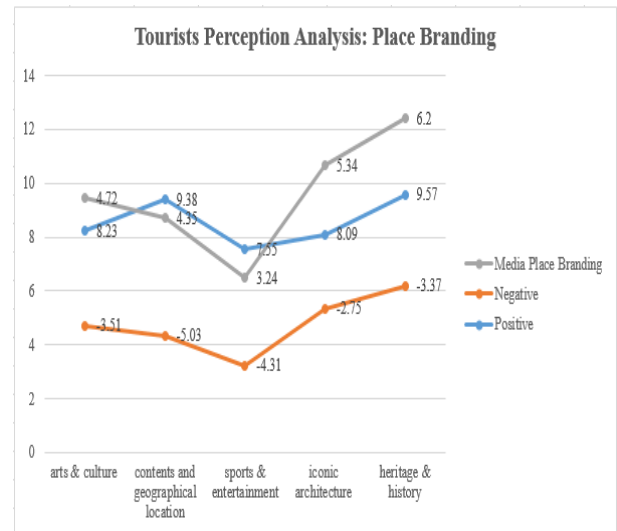


Fig 3. Media Place Branding – Perceptive Score Analysis.

As shown in Figure 3, positive perception for all place branding constructs confirms that media has a stronger influence in terms of reinforcing popular perception of a destination. For all constructs under investigation, the pattern is similar for negative and positive score points.

VIII. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Ho = Tourist perceptive score of a destination will not be significantly governed by their confidence to select the destination that is manipulated by media for place branding purpose

Ha = Tourist perceptive score of a destination will be significantly governed by their confidence to select the destination that is manipulated by media for place branding purpose. To test Hypothesis, Univariate Analysis based on General Linear Modelling statistical technique was applied. Analysis was done in Predictive Analytical Software V. 20. Data Normality assumption was tested through Box-plots, QQ-Plots and Histograms. Skewness and kurtosis analysis showed data distribution to be parametric in nature, and within the required ranges. Outliers were adjusted and removed from the data set, with N # coming down to 57.

Table 3 shows results of Univariate Modelling and Interaction Effect analysis. Since the sample set for study was small, therefore variance predicted was very small for the study. However, based on General Linear Modelling, it is reported that Tourists Confidence in selecting Tourist destination,  $F(2, 57) = 10.204, p = .008 < .01$  (giving 99% confidence) and Influence of Role of Media in Place Branding,  $F(2, 57) = .724, p = .41 < .05$  (giving 95% confidence) predicted significant Perceptive Scores of Respondents for choosing a likely destination to visit next. The interaction effect between Tourists Confidence x Role of Media in Place Branding,  $F(2, 57) = 5.097, p = .068$  was non-significant at  $p > 0.05$ . Interaction effect chart as shown in Figure 3, ascertains that even though data interaction for predicting respondents Perceptive Score was significant at some points, for the variables under study, Interaction effect was found to be non-significant. It can be attributed to limitations of the study, including smaller sample size. Moreover, tourist with high confidence (> 90%) towards choosing a destination to visit, attributed to higher media place branding influence on their choice, compared to those with confidence (<30 %). People with low confidence in making informed decision, had higher perception of the destination at least due to media's place branding. It is a significant finding that confirmed, informed decision which is directly associated with confidence of travelers in choosing destination, in all cases was under the influence of media's place branding. Based on statistical evidence, we can confidently reject null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept alternative ( $H_a$ ) which confirms that Tourist Perceptive Score of a destination is significantly governed by their confidence to select the destination that is largely manipulated by role of media in place branding. However, post-hoc tests can ascertain degree of influence and effect size of the observed effect power.

**Table 2: Univariate Analysis of Tourists Perceptive Score Influenced by Media's Place Branding**

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Perceptive Score of Destination (1 to 10)					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	25.999 <sup>a</sup>	8	3.250	3.424	.003
Intercept	1187.550	1	1187.550	1251.219	.000
Confidence in choosing destination	10.204	2	5.102	5.375	.008
Place branding influence (media)	.724	2	.362	.381	.041
Confidence in choosing destination* place branding influence (media)	5.097	4	1.274	1.342	.068
Error	46.507	49	.949		
Total	3170.630	58			
Corrected Total	72.506	57			

a. R Squared = .359 (Adjusted R Squared = .254)

## IX. CONCLUSION

Cities or places creating their brand identity under the umbrella of Iconic Architectural developments have a very successful strategy so far adopted by many nations. This study concludes that excessive use of such media strategies lead to reinforcing ideas or forming visual perceptions that significantly impact the way they decide or choose a destination to visit. The role of media should be to spread appropriate awareness about any place with its current scenario rather than providing unreal information and reinforcing perceptions. The study was able to substantiate through statistical analysis that role of media's place branding has an influence on travelers perception of the destination. Moreover, it can have positive or negative influence that was found to be significantly linked with traveler's confidence in making apparently "an informed decision" – that were more media projected in reality.

Repetitive media coverage acts as a catalyst in psychological impacts of human perceptions which can prove harmful when not been catered to its appropriateness. As discussed in the case of Dubai, Iconic Architecture has been a primary tool to create its place identity. Without the construction of such Icons, it would have been very challenging to find Dubai at this brand position. In spite of various limitations and unfavorable climatic conditions, Dubai stands out in the top most category for place branding. On the other hand creating icons should not be the only focus for development rather cities should also focus on innovative practices to enhance the lifestyle and contribute to the urban development for a self-sustained presence without the support of any superficial media coverage. Media should be a medium to reach with appropriate awareness rather than dealt like product marketing. The citizens themselves can act as media tools to reach the world with a true perception based on their live experiences to create city branding.

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