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Identifying City Attributes for Place Branding that Create Strong Self-Brand Connections

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Identifying City Attributes for Place Branding that Create Strong Self-Brand Connections

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Abstract

Self-brand connection is a stream of brand research that focuses on how individuals form relationships with brands. Self-brand connections are of interest to marketers because individuals who form a self-brand connection with a brand are more likely to be loyal to, advocate for, and engage with that brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). The purpose of this study was to determine if specific city attributes could be identified as antecedents of self-brand connection for a city brand. Data were collected through a survey of a neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio, and analyzed using multiple regression. Results showed that Columbus' outdoor opportunities, business environment, and access to K-12 education were associated with the formation of self-brand connections. This outcome suggests that specific city attributes can be identified as strategic investment opportunities for city brand managers who view encouraging self-brand connections as a way to make their brand more effective.

Keywords: Self-brand connection, city brands, place brands

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Research Problem

Place branding emerged as a serious topic in academic research during the late 1990s, and originally sought to help cities understand how the development and communication of a city brand could make a city more competitive (Green, Grace, & Perkins, 2016). As the field has evolved, place branding academics have grown skeptical of any city's ability to define its own brand, insisting instead that a place brand must be understood through the values, experiences, and identity of the many stakeholders who constitute the city itself (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). Put simply, a place brand should be an expression of city stakeholders' individual identities (Zenker & Braun, 2017). In the marketing literature, such a situation has been called a "self-brand connection" – the brand is no longer seen as merely an expression of the product it represents but is also perceived by a consumer as a faithful expression of their own self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

Because any city has a multitude of diverse stakeholders, articulating a coherent brand identity that allows each of these stakeholders to view the city brand as a tool to accurately communicate an aspect of themselves is an immense, if not impossible challenge. Even if city officials and brand managers may not be able to define the city brand, they may still have the opportunity to shape it. A stream of place branding literature has focused not on what a city claims to be, but instead on how its attributes – the physical, economic, and cultural elements that are experienced and shared by its stakeholders – impact how a city's brand is perceived and understood (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2013). What has not been explored and is a needed

area of research is how these city attributes facilitate the formation of self-brand connections between a city's stakeholders and its brand. The purpose of this study was to examine which city attributes help produce strong self-brand connections between city residents and the city brand.

Significance of Study

A better understanding of how individuals form self-brand connections could help a city's civic and business leaders build and leverage a city brand that produces measurable economic impact and positive brand attitudes. A city may not be able to create an authentic place brand or have the financial means to build interest and awareness through intense promotional activities, but it could be possible for a city to create the physical, economic, and cultural conditions that will result in strong self-brand connections. Research has shown self-brand connections can accomplish some of the same results that a brand is intended for in the first place: brand loyalty, brand advocacy, and brand engagement (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012a, 2012b), all of which have potential to boost a city's civic and business interests.

Definition of Terms

Place branding is "a network of associations in the place consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place and its' stakeholders. These associations differ in their influence within the network and in importance for the place consumers' attitude and behavior" (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p. 275).

City branding is, for the purposes of this study, synonymous with place branding, but understood to refer exclusively to cities as the object of place branding.

Self-brand connection is the situation in which the brand is no longer seen as merely an expression of the product (place) it represents but is also perceived by a consumer as a faithful expression of their own self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

City attributes are the independent variables that describe aspects of a city's economic, cultural, and physical landscape, and precede residents' attitudes about and connections with the city brand (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009).

Brand advocate is an individual who is an active and positive promoter of a brand via word-of-mouth communication (Kemp et al., 2012b).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine what city attributes help produce strong self-brand connections between city residents and the city brand. To accomplish this, the following research questions guided this study's research:

RQ1: What city attributes create strong self-brand connections?

RQ2: Do strong self-brand connections increase residents' likelihood to continue living in the city?

RQ3: Do strong self-brand connection increase residents' likelihood to become brand advocates?

Delimitations

This study was limited to a convenience sample of individuals over the age of 19 who are living in the city of Columbus, Ohio. It did not include people who live in the Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area but are outside the city of Columbus itself. This research was limited to the city attributes which were included on the survey instrument. Many possibly

significant city attributes have been identified in the city-branding literature, but this study focused on six city attributes that have been regularly examined in prior studies and can be measured by multi-factor scales.

Limitations

This study was limited by the number and quality of survey responses collected, and the diversity of respondents. The research was also limited by the type of people who responded – study respondents may implicitly be the same people who are likely to exhibit a strong self-brand connection with the city brand. The researcher worked to moderate these limitations through careful selection of survey response incentives and the neighborhood groups through which the surveys were distributed.

Study Population

The City of Columbus is the capital of Ohio, the most populous city in the state, and the 14th largest city in the country. Approximately 860,090 people live in Columbus, and the population is estimated to have grown by 9% since 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). 34.8% of the population has a Bachelor's degree or higher (of residents age 25 and older), the median household income for the city is \$47,156 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a), the median age of residents is 32.1 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b), and the January 2019 unemployment rate for the city was 4.5% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). 11.6% of the Columbus' residents are foreign born, 61.1% are white, 28% are black or African American, 5.8% are Hispanic, and 4.9% are Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

Researcher's Perspective

This research focused on Columbus, Ohio, the city where the researcher lives. The researcher grew up in the Columbus area, but moved away for college and spent over 15 years living in multiple cities outside Ohio. During that time, he began to notice that people he met who were from his home state were typically proud of it and considered their connection to Ohio as a key aspect of their own identity. In a similar way, while he lived in Nashville, Tennessee, he noticed that many people were proud of that city and considered it a key aspect of their own identity, even though they were originally from somewhere else. As a marketing professional, the researcher wondered if these two places had anything in common that could help to explain the strong connection that people seemed to feel with them. If so, could place marketers somehow make use of that information to build powerful and organically driven place brands? These observations are the root of this research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose and design of this study flow from current ideas and concepts in the place brand literature. To better understand this study and how it relates to existing scholarship, this chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature. The review will begin with a broad overview of how the field has evolved, and the terms and challenges that presently define it. From there, this chapter will explore the practical application of place branding concepts, including how the effectiveness of place branding efforts can be measured. The chapter will conclude by examining how individuals connect with place brands and considering how this phenomenon may provide a way forward for a field that has recently become mired in theoretical discussions that offer practitioners little useful guidance.

Evolution of Place Branding

Place branding emerged as a serious topic in academic research during the late 1990's, and interest in the topic has grown rapidly in the decades since (Green et al., 2016). Early place branding research considered the topic from a simplistic perspective, viewing place branding primarily as the development and broadcasting of a slogan and a logo (Lucarelli & Olof Berg, 2011). It also tended to approach the topic with a marketing orientation (i.e. promotion, selling, and communication), while the field has generally evolved to work from a branding orientation (i.e. visual identity, image building, profile) today (Lucarelli & Olof Berg, 2011). The term place branding is often used in the literature interchangeably with other terms such as city branding, place marketing, or destination branding. It is important to understand how the term is being used in a specific context, as place and destination can sometimes be used to refer to whole

regions or countries (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). This literature review focuses on research that uses these terms in the context of studying cities both in the U.S. and around the world.

Place branding can hold different meanings depending on whose perspective is intended to be represented. If place branding were being approached from the point-of-view of a city official or contracted agency, then place branding could be understood as the purposeful embodiment of all information connected to a place with the intent of creating associations around it (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). If place branding is being approached from the point-of-view of a resident or visitor to the city, then place branding could be understood as the attempt to understand and express what exactly a city means to people (Green et al., 2016). This distinction has become less important in recent years as the literature has begun to coalesce around the idea that place branding must be rooted in the values, experiences, and identity of the many stakeholders who constitute the city itself (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). A place brand and how the people of that place perceive the place should agree. A challenge with this understanding, however, is that because of the vast number of stakeholders connected to a city, the meanings attributed to the city are inherently complex and varied. With this in mind, Zenker & Braun (2017) proposed the following definition for place branding: "A place brand is a network of associations in the place consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place and its' stakeholders. These associations differ in their influence within the network and in importance for the place consumers' attitude and behavior" (p. 275). This definition is cumbersome but makes the important assertion that associations "differ in their influence...and importance for the place consumers' attitude and behavior," (p. 275) implying that a one-size fits all approach to place-branding will be ineffective, and that some form of segmentation is a

necessary aspect of place branding. A tourist may only be able to grasp a simplistic brand representation of a city, but a resident's understanding of the city brand will come from a wide array of ideas and experiences. Aspects of a city brand might resonate strongly with a wealthy tourist but discourage the interest of a middle-class visitor. Embracing the complexity of a place brand can make a city nimbler and more authentic in the way it understands and represents itself.

Place Branding in Practice

The practice of place branding has developed in parallel to academics' evolving understanding of what place branding is. As place branding first emerged as a distinct area of study, its practical application was seen to be using basic marketing principles to promote a city brand. This did not necessitate any foundational theory or framework, but simply required that a city invest in marketing communications, especially advertising (Pike & Page, 2014). From the period between 2000 and 2010, place marketers began to recognize a need for a more formalized approach to place branding and found guidance in corporate branding theory (Green et al., 2016). With corporate branding as a template, place branding adopted a more professional orientation that focused on the creation and communication of a clearly articulated brand identity. This approach produced a common reliance among cities on consultancy firms, and the resulting city brand identities were widely criticized for being generic and disconnected from the reality of the places they claimed to represent (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). In reaction to this, the place branding literature took on a critical tone that drew attention to the ways that official city brands were hollow or somehow inconsistent with the lived experiences and ideas of actual stakeholders (Green et al., 2016). Instead of a top-down approach to creating and managing a brand, place branding thinkers began to argue that cities should instead look for ways to involve their many

and diverse stakeholders in a process of brand co-creation and even co-management (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). Although this idea has become widely accepted in the literature, it brings significant practical problems that center around the issue of control. If a city's brand can only be authentically captured and maintained through the contributions of a multitude, then how can strategic management of the brand be possible? Researchers have yet to provide a clear answer to this question.

While the literature has not produced an agreed upon theory or conceptual framework that can guide the efforts of place brand managers, researchers have suggested some helpful directions with practical application. The starting point for any city brand should be the pre-existing cultural, economic, and natural attributes that organically shape its identity (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). An instructive example is the city of Austin, Texas, which branded itself as the "Live Music Capital of the World" after discovering that it had more live music venues and events per capita than other cities known for their music culture. Subsequently, researchers were able to establish that this branding choice resulted in strong self-brand connections between Austin residents and the articulated brand (Kemp et al., 2012b). The emphasis on self-brand connection in this study is significant because it points to a possible path for navigating the complexity of city brands which are experienced differently by different stakeholders.

Measurement in Place Branding

Because place brands are complex and there is debate in the literature about who defines them and how they emerge, some researchers have sought to ground the place branding conversation in the practical and measurable. Several of these approaches stand out for their

success in connecting concepts from the place branding literature to established measurement instruments from related academic fields.

Place brand profiles. Context for the idea that city residents may connect well with city brands that exhibit certain attributes is provided by a study of the brand profiles of "stressed" cities (Merrilees et al., 2013). Stressed cities are cities that lack the services necessary to maintain a satisfactory quality of life for their residents. Researchers compiled a list of attributes which might contribute to an individual's understanding of a city brand, and surveyed residents of multiple stressed cities in search of a common attribute profile. They found that stressed cities did in fact share similar attribute profiles, and in particular, they suffered from weak attribute associations in general (Merrilees et al., 2013). Taken together with the work of Kemp et al. (2012a), these two studies suggest that the strength of a city brand may be rooted in how individuals connect to particular brand attributes, moving the starting point for creating a city brand from multi-stakeholder conversations focused on discovering brand identity, to conversations about strategic city planning and investment to create the physical, economic, and cultural infrastructure that will eventually support strong self-brand connections. For this to be possible however, cities must clearly understand what attributes are important to the formation of self-brand connections among different consumer and citizen groups, and carefully weigh which of these segments the city brand is best positioned to connect with while remaining faithful to its responsibility to all its citizens.

Brand association model. Many place branding researchers have identified city attributes that could influence perceptions of a place brand. Merrilees stands out among them for his efforts to catalog and refine these city attributes. Noting that different strands of place

branding literature (e.g. approaching place branding from the perspective of marketing, urban studies, urban planning, tourism, cultural heritage or sociology) emphasized the importance of different city attributes, Merrilees et al. (2009) proposed a brand association model that categorized the various city attributes discussed in the literature and attached them to a Likert scale which could then be compared with data about brand attitudes. This instrument was refined across multiple studies (Merrilees et al., 2009; Merrilees et al., 2013; Merrilees, Miller, Gloria, & Tam, 2018) and consistently revealed city attributes that were significant antecedents of brand attitudes, including social bonds, safety, and economic opportunities (Table 1).

Table 1

City Attribute Items Included in Research by Merrilees et al. (2009, 2013, & 2018)

<p><i>Nature/Environment</i> Clean and free from pollutants (2013) Residents feel safe living here (2013) Access to outdoor recreation (2009, 2013) Opportunities for outdoor enjoyment (2009, 2013) Green belt (2009, 2013) Natural wonders (2009, 2013)</p> <p><i>Business opportunities</i> Good place to do business (2009) Business is innovative/creative (2009, 2013, 2018) Local business appears to be thriving (2009, 2013) Many self-employment opportunities (2009, 2013) Quality jobs (2013, 2018) Career advancement (2013, 2018) Many job opportunities (2018)</p> <p><i>Shopping</i> Fashion shopping is excellent (2009) Cafes (2009, 2013) Wide choice of shopping (2009, 2013, 2018) Good homeware stores (2009, 2013) Eating and drinking establishments (2009, 2013) Many mid-range shopping malls (2018)</p> <p><i>Brand</i> Proud to live here (2009, 2013, 2018) Overall lifestyle is good (2009, 2013, 2018) Rather live here than any other place (2009, 2013, 2018) Good reputation among residents (2009, 2013, 2018) I am satisfied living here (2018) I like living here (2018)</p> <p><i>Intentions</i> Live here for another 5-10 years (2009, 2013) Live here for the next year or two (2009, 2013, 2018) Retire/live here as long as possible (2009, 2013, 2018)</p>	<p><i>Social bonding</i> Good for families (2009, 2013, 2018) Positive attitude toward multicultural society (2013) Community spirit (2013) Cultural diversity (2009, 2013) Easy to make friends (2009, 2018) Family and friends enjoy visiting/connect well (2009, 2018)</p> <p><i>Transport</i> Road network adequate (2009, 2013) Traffic moves freely (2009, 2013) Roadworks do not inconvenience (2009) Roads well maintained (2009, 2013)</p> <p><i>Government services</i> Good access to health care (2009, 2013) Many educational facilities (2009, 2013, 2018) Public transport is adequate (2009) Health need of old catered to (2009) Energy supplies reliable (2009) Trust local government to make sound decisions (2009, 2013) Excellence of education (2018) Pleased with council's residential services (2009, 2013)</p> <p><i>Cultural activities</i> Cultural events and festivals (2009, 2013) Live shows (2009) Adequate community centers (2009, 2013) Modern day design and appeal (2009) Cosmopolitan and sophisticated (2009) Leisure activities (2013) Nightlife (2013) Indoor recreation (2013) Markets (2013, 2018)</p>
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Major advantages to this approach include building on a well-established conceptual foundation from the brand attitudes literature (Keller, 1993), and the opportunity for residents to quantify which of many city attributes are most salient to them. Following this model, researchers collected data via printed or online surveys from the focus city's residents. The surveys featured Likert scaled questions addressing each city attribute under consideration, and an additional set

of Likert scale-based questions addressing the respondent's attitudes toward the city brand. These two groups of data were then analyzed for any statistically significant relationships. Application of the model has revealed that city attributes related to social bonding have a significant impact on brand attitudes, and that attributes associated with government services have little impact on brand attitudes (Merrilees et al., 2009 & 2013)

Impact of place brands. From the perspective of city leaders and city brand managers, a city brand can be valuable for multiple reasons. It may produce a positive economic return on investment (Mizik, 2014), it may improve the reputation of the city among an external audience (Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, & Zenker, 2018), and it may help the city to differentiate itself from competitors (Zenker, Eggers, & Farsky, 2013). A city brand can also have an important impact on the way internal audiences relate to the city. Citizens who hold positive associations with place brands also display positive attitudes toward those brands. These attitudes may become manifest in brand loyalty (e.g., intention to continue living in the city) (Merrilees et al., 2018), brand advocacy (Kemp et al., 2012b), brand engagement (Sameeni & Qadeer, 2015) and increased propensity to purchase goods or services connected to the place brand (Xiaodong, Chungling, & Saiquan, 2016). In each case, the antecedents of these desirable place brand impacts can be identified through the use of Merrilees et al.'s (2009) brand association model, helping city leaders and city brand managers to isolate the city brand attributes that are most impactful to creating an effective brand.

Self-Brand Connection

In the preceding discussion of place branding, self-brand connection was identified as a possible tool for better understanding the impact of city brands on individual consumers. The

broader marketing literature also offers reasons to believe that a focus on self-brand connection in place branding could be fruitful. In an effort to better understand the purpose of marketing, marketing academics and practitioners have often found the metaphor of relationship to be helpful (Fournier, 1998). The phrase “Relationship Marketing Era” is a commonly accepted element of the evolution of marketing, characterized by brands seeking to develop long-term relationships with consumers by creating and delivering value as perceived by consumers (Murphy et al., 2005). In the literature, research and thinking around relationship marketing was long skewed toward a focus on brand loyalty, producing studies that emphasized the transactional and utilitarian aspects of consumer brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). Over the last two decades however, the literature has undergone a slow, subtle, and significant shift; relationship marketing is not only about what happens between a consumer and a brand but is more fundamentally about the values that each desire to embody. From this perspective, consumers do not primarily associate brands with the quality of products, services, or even the experiences brands provide, but rather see them as an extension of themselves - an expression of who they are and aspire to be (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010).

When consumers “use brand associations to construct the self or communicate self-concept to others, a connection is formed” (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 339). These self-brand connections represent an entire set of brand associations; the “gestalt” of the brand from the consumer’s point of view. Self-brand connections may be influenced by reference groups, celebrity endorsements, personal memories, cultural background, and many other possible intersections between a consumer and a brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998). While their genesis may be diverse, once formed, self-brand connections can benefit brands by making

consumers more tolerant of product or service failures, less responsive to competitor's promotions, and more likely to be brand champions (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

There is some debate in the literature regarding how self-brand connections are formed, but the different perspectives share three elements:

First, consumers must possess brand associations that can be related to the self, such as user characteristics, personality traits, reference groups, and personal experiences.

Second, consumers must possess a representation of their self-concept—such as the actual self, ideal self, or future self—that includes characteristics and traits that can be aligned with those possessed by brands. Third, consumers must engage in a comparison process to determine whether the perceived brand images are congruent with aspects of their self-concept. (Chaplin & John, 2005, p. 120)

Researchers have found evidence that self-brand connections begin to form in children as young as seven and increase in both number and complexity as children move into adolescence. Among younger children, self-brand connections have been shown to be centered on a brand's observable qualities or the simple act of ownership. In adolescence, self-brand connections evolve into the abstract, connecting brands with particular personality traits, reference groups, and stereotypes (Chaplin & John, 2005). This research implies that self-brand connections express more than a simple awareness of brands, or even the presence of strong attitudes about them. A teenager for example, may have a keen understanding of what the Calvin Klein brand is, and perceive it to be indicative of high-quality and desirable social status. From a marketer's perspective, the teen's awareness and attitude of the brand are positive, and yet the adolescent may never purchase a Calvin Klein product because a self-brand connection does not exist - the

brand is not congruent with the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982; Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht, & Brandstätter, 2016). The distinction between brand attitude and self-brand connection may be a powerful one, and research has shown that the presence of a self-brand connection is a significantly stronger predictor of consumer purchase behavior and a consumer's willingness to invest time, money, energy, and personal reputation into deepening or maintaining a relationship with a brand than strength of brand attitude (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Sameeni & Qadeer, 2015).

While some consumers understand their self-brand connection in terms of straightforward congruence between self-concept and brand image (Chaplin & John, 2005), others perceive their connection in terms of incongruency with social norms (Tian & Bearden, 2001). For the latter, a strong self-brand connection is unlikely to result in active promotion of a brand, but rather in stubborn defense of the brand to individuals outside of the consumer's social group who disparage the brand (Thomas & Saenger, 2017). Self-brand connections can also be indicative of a consumer's personality and emotional state. Consumers with high self-esteem and strong self-brand connections for example, have been shown to react to a feeling of embarrassment by choosing apparel that conspicuously displays the brands logo. Conversely, consumers with low self-esteem and strong self-brand connection who are experiencing a feeling of embarrassment are likely to choose apparel with a less prominent brand logo (Song, Huang, & Li, 2017).

Self-Brand Connection and Products

The self-brand connection is perhaps more easily understood in the context of how consumers relate to specific products. As a consumer's desire for conformity or nonconformity can impact their display of self-brand connection, so too can the acquisition and possession of

products reflect different aspects of a consumer's identity and their evolving sense of self. Some of a person's possessions may represent affiliation with other people, some possessions may serve to reinforce the consumer's present identity, and still others may be expressing identity, both in positive (I am), and negative (I am not) terms (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). Whatever element of a person a product may be intended to represent, research is clear that if a strong attachment exists between a consumer and an object, it is because that object somehow represents an aspect of the consumer's personal identity. An object's affiliation with another person or group, however strong, is not enough by itself for the consumer to form a strong attachment to it (Kleine et al., 1995). This finding is echoed in the work of Escalas and Bettman (2003) who described the self-brand connection as an entire set of brand associations; the gestalt of the brand.

Connection between people and the objects they possess may convey different meanings in different cultural settings. A study comparing American consumers' attachment to their favorite things to how Nigerian consumers characterized theirs, revealed that the respective Judeo-Christian and Islamic-Animist cultural backgrounds significantly influenced the type and quantity of values consumers construed between themselves and their possessions. Americans for example, might see objects as a way to express individuality, while Nigerians might see objects as a way to express their conformity to family and societal values. What both consumer groups had in common however, was that their connections to their objects were not singular, but expressed group and individual affiliations, and distinct aspects of their personal identity (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). This research agrees with the seminal writing of Belk (1988), who argued that possessions have been a part of humans' sense of self, their "extended self," as

far back as humans used the simplest of tools to extend their own abilities. In contemporary society, self-defining objects are not limited to tools or even products that are purchased or received, but may also include places, experiences, “collections, money, other people, pets, and body parts” (Belk, 1988, p. 160). Whatever “possessions” might be used to define the self, the self-concept cannot be understood or expressed through only one object alone.

There is also some evidence to suggest that the type of a product can impact how consumers form connections with it. Consumers of a functional product (e.g. simple mobile phone) may be less sensitive to its aesthetic and emotional value than consumers of a lifestyle product (e. g. smartphone), but they are also less likely to form a strong self-brand connection with a functional product (Tan & Sie, 2015). Other research has shown that relationship length and brand prominence are important antecedents of self-brand connections with identify (lifestyle) products but not instrumental (functional) products (Sameeni & Qadeer, 2015).

Cities are typically diverse places, and how city residents form self-brand connections with city brands are likely to be diverse as well. A resident’s socioeconomic background, experiences in the city, and reason for living in the city are just a few of the factors that could affect how they connect with the city. While the study did not explicitly seek to understand how personal factors moderate the formation of self-brand connections, it did offer clues about this by identifying specific city attributes that facilitate strong self-brand connections and comparing these results among several demographic groups.

Self-Brand Connection and the Intangible

In addition to products or objects, experiences and places are also known to be important elements of a consumer’s sense of self (Belk, 1988). Research has shown that self-brand

connections can be formed between a consumer and a specific city (Kemp et al., 2012b; Schade, Piehler, Müller, & Burmann, 2018). This self-brand connection is preceded by a favorable impression of the city's brand, and a sense that the brand represents something authentic and unique. Once created, a self-brand connection to a city can result in heightened civic-consciousness, and word-of-mouth advocacy (Kemp et al., 2012b).

Marketing academics have demonstrated that consumers are inclined to behave positively toward a national brand personality that reflects their individual personality. As in other aspects of self-brand connection, this propensity is not significantly moderated by affiliation (in this case, in the form of personal visits to a country or knowing someone who lives there) and appears to be best explained by self-congruity theory. When a consumer's individual personality and a nation's brand personality are in alignment, the consumer will be more likely to buy that country's products, visit it, immigrate to it, or invest in it in some other way (Rojas-Méndez, Papadopoulos, & Alwan, 2015), although national pride could be a moderating factor (Xiaodong, Chungling, & Saiquan, 2016). It has been suggested that this phenomenon can be partially explained by the positive effect that linking a brand to a heritage story can have on the formation of self-brand connection. Heritage stories may include a focus on national origin, craftsmanship, a dynamic founder, brand history, or a clear celebrity association (Chelminski, & DeFanti, 2016). For a city brand, a heritage story could describe the history of a key cultural element (i.e., how Nashville became Music City), the origin of a marquee brand (i.e., Atlanta and Coca-Cola), or tell the story of a pivotal shared experience (i.e., the economic collapse and subsequent revitalization of Detroit).

In keeping with Belk's (1988) emphasis on the potential power of experiences, recent research has revealed that consumers may form self-brand connections with service brands. Since these brands inherently lack physical attributes for consumers to use in evaluation and comparison, service performance and perceived value are the foundational elements of self-brand connections with service brands (Dwivedi, 2014). It may be more difficult for service-brands to forge self-brand connections with consumers, and to do so, it is critical that brands emphasize their emotional benefits (e.g. Southwest Airlines and love) (Lin, Lobo, & Leckie, 2017).

Measuring Self-Brand Connection

Self-brand connection scale. Because self-brand connections have potential to be valuable assets to brands, marketing practitioners and academics alike have sought to understand how self-brand connections can be quantified. Escalas and Bettman (2003) are pioneers in this field, and their work is foundational to most subsequent self-brand connection measurement studies. In their seminal study, they used a pretest to identify five brands that college students considered "really cool," and five that they "would never use." Students were then asked to identify up to 10 social groups (or student types) on campus, and rate: the likelihood that each of the previously identified brands would be used by each group, the degree to which they themselves belonged or aspired to be part of each group, and the degree to which they themselves had formed a self-brand connection with each of the brands. The responses were then scored according to a seven-point Self-Brand Connection Likert scale (created by Escalas in 1996, published in 2004), producing a single self-brand connection score for each participant. The researchers found that strong self-brand connections are formed when a group that an individual wishes to be part of is strongly associated with the brand.

Adaptations of self-brand connection scale. Building on the work of Escalas and Bettman, other researchers (Chaplin & John, 2005) used collages and individual images as a means for study participants to answer the question “who am I?” Based on the responses, the researchers counted the number of times particular brands and themes appeared in participants’ answers to arrive at a numerical score for the strength of self-brand connection. Additional studies (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Park et al., 2010) also relied on the prior research of Escalas and Bettman, choosing to employ the same Likert scale survey approach with minimal modifications to Escalas and Bettman’s original survey questions in order to better suit their particular context and goals.

Kemp et al. (2012a, 2012b) applied the concept and measurement of self-brand connection to city branding. To do so, they used the identical Likert scale questions from Escalas and Bettman’s 2003 self-brand connection survey, replacing the name of the brands originally studied with a city-brand (“Austin’s musical branding”). Data gathered through this instrument were analyzed in combination with data simultaneously gathered through established instruments for assessing brand trust, brand uniqueness, and brand commitment in order to ascertain the relationships between them. The researchers found that brand attitudes were antecedents for self-brand connections, and that self-brand connections were antecedents of brand advocacy.

With the exception of Chaplin & John (2005) who chose to measure self-brand connection with a qualitative approach, there are several things that each of these studies have in common: 1) the use of a survey to collect data intended to measure self-brand connection, 2) the use of Likert scale questions based closely on the seven questions from Escalas and Bettman’s 2003 survey, 3) the use of an additional survey instrument to collect data regarding a relevant

variable that could be statistically analyzed for a relationship to self-brand connection, thereby adding meaningful context to the self-brand connection measurement.

Summary

A review of the literature has shown that there is growing interest in the field of city branding, and that there is confusion surrounding what exactly gives a city brand meaning and how the brand can be defined. There is interest in better understanding how city brands could encourage consumer (resident) brand loyalty, advocacy, and engagement by focusing on the city attributes that are antecedents of individual stakeholders forming self-brand connections with the brand. No research has been found that examines how specific city attributes facilitate the formation of self-brand connections. Addressing this gap in the literature could provide much needed direction to city brand managers who struggle to express and exert their brand, and also help to make city brands more meaningful and impactful for city residents.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The preceding chapter identified a critical gap in the place branding literature regarding the relationship between city attributes and self-brand connections. This chapter will describe how the researcher designed and implemented a study to shed light on that relationship. It will explain how specific measures were selected and used, how data were collected, and what methods were used to analyze that data. It is important to note this study was designed as a first step in developing a generalizable model to predict how investment in specific city attributes could impact self-brand connection, brand loyalty, and brand advocacy. It was not intended to create that model itself, but to use a non-probability sample as a proof of concept for the hypothesized relationships.

Research Design and Rationale

This study sought to establish a research foundation that could later be used to inform generalizable models intended to predict how investment in specific city attributes could impact self-brand connection, brand loyalty, and brand advocacy. It explored the following research questions:

RQ₁: What city attributes create strong self-brand connections?

RQ₂: Do strong self-brand connections increase residents' likelihood to continue living in the city?

RQ₃: Do strong self-brand connection increase residents' likelihood to become brand advocates?

This study took a quantitative approach to answering these questions. The literature has identified a multitude of attributes that can contribute to a city brand's meaning, and there is

consensus that these attributes - and consequently the city brands - carry different associations and meanings for different people (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). What is needed is a quantitative framework to assist brand leaders in determining which attributes are most impactful to the brand both in the formation of strong connections between individuals and the brand, and in encouraging individuals to take actions that advance the brand's goals.

Measures

This study used two established measurement instruments: Merrilees et al.'s (2009) Brand Association Model, and Escalas and Bettman's (2003) Self-Brand Connection Scale. Both are well-established and validated instruments with details of their application and results of their use documented across multiple studies in the literature. A visual summary of their recent use and interconnection as conceived by the researcher is presented in Figure 1.

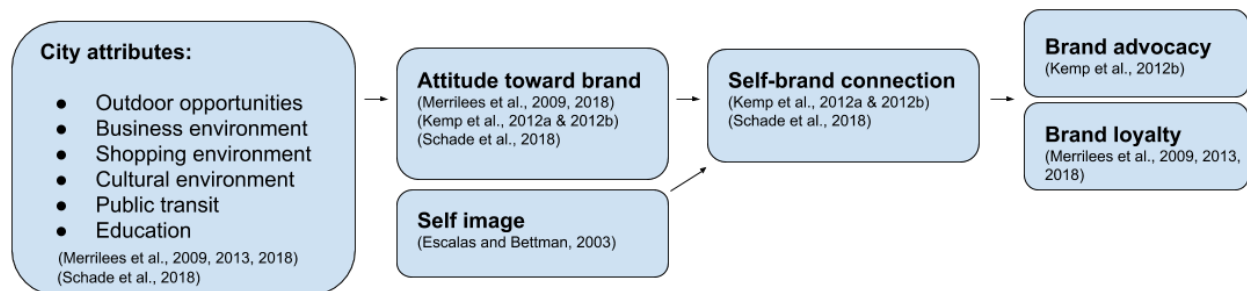


Figure 1. Self-brand connection for city brands conceptual model

Merrilees et al. (2009) demonstrated that city attributes (independent variables) are antecedents of a city resident's attitude toward the city brand (dependent variable), Kemp et al. (2012a, 2012b) demonstrated that a city resident's attitude toward a city brand is an antecedent of the formation of a self-brand connection with the city brand. A consumer's self-image (or desired self-image) must align with their perceptions of a brand (city) before a self-brand connection may form (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). The bridge between these two studies is a resident's

attitude toward a city brand, and this study seized on that bridge and sought to test if city attributes (Merrilees et al.'s independent variables) are antecedents of a resident's self-brand connection with a city brand (Kemp et al.'s dependent variable). Kemp et al. found that strong self-brand connections can increase brand advocacy (2012b) and are related to increased loyalty (2012a), and Merrilees et al. (2009, 2013) found that positive brand attitudes can lead to brand advocacy and loyalty. This study looked for those same outcomes in the context of self-brand connections formed with cities based on specific city attributes.

City attributes. Merrilees et al. (2009) created a 40-item survey to measure the strength of a city brand's attributes and associated resident attitudes and used and refined the survey in further research in 2013 and 2018 (Table 1). Across the three studies, 55 city attributes were identified and tested. This study focused on 15 city attributes which appeared in at least two of Merrilees et al.'s studies (2009, 2013, 2018), were unique, could be impacted by city policy, and showed promise in the literature as being important.

The following questions were used to collect resident perceptions of 15 city attributes using a seven-point Likert scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree," and 7 representing "strongly agree":

Table 2

Survey Questions to Assess Resident Perceptions of City Attributes

1. Columbus offers good access to outdoor recreation
2. Columbus offers good access to natural beauty
3. Columbus is a good place for families
4. Columbus is culturally diverse
5. It is easy to make friends in Columbus
6. Columbus is a city with a sense of community spirit
7. Columbus encourages business innovation
8. Columbus businesses appear to be thriving
9. Columbus offers good job opportunities
10. Columbus offers access to quality education
11. Columbus offers adequate public transportation
12. Columbus offers a wide choice of shopping
13. Columbus offers a wide choice of eating and drinking establishments
14. Columbus offers many cultural events and festivals
15. Columbus offers many leisure activities

Following the example of previous research (Merrilees et al., 2009, 2013, 2018; Schade et al., 2018; Kemp et al., 2012a, 2012b), and to improve reliability and validity (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004), the city attribute survey questions were used to create multi-item scales that measured common underlying factors. The creation of these scales was informed by both Merrilees et al.'s previously established groupings (Merrilees et al., 2009, 2013, 2018), and the

results of the researcher's principal components analysis. The scales that were used and their corresponding questions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Multi-Item Scales

Scale	Included Questions
Outdoor Opportunities	1. Columbus offers good access to outdoor recreation. 2. Columbus offers good access to natural beauty.
Social Environment	3. Columbus is a good place for families. 4. Columbus is culturally diverse. 5. It is easy to make friends in Columbus. 6. Columbus is a city with a sense of community spirit.
Business Environment	7. Columbus encourages business innovation. 8. Columbus businesses appear to be thriving. 9. Columbus offers good job opportunities.
Government Services	10. Columbus offers good access to K-12 education. 11. Columbus offers good access to public transportation.
Cultural Environment	14. Columbus offers many cultural events and festivals. 15. Columbus offers many leisure activities.
Shopping Environment	12. Columbus offers a wide choice of shopping. 13. Columbus offers a wide choice of eating and drinking establishments.

Self-brand connection. Escalas and Bettman's (2003) Self-Brand Connection Scale includes seven questions pertaining to an individual's relationship to a brand. Originally designed to measure self-brand connection with a product-based brand, Kemp et al. (2012a, 2012b) adapted the instrument for use with a city brand. Their version was easily modified to accommodate the study by simply replacing "Austin musical branding" with "Columbus' branding." Columbus has a clearly articulated brand which was introduced in 2010 and focuses on the themes of "open" and "smart" (Columbus Brand Marketing Committee, 2017). Information about the official Columbus brand was included on the survey to ensure respondents had necessary context for answering the survey questions.

The range labels of the original scale were adapted to maintain consistency with the “strongly disagree/strongly agree” scale range used throughout the survey. Questions from the original Escalas and Bettman (2003) survey, Kemp et al.’s (2012a , 2012b) adaptation, and the version for this study are shown side-by-side in Table 4.

Table 4

Self-Brand Connection Scale, Original Questions and Subsequent Adaptations

	Escalas and Bettman (2003)	Kemp et al. (2012a, 2012b)	This Study
1	Brand X reflects who I am (not at all/extremely well)	Austin's musical branding reflects who I am (not at all/extremely well)	Columbus' branding reflects who I am (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
2	I can identify with Brand X (not at all/extremely well)	I can identify with Austin's musical branding (not at all/extremely well)	I can identify with Columbus' branding (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
3	I feel a personal connection to Brand X (not at all/very much so)	I feel a personal connection to Austin's musical branding (not at all/very much so)	I feel a personal connection to Columbus' branding (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
4	I (can) use Brand X to communicate who I am to other people (not at all/extremely well)	I (can) use Austin's musical branding to communicate who I am to other people (not at all/extremely well)	I (can) use Columbus' branding to communicate who I am to other people (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
5	I think Brand X (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be (not at all/extremely well)	I think Austin's musical branding (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be (not at all/extremely well)	I think Columbus' branding (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
6	I consider Brand X to be "me" (not "me"/"me")	I consider Austin's musical branding to be "me" (not "me"/"me")	I consider Columbus' branding to be "me" (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
7	Brand X suits me well (not at all/extremely well)	Austin's musical branding suits me well (not at all/extremely well)	Columbus' branding suits me well (not at all/extremely well)

Note: Responses collected on a seven-point Likert scale

Brand outcomes. An effective brand should produce a response from consumers, including brand loyalty and brand advocacy (Keller, 1993). In the study, brand loyalty was measured by Merrilees et al.'s (2018) survey questions regarding resident intentions:

1. I am content to live in Hong Kong (Columbus) for the next year or two
2. I plan to live in Hong Kong (Columbus) for as long as possible

Brand advocacy was measured by the brand advocacy survey questions adapted by Kemp et al. (2012b) from Kim, Han, and Park's (2001) established scale:

1. I recommend to other people that they attend support Austin musical events (visit Columbus)
2. I talk directly to other people about my experience with Austin music events (living in Columbus)

Demographic data. The survey collected a small amount of demographic data to aid in placing the results in the context of the city population and assist with identifying possible directions for future research. This section of the survey was limited in order to avoid discouraging completion among respondents reluctant to provide personal information or invest time in the survey. The demographic data points collected were: age range (Below 20, 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+), gender (Male, Female), household income (Less than \$50,000, \$50,000 or above), household size (1-person, 2-person, 3-person, 4-or-more-person), time lived in Columbus (Less than one year, 1 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, 10 or more years), and zip code.

Survey. Screenshots of the survey (created using Survey Monkey) are shown in Appendix A.

Procedure of Data Collection

Prior research into self-brand connections has focused on establishing the reliability and validity of the instrument and applying it to small groups of study participants to gain understanding of how individual consumers – not entire populations – form self-brand connections and behave toward the brand in question. Escalas and Bettman's (2003) seminal research used a sample of 171 participants, and more recent similar research used sample sizes of 108 (Park et al., 2010) and 103 participants (Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2013). As this study also sought to understand the formation of self-brand connections and the impact of those self-brand connections, a dataset of 163 responses was collected – a number in line with previous research.

The survey was approved by the George Fox University IRB and administered solely online using SurveyMonkey. It was distributed primarily through cooperation with Columbus neighborhood associations. Ten Columbus neighborhood associations were invited to participate, and two did so. In return for their cooperation, the researcher agreed to donate to the neighborhood association based on the number of completed surveys that were received: 50 completed surveys would earn a \$150 donation, 100 completed surveys would earn a \$300 donation, and 150 completed surveys would earn a \$400 donation. This incentive structure that rewarded an organization instead of an individual helped to mitigate the potential for the incentive to skew individual responses. For a response to the survey to be considered usable it must have been unique and submitted by a respondent living inside the city of Columbus who was over the age of 19.

Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was to determine if the data collected were a good representation of the city population. This was accomplished by referencing publicly available census data regarding the gender, income, and age makeup of Columbus. Specifically, 36.3% of Columbus residents are 20 to 39 years old, 23.8% are 40 to 59, and 14.1% are 60 or older; 49% are male and 51% are female; 52.3% have a household income below \$50,000, and 47.3% have an income of \$50,000 or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). The goal of this step was to inform interpretation of subsequent data analysis and identify any limitations that needed to be detailed in reporting of results. The purpose of the study was to examine which city attributes help produce strong self-brand connections between city residents and the city brand. This did not require a balanced sample of city residents, but knowledge of what the data represents is important to properly understanding results and implications for future research directions.

Regarding conducting the actual analysis, the research relating city attributes to scales measuring different aspects of brand provided several instructive examples. In Merrilees et al.'s 2009, 2013, and 2018 studies, data were analyzed using multiple regression. Kemp et al. (2012a) and Schade et al. (2018) both employed Structural Equation Modeling as an alternative to multiple regression. While Structural Equation Modeling is a more powerful approach, it also requires a larger sample size. This study's sample size of 163 residents does not meet the required threshold (Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013). Multiple regression was therefore the most appropriate choice for analyzing the collected data. SPSS was used to complete the multiple regression analysis, which followed a two-step procedure: 1) assess the scales for

reliability and validity, and 2) test the model with multiple regression to gain insight into city attributes' impact on self-brand connection.

Assessing reliability and validity of scales. The following statistical procedures were used to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scales:

- Cronbach's Alpha: A measure of internal consistency that helps reveal the degree to which the items in the scale are measuring the same latent factor. Values of .70 and above indicate a good level of internal consistency (Laerd Statistics, 2015a).
- Principal Components Analysis (PCA): A procedure that reduces a large number of variables to smaller set of variables by identifying the principal components of the original variable list. Each identified component acts as an artificial variable that is composed of a group of the original variables which are measuring the same latent factor. The groupings identified by this procedure were used to confirm the variables used in each multi-item scale did in fact belong together. (Laerd Statistics, 2015b)
- T-tests: A test to determine if a statistically significant difference exists between groups. T-tests were used to compare mean responses of early and late responders and rule out late response bias. They were also used to test for significant differences in responses based on demographics including gender, household income, household size, time living in Columbus, and neighborhood.

Multiple regression results. The following values were used to evaluate the multiple regression results:

- P-value of less than .05 to demonstrate statistical significance.
- Adjusted R-Square to determine the percentage of variance explained by the model.

Expected results. Based on a review of the literature, the researcher expected to find that some city attributes do facilitate the creation of strong self-brand connections. In particular, it was expected that city attributes related to social bonds would have the greatest impact on self-brand connection formation, and that attributes related to city services would have the least impact on self-brand connection. The researcher expected that those survey respondents who exhibit strong self-brand connections would also indicate a strong intention to continue living in Columbus, and a tendency to share their positive impressions of Columbus with others.

Chapter 4: Results

Previous research has not directly addressed the relationship between city attributes and self-brand connection. Research has shown, however, that the strength or weakness of particular city attributes is related to the strength of city brand image (Merrilees et al., 2009), and that citizens of a given city who experience a self-brand connection with their city brand are more likely to exhibit loyalty and advocacy related to the brand than those who do not (Kemp et al., 2012b). The research discussed in this chapter will provide an initial understanding of the relationship between city attributes and self-brand connection, brand advocacy, and brand loyalty in a specific city.

This chapter addresses the research questions and is organized as follows. First, a general description of survey responses and how the dataset compares to the population of Columbus as a whole is provided. This is followed by an explanation of how the scales were checked for validity and reliability. Next, regression analysis results for each research question are presented, along with the results of tests for any significant differences between groups within the dataset. Finally, limitations of the findings are considered.

Survey Responses

Ten Columbus neighborhood associations were invited to participate in this study, and two did so. Of those, one collected 152 surveys, and the other collected six. Both promoted the survey to their members via an email list, Facebook page, and an announcement at their members' meeting. An additional five complete and eligible surveys were collected via SurveyMonkey's survey research service. Through this service, survey links are distributed by email to SurveyMonkey's paid consumer panel members who meet the specified demographic

criteria; in this case, over the age of 19 and a resident of the city of Columbus. All survey responses were confirmed as unique using SurveyMonkey's IP address tracking feature. 230 survey responses were collected. Of these, 67 responses were removed from the dataset due to the respondent living outside of the city of Columbus, being age 19 or below, or duplication. 163 responses were used to perform the analysis, exceeding the study's goal of 150 responses.

Age and gender. The survey collected respondents' age and gender. This data is presented in comparison to the Columbus population in Table 3. The dataset was 71% female in comparison to 51% female for Columbus. Age data were collected in four ranges (19 or below is not shown as the study was confined to residents 20 and above. Responses from people below 20 were eliminated from the data set.) and showed that the dataset was older than the population of Columbus.

Table 3

Summary of Respondents' Age and Gender and Comparison to Columbus Population

Age Bracket	Female	Male	Total	% Sample Pop.	% Columbus Pop.
20 - 39	23	13	36	22%	37%
40 - 59	48	14	62	38%	24%
60 or Above	45	20	65	40%	13%
Total	116	47	163	-	-
% Sample	71%	29%	-	-	-
% Columbus	51%	49%	-	-	-

Household size and income. The survey collected respondents' household size and income. This data is presented in comparison to the Columbus population in Table 4. 82% of respondents reported an annual household income of \$50,000 or more, compared to 50% for the

Columbus population. Household size data were collected in four ranges and showed that the dataset included fewer one-person households, more two-person households, and fewer 3 or more person households than the population of Columbus.

Table 4

Summary of Respondents' Household Size and Income and Comparison to Columbus Population

Annual Household Income	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 or More Person	Total	% Sample Pop.	% Columbus Pop.
Less than \$50,000	16	9	3	1	29	18%	50%
\$50,000 or above	26	62	19	27	134	82%	50%
Total	42	71	22	28	163	-	
% Sample Pop.	26%	44%	13%	17%	100%	100%	
% Columbus Pop.	35%	31%	15%	19%			

Zip codes. The survey collected respondents' zip codes and the data is presented in Table 5. The dataset was concentrated in a single zip code, with 77% of respondents living in the 43209 zip code. The next two most common zip codes (43213 and 43227) were geographically adjacent to zip code 43209.

Table 5

Summary of Respondents' Zip Codes

Zip Code	Count	%
43017	2	1%
43026	2	1%
43035	1	<1%
43125	1	<1%
43201	1	<1%
43202	2	1%
43205	1	<1%
43206	1	<1%
43209	125	77%
43212	2	1%
43213	7	4%
43214	1	<1%
43215	1	<1%
43221	1	<1%
43222	3	2%
43223	2	1%
43224	2	1%
43227	5	3%
43229	1	<1%
43230	1	<1%
43309	1	<1%
Total	163	100%

Time in Columbus. The survey collected respondents' time in Columbus according to three ranges of time. This data is presented in Table 6. The sample had overwhelmingly lived in Columbus for more than ten years.

Table 6

<i>Summary of Time in Columbus</i>		
Years of Residency	Count	%
Less than 1	1	<1%
1 - 5	14	9%
6 - 10	10	6%
More than 10	138	85%
Total	163	100%

Validity and Reliability of the Scales

Validity of the scales. The scales that were used to create the component variables used in the regression model (Table 3) came directly from previous research. The Self-Brand Connection scale questions were used almost exactly as they were in their original research setting, and their validity is well-established (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Kemp et al., 2012b; Schade et al., 2018). The city attribute and city brand outcomes scales and questions were also used almost exactly as they were used and validated in their original research settings (Merrilees et al., 2009, 2013, & 2018; Kemp et al., 2012b). Because small changes were made to the scales to accommodate this study's unique purpose and design, each scale was analyzed using Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to check for reliability and validity. PCA is a statistical technique that identifies variables which are measuring the same thing. In other words, PCA would show which of the survey questions should be grouped together in a scale.

Originally, the survey questions addressing access to K-12 education and access to public transit were grouped together in a single scale labeled government services. PCA revealed that these two questions were not measuring the same thing and did not belong together. They were found to only share a correlation of 0.292, below the 0.03 threshold for immediate exclusion

(Laerd Statistics, 2015b). Both variables displayed correlations at or below 0.04 across all other variables, suggesting that they did add unique value to the model (Laerd Statistics, 2015b). The questions were therefore included in the model as separate variables not attached to any scale.

Three other questions that were originally thought to comprise a scale measuring social bonding were also shown to be an inappropriate grouping (Table 7). Two of these questions were removed because they did not correlate with their proposed group and showed mild correlations with multiple other scales – they were not measuring something unique in this study’s model. The third question, “Columbus is culturally diverse” was shown to be measuring the same factor as two other questions which made up the cultural environment scale. This question was added to the cultural environment scale.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix for “Social Bonding” Scale Variables

City Attribute	Good for Families	Culturally Diverse	Easy to Make Friends	Community Spirit
Outdoor Recreation	0.556	0.468	0.414	0.503
Natural Beauty	0.595	0.478	0.369	0.546
Good for Families*	1	0.358	0.482	0.67
Culturally Diverse	0.358	1	0.482	0.372
Easy to Make Friends*	0.482	0.482	1	0.513
Community Spirit	0.67	0.372	0.513	1
Business Innovation	0.406	0.456	0.509	0.485
Thriving Business	0.418	0.415	0.465	0.422
Job Opportunities	0.481	0.437	0.477	0.478
Education Access	0.391	0.195	0.163	0.3
Public Transit	0.247	0.391	0.325	0.283
Shopping	0.467	0.394	0.333	0.34
Restaurants and Bars	0.508	0.503	0.481	0.414
Cultural Events	0.459	0.614	0.451	0.462
Leisure Activities	0.534	0.593	0.484	0.557

*Questions that were removed

After making these changes PCA was performed on the remaining data and confirmed the dataset's principal components, i.e. appropriate scale groupings (Table 8). All variables loaded strongly onto at least one component, with coefficients of 0.6 and above, with the exception of "I share why I like living here." This variable loaded onto Component 7 with a coefficient of 0.431, well above the 0.3 cutoff level, and the 0.4 caution level (Laerd Statistics, 2015b). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .891 indicated a good level of sampling adequacy for the PCA, and a Bartlett's Test significance value of $P < .05$ indicated that correlations between the variables make the dataset suitable for analysis with PCA (Laerd Statistics, 2015b)

Table 8

Rotated Structure Matrix for PCA with Varimax Rotation of a Nine Component Survey

Variable	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Brand is "me"	0.908								
Brand helps me be "me"	0.901								
Brand suit me well	0.898								
Brand helps me communicate "me" to others	0.881								
Personal connection to brand	0.817								
Identify with brand	0.717						0.396		
Brand reflects who I am	0.686						0.385		
Shopping		0.808							
Restaurant and bars		0.715			0.36				
Business is thriving		0.355	0.807						
Encourages business innovation			0.797						
Good job opportunities		0.427	0.642				0.325		
Plan to live here as long as possible				0.868					
Plan to live here for year or two				0.761					
Culturally diverse					0.744				
Cultural activities and festivals		0.518			0.651				
Leisure activities		0.351			0.624	0.361			
Outdoor recreation						0.83			
Natural beauty	0.335					0.737			
I recommend a visit				0.323			0.67		
I share why I like living here	0.395	0.311		0.394	0.306		0.431		
Access to K-12 education								0.939	
Access to public transit									0.896

The PCA component loadings confirmed the validity of the seven scale groupings, including the assignment of the "Culturally Diverse" variable to the "Cultural Environment" scale. It also

indicated that the variables “Access to K-12 Education” and “Access to Public Transit” should be treated as singular variables not associated with a scale. These results fit with the preliminary correlation matrix analysis. Analysis of the data continued using the nine components identified by the PCA, which are shown in Table 8 as highlighted bands. The components corresponded to scales in this way:

- Component 1: Self-Brand Connection
- Component 2: Shopping
- Component 3: Business Environment
- Component 4: Brand Loyalty
- Component 5: Cultural Environment
- Component 6: Outdoor Spaces
- Component 7: Brand Advocacy
- Component 8: Access to K-12 Education
- Component 9: Access to Public Transit

Reliability of the scales. Cronbach’s Alpha is a measure of internal consistency that helps confirm that the items in scale are measuring the same latent factor (i.e. principal component or variable) and are reliable. Each of the study’s scales were found to have a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .77 or greater, above the .70 minimum to establish a good level of internal consistency (Laerd Statistics, 2015a).

Research Question Analysis

Research question one. Research question one stated:

RQ1: What city attributes create strong self-brand connections? This study found that outdoor opportunities, business environment, and access to education are city attributes which can help create strong self-brand connections. To arrive at this answer, multiple regression analysis was conducted using:

- Dependent variable: Self-Brand Connection. This variable was a single score created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the seven survey questions in the Self-Brand Connection instrument. See Appendix B for a list of the exact questions.
- Independent variables: The independent variables each measured a city attribute and were:
 - Shopping environment
 - Business environment
 - Cultural environment
 - Outdoor opportunities
 - Access to K-12 education
 - Access to public transit

Each of these variables were single scores created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the questions in their respective scales. See Appendix C for a list of the exact questions in each scale. The multiple regression model indicated that the dependent variables could explain 37.8% (\hat{R}) of the variance in Self-Brand Connection ($F(6, 156) = 15.819, p < .01$). Three of the variables were statistically significant predictors of Self-Brand

Connection: business environment, outdoor opportunities, and access to K-12 education (Table 9).

Table 9

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for RQ1

City Attribute	B			P Value
Outdoor Spaces*	.430	.108	.335	.000
Business Environment**	.262	.122	.191	.034
Access to K-12 Education**	.131	.057	.158	.022
Cultural Environment	.130	.145	.091	.372
Shopping Environment	.026	.128	.019	.838
Access to Public Transit	.004	.065	.005	.945

* Significant at the $p < .01$ level

**Significant at the $p < .05$ level

There was independence of residuals, as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.828. There was homoscedasticity, as assessed by visual inspection of a plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values (Figure 2), and residuals were normally distributed as assessed by visual inspection of a normal probability plot (Figure 3). There was no evidence of multicollinearity, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. The Adjusted R^2 was 35.4%, a medium effect size according to Cohen (1988).

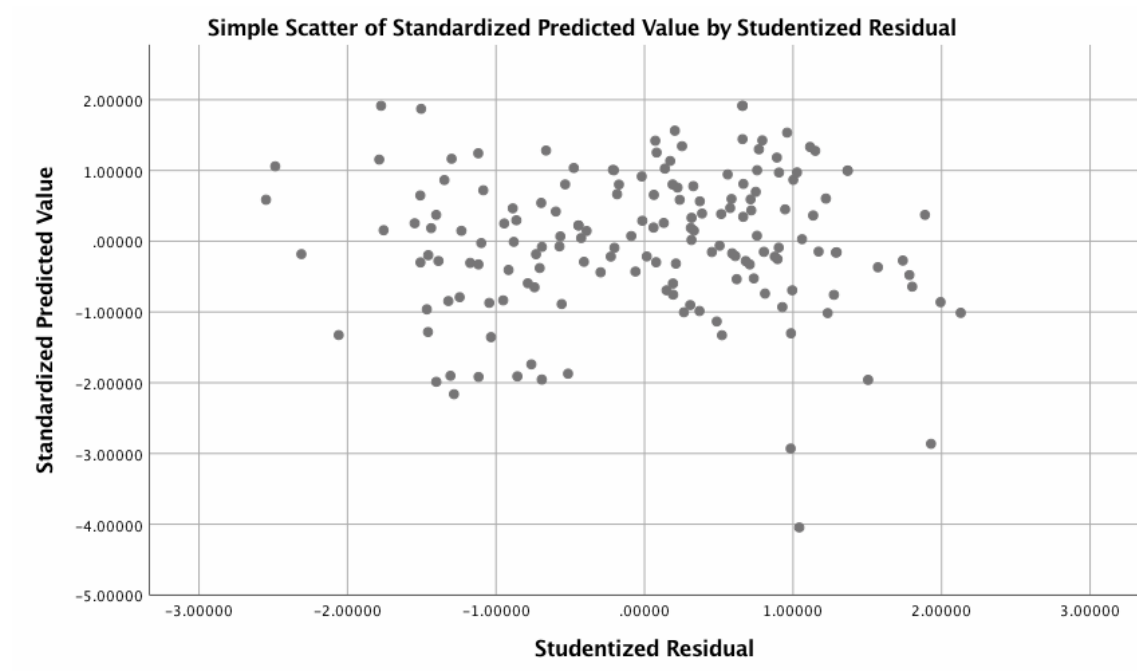


Figure 2. Scatter plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values of self-brand connection.

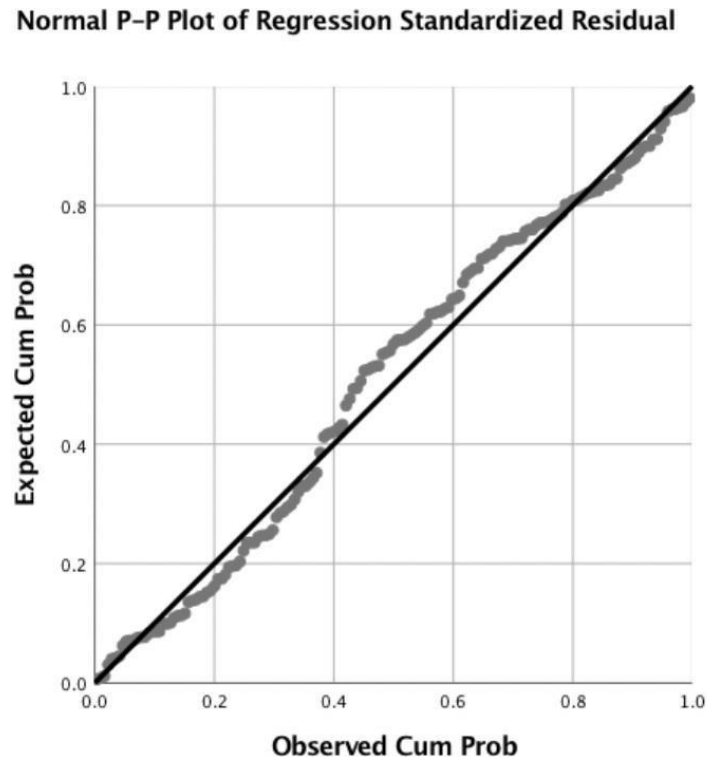


Figure 3. Normal probability plot for dependent variable self-brand connection.

Research question two. Research question two stated:

RQ₂: Do strong self-brand connections increase residents' likelihood to continue living in the city? This study found that stronger Self-Brand Connections are associated with an increase in the likelihood that a resident will continue to live in the city. To arrive at this answer, linear regression analysis was conducted using:

- Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty. This variable was a single score created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the two survey questions in the loyalty scale. See Appendix D for a list of the exact questions.

- Independent variable: Self-Brand Connection. This variable was a single score created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the two survey questions in the loyalty scale. See Appendix B for a list of the exact questions.

An inspection of the plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values revealed that the data did not pass the test of homoscedasticity, requiring correction by logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable (Figure 4) (Laerd Statistics, 2015d).

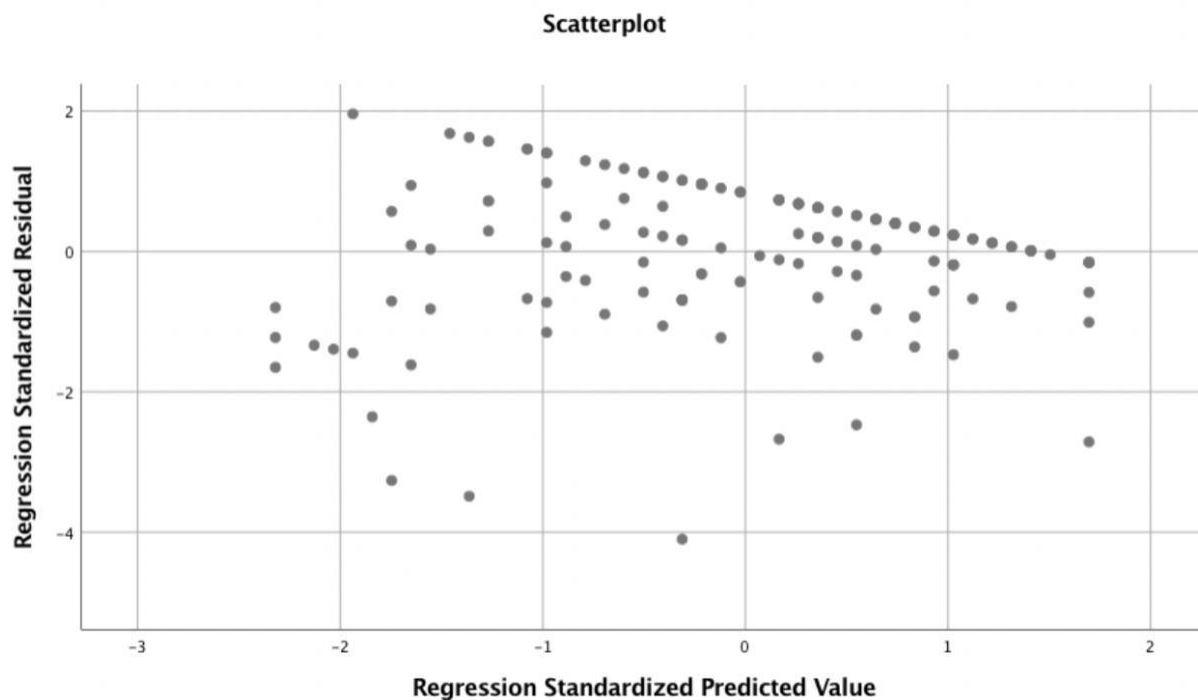


Figure 4. Scatter plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values of brand loyalty.

This transformation complete, the linear regression was rerun using the transformed version of the dependent variable (Williams, 2015). There was independence of residuals as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.036, and the residuals were normally distributed as assessed by visual inspection of a normal probability plot (Figure 5).

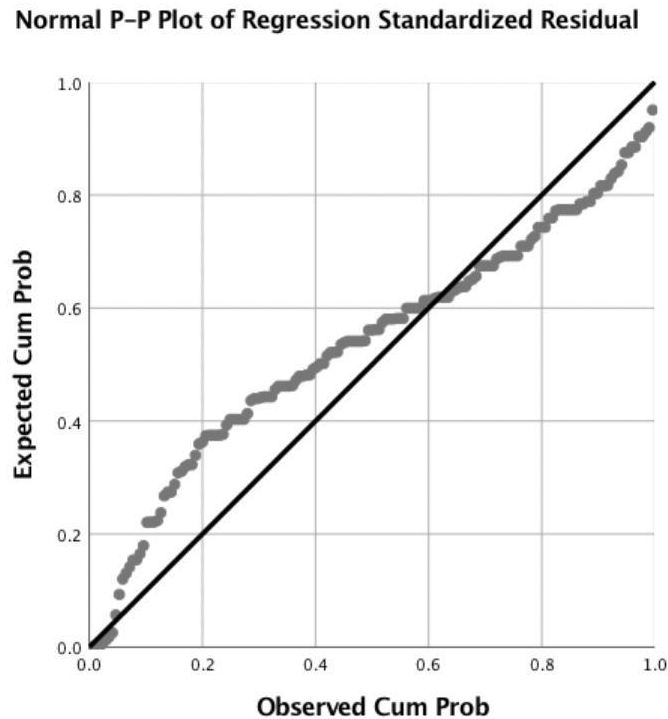


Figure 5. Normal probability plot for dependent variable brand loyalty (transformed).

The prediction equation was: brand loyalty = .559 + .046 * self-brand connection. Self-brand connection statistically significantly predicted brand loyalty, $F(1,161) = 44.094$, $p < .01$, accounting for 21.5% of the variation in brand loyalty with adjusted $R^2 = 21\%$, a small size effect according to Cohen (1988). A one unit increase in self-brand connection leads to a 0.046 (95% CI, .032 to .059) increase in brand loyalty.

Research question three. Research question three stated:

RQ3: Do strong self-brand connections increase residents' likelihood to become brand advocates? This study found that stronger Self-Brand Connections are associated with an increase in the likelihood that a resident will become a brand advocate. To arrive at this answer, linear regression analysis was conducted using:

- Dependent variable: Advocacy. This variable was a single score created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the two survey questions in the advocacy scale. See Appendix D for a list of the exact questions.
- Independent variables: Loyalty. This variable was a single score created by averaging the values (1-7 on the Likert Scale response) from the two survey questions in the loyalty scale. See Appendix D for a list of the exact questions.

An inspection of the plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values revealed that the data did not pass the test of homoscedasticity, requiring correction by logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable (Figure 6) (Laerd Statistics, 2015d).

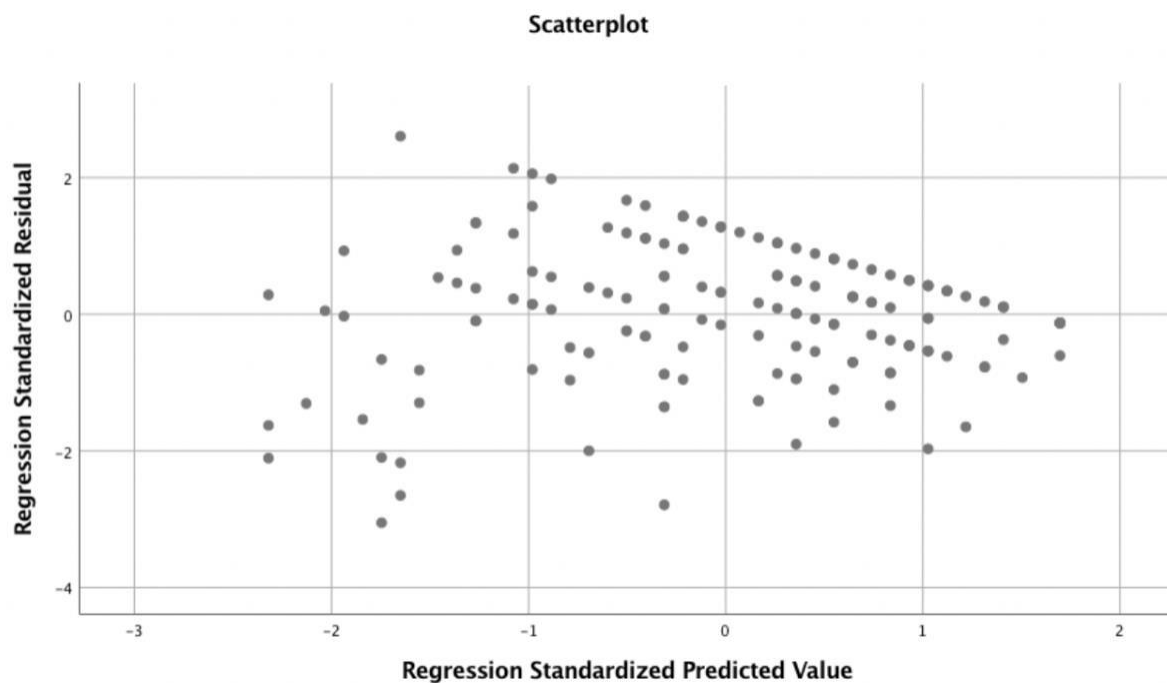


Figure 6. Scatter plot of standardized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values of brand advocacy.

This transformation complete, the linear regression was rerun using the transformed version of the dependent variable (Williams, 2015). There was independence of residuals as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.166, and the residuals were normally distributed as assessed by visual inspection of a normal probability plot (Figure 7).

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

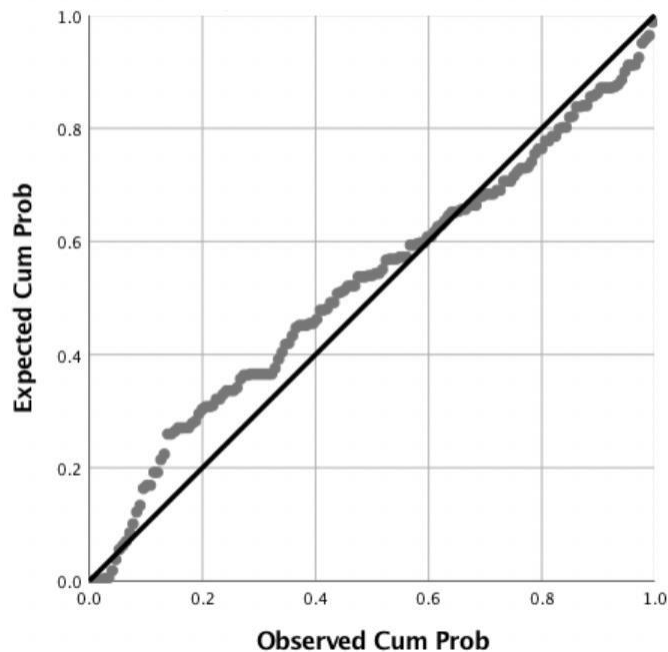


Figure 7. Normal probability plot for dependent variable brand advocacy (transformed).

The prediction equation was: brand advocacy = .477 + .058 * self-brand connection. Self-brand connection statistically significantly predicted brand advocacy, $F(1,161) = 96.729$, $p < .01$, accounting for 37.5% of the variation in brand loyalty with adjusted $R^2 = 37.1\%$, a medium size effect according to Cohen (1988). A one unit increase in self-brand connection leads to a 0.058 (95% CI, .046 to .070) increase in brand advocacy.

Differences between early and late responses. All of the component scores were tested for late response bias by comparing the first and last thirty responses using independent sample t-

tests (Table 10). All items passed normality tests, as indicated by significance values greater than .05 on Lavene's Test for Equality of Variances (Laerd Statistics, 2015c). There were no signs of major late response bias, as indicated by significance values greater than .05 on the T-Tests for Equality of Means (Laerd Statistics, 2015c).

Table 10

Differences Between Early and Late Responses: Independent Samples T-Tests

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
OutdoorAVG	Equal variances assumed	.361	.550	-.992	72	.324	-.29730	.29963	-.89459	.30000
	Equal variances not assumed			-.992	71.205	.324	-.29730	.29963	-.89470	.30011
CultureAVG	Equal variances assumed	.455	.502	-1.311	72	.194	-.34234	.26106	-.86276	.17808
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.311	71.978	.194	-.34234	.26106	-.86276	.17808
BusAVG	Equal variances assumed	.151	.699	-.762	72	.449	-.21622	.28383	-.78202	.34958
	Equal variances not assumed			-.762	71.822	.449	-.21622	.28383	-.78204	.34961
ShoppingAVG	Equal variances assumed	.242	.625	-1.479	72	.144	-.40541	.27416	-.95194	.14113
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.479	71.785	.144	-.40541	.27416	-.95197	.14116
LoyaltyAVG	Equal variances assumed	.498	.482	-.989	72	.326	-.35135	.35514	-1.05931	.35661
	Equal variances not assumed			-.989	71.967	.326	-.35135	.35514	-1.05932	.35662
AdvocacyAVG	Equal variances assumed	.253	.617	-.088	72	.930	-.02703	.30878	-.64257	.58852
	Equal variances not assumed			-.088	71.272	.930	-.02703	.30878	-.64268	.58862
SBCAVG	Equal variances assumed	.399	.530	-1.407	72	.164	-.49807	.35406	-1.20388	.20775
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.407	71.205	.164	-.49807	.35406	-1.20402	.20788
Columbus offers access to quality K-12 education	Equal variances assumed	.527	.470	-.062	72	.951	-.027	.436	-.896	.842
	Equal variances not assumed			-.062	71.508	.951	-.027	.436	-.896	.842
Columbus offers adequate public transportation	Equal variances assumed	.448	.505	-.468	72	.641	-.189	.404	-.995	.617
	Equal variances not assumed			-.468	71.528	.641	-.189	.404	-.995	.617

Differences between response sources. The data were also tested for differences between the primary and secondary survey response sources (Table 11). 152 responses were collected through the Eastmoor Civic Association and an additional 11 were collected through the Franklinton Area Neighbors (six responses) and SurveyMonkey research service (five responses). Neither of the secondary sources was large enough to be meaningfully compared with the primary source individually, and were instead considered as a combined group (Laerd

Statistics, 2015c). With one exception (shopping environment), there were no signs of statistically significant differences, as indicated by significance values greater than .05 on Lavene's Test for Equality of Variances. Shopping environment violated the assumption of homogeneity ($p = .026$) and the mean shopping environment score for responses that did not come from the Eastmoor Civic Association was .55 higher (95% CI, -.71 to 1.81) than those that did. The T-Test for Equality of Means however showed this result to be statistically insignificant ($P=.37$).

Table 11

Differences Between Response Sources: Independent Samples T-Tests

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Outdoor	Equal variances assumed	.059	.810	.178	20	.861	.13636	.76790	-1.46545	1.73817
	Equal variances not assumed			.178	19.968	.861	.13636	.76790	-1.46561	1.73834
Business	Equal variances assumed	.194	.665	1.228	20	.234	.60606	.49348	-.42333	1.63545
	Equal variances not assumed			1.228	18.860	.235	.60606	.49348	-.42733	1.63945
Shopping	Equal variances assumed	5.774	.026	.930	20	.363	.54545	.58635	-.67764	1.76855
	Equal variances not assumed			.930	13.764	.368	.54545	.58635	-.71416	1.80506
Cultural	Equal variances assumed	4.199	.054	.706	20	.488	.39394	.55794	-.76990	1.55778
	Equal variances not assumed			.706	14.706	.491	.39394	.55794	-.79735	1.58523
SBC	Equal variances assumed	.927	.347	-.032	20	.975	-.02597	.81455	-1.72509	1.67314
	Equal variances not assumed			-.032	19.670	.975	-.02597	.81455	-1.72691	1.67497
Loyalty	Equal variances assumed	1.171	.292	1.237	20	.230	.77273	.62457	-.53009	2.07555
	Equal variances not assumed			1.237	16.563	.233	.77273	.62457	-.54764	2.09310
Advocacy	Equal variances assumed	.072	.792	.458	20	.652	.31818	.69502	-1.13161	1.76798
	Equal variances not assumed			.458	19.991	.652	.31818	.69502	-1.13165	1.76802
Columbus offers access to quality K-12 education	Equal variances assumed	1.601	.220	-.189	20	.852	-.182	.961	-2.187	1.823
	Equal variances not assumed			-.189	19.368	.852	-.182	.961	-2.191	1.827
Columbus offers adequate public transportation	Equal variances assumed	1.322	.264	.929	20	.364	.818	.880	-1.018	2.655
	Equal variances not assumed			.929	19.335	.364	.818	.880	-1.022	2.659

Additional t-tests were run to check for differences between genders and income levels. The gender results passed normality tests, and significance values greater than .05 on the T-Tests for

Equality of Means demonstrated no statistically significant differences between gender groups (Table 12).

Table 12

Differences Between Genders: Independent Samples T-Tests

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
BusinessAverage	Equal variances assumed	1.756	.187	-1.041	161	.299	-.19632	.18851	-.56859	.17595
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.096	95.512	.276	-.19632	.17911	-.55188	.15924
ShoppingAvg	Equal variances assumed	3.237	.074	-1.820	161	.071	-.33923	.18637	-.70729	.02882
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.096	118.848	.038	-.33923	.16187	-.65975	-.01871
CulturalEnvAverage	Equal variances assumed	.039	.843	.951	161	.343	.17186	.18071	-.18501	.52874
	Equal variances not assumed			.944	83.941	.348	.17186	.18202	-.19011	.53384
NaturalEnvAvg	Equal variances assumed	1.638	.202	-.130	161	.897	-.02632	.20213	-.42550	.37286
	Equal variances not assumed			-.145	109.593	.885	-.02632	.18138	-.38579	.33315
LoyaltyAvg	Equal variances assumed	.000	.983	-.362	161	.718	-.08511	.23491	-.54900	.37879
	Equal variances not assumed			-.366	87.370	.715	-.08511	.23222	-.54664	.37642
AdvocacyAvg	Equal variances assumed	.042	.838	-1.854	161	.066	-.42902	.23139	-.88597	.02793
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.813	81.321	.074	-.42902	.23666	-.89987	.04184
SBCAvg	Equal variances assumed	1.506	.222	-.604	161	.547	-.15633	.25889	-.66758	.35493
	Equal variances not assumed			-.623	91.136	.535	-.15633	.25109	-.65507	.34242
Columbusoffersaccessto qualityK12education	Equal variances assumed	.972	.326	.459	161	.647	.143	.312	-.473	.760
	Equal variances not assumed			.456	84.137	.649	.143	.314	-.481	.768
Columbusoffersadequat epublictransportation	Equal variances assumed	1.720	.192	-.428	161	.670	-.122	.286	-.687	.443
	Equal variances not assumed			-.443	92.297	.659	-.122	.276	-.670	.426

The same was true for potential differences between income levels, except in relation to outdoor opportunities, shopping environment, and advocacy, which in each case were shown to be statistically insignificant by values great than .05 on the t-test for Equality of Means (Table 13).

Table 13

Independent Samples T-Test: Income Level

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Outdoor	Equal variances assumed	3.912	.050	-.642	162	.522	-.15530	.24192	-.63302	.32242
	Equal variances not assumed			-.532	35.005	.598	-.15530	.29167	-.74743	.43683
Business	Equal variances assumed	3.497	.063	-1.264	162	.208	-.28123	.22255	-.72069	.15824
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.059	35.260	.297	-.28123	.26547	-.82001	.25756
Shopping	Equal variances assumed	14.904	.000	-1.976	162	.050	-.43499	.22009	-.86961	-.00038
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.451	32.582	.156	-.43499	.29986	-1.04536	.17537
Cultural	Equal variances assumed	2.426	.121	-.158	162	.875	-.03389	.21434	-.45715	.38937
	Equal variances not assumed			-.132	35.233	.895	-.03389	.25596	-.55339	.48561
SBC	Equal variances assumed	1.996	.160	-.381	162	.704	-.11797	.30993	-.72999	.49405
	Equal variances not assumed			-.338	36.820	.737	-.11797	.34854	-.82430	.58835
Loyalty	Equal variances assumed	3.134	.079	-.712	162	.477	-.19719	.27688	-.74395	.34957
	Equal variances not assumed			-.612	35.864	.545	-.19719	.32243	-.85119	.45681
Advocacy	Equal variances assumed	3.917	.049	-1.113	162	.267	-.30600	.27491	-.84888	.23687
	Equal variances not assumed			-.959	35.944	.344	-.30600	.31916	-.95332	.34131
Columbus offers access to quality K-12 education	Equal variances assumed	.006	.939	.664	162	.507	.247	.371	-.487	.980
	Equal variances not assumed			.683	42.159	.498	.247	.361	-.482	.976
Columbus offers adequate public transportation	Equal variances assumed	.694	.406	-.349	162	.728	-.118	.338	-.785	.549
	Equal variances not assumed			-.320	37.808	.751	-.118	.368	-.862	.627

Differences by age, household size, and time in Columbus. One-way ANOVA tests were used to test for differences between the three categories of the variables age groups (20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60 or above), household-size (1 – person, 2 – person, 3 – person, 4 or more – person), and years in Columbus (less than one year, 1 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, more than 10 years) and Self-Brand Connection. In all cases the differences between groups were not statistically significant ($p = .343, .367$, and $.118$ respectively).

Summary of Findings

This study sought to establish a conceptual basis for a relationship between city attributes and self-brand connection. It succeeded in showing that among participants in the study, three city attribute variables – outdoor opportunities, business environment, and access to K-12

education – did have a statistically significant impact on the formation of self-brand connections in city residents. It was also able to show that for those residents, self-brand connection was a statistically significant antecedent to brand loyalty and brand advocacy. This study lays a helpful foundation for future research into creating and managing city brands. Specific implications of this study and suggestions for future research will be addressed in the next chapter.

Limitations of Findings

This research is limited in a number of important ways. First, the design of the study was intended to test a conceptual model, not to produce generalizable results. The research sought to find evidence of a connection between specific city attributes and the formation of self-brand connections among a non-probability sample in Columbus, Ohio. While it was able to show that self-brand connections were significantly impacted by changes in specific city attributes, it does not offer a set formula for predicting the strength of self-brand connections for all residents of Columbus or other cities. The study focused almost exclusively on a single Columbus zip code, and respondents to the study's survey skewed strongly female, older and higher income than the population of the city as a whole.

Data for this research were gathered primarily through partnerships with neighborhood associations. Collecting data in this way creates the possibility that respondents will be inherently more engaged in the life of the city than a typical resident – they are already connected to a civic organization (the neighborhood association) and encountered the survey because they participated in that organization by attending a meeting or reading an association email or Facebook post. Perhaps such individuals are also more likely to exhibit self-brand connections, brand loyalty, and brand advocacy.

This study is also limited by the data it did not collect. The demographic information section of the survey was deliberately kept short, and answer categories kept broad so as not to discourage responses. Race, level of education, commute time, primary mode of transportation, and home ownership are just a few of the data points that were not collected but could provide perspectives that significantly alter interpretation of the data.

The city attribute scales were also limited by the length of the survey. Merrilees et al. (2009, 2013, & 2018) identified and measured 55 city attributes across their three studies, but this study chose to focus on 15 that were judged to be the most promising for potential impact on self-brand connection. There are likely many additional city attributes that could influence self-brand connection which were not explored in this study or have even yet to be identified in the broader literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine which city attributes help produce strong self-brand connections between city residents and the city brand. The study found that the city attributes of outdoor opportunities, business environment, and access to K-12 education helped create strong self-brand connections. In addition, this study showed that strong self-brand connections increased brand loyalty and advocacy. This chapter will discuss the significance of these findings and suggest directions for future research.

Implications

City attributes as antecedents of self-brand connection. Previous research has explored self-brand connection as an antecedent of city brand attitudes (Schade et al., 2018), and also city attributes as antecedents of city brand attitudes (Merrilees et al., 2009). This study was the first (to the author's knowledge) to investigate city attributes as antecedents of self-brand connection. This is significant because self-brand connection is concerned with how individuals relate the brand to themselves (Escalas & Bettman, 2003); an understanding that impacts their attitude toward the brand (Schade et al., 2018), their loyalty to the brand (Kemp et al., 2012b), their engagement with the brand (Kemp et al., 2012a, 2012b), and as this study showed, their advocacy for the brand. It is important to draw a distinction between self-brand connection (how a person relates a brand to themselves) and brand attitudes, which encompass a person's overall evaluation of a brand (Keller, 1993). This subtle difference is more than semantics. It is possible for a consumer to have an overall positive evaluation of a brand, and still not consider that brand "for me." For example, a consumer may regard Tesla vehicles as the best in their class and highly desirable, but also hold no intention of purchasing a Tesla – they think of themselves as a

Honda person. Consumer brand managers may be content with a focus on brand attitude because their strategy is built on segmentation. They understand their brand as not for everyone, and indeed, rely on it. City brand managers do not have this luxury. They can use segmentation as a tool for communication and delivering the brand promise but cannot use it to as a strategy that assumes the brand is only for a certain group of consumers: the city brand must be for all the city's residents, and a multitude of other stakeholders (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). This is the point where the city brand literature and even practitioners lose a clear sense of direction. The city brand's stakeholders are diverse and inevitably relate themselves to their city in diverse ways. Current city branding best practice prescribes identifying the salient aspects of a city brand by gathering direct input from stakeholders representing different neighborhoods, professional roles, and cultural points of view (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). The intent of this process is inclusivity, but necessarily requires a distillation of ideas and opinions into common themes, and a deemphasizing, if not ignoring of some perspectives. One advantage of a focus on self-brand connection is that it allows a brand manager to be less concerned with trying to articulate *what* meaning millions of people assign to the city brand, and instead be primarily concerned with *how* those people come to connect with the brand in a personal way. This study has shown that it is possible to identify specific city attributes as antecedents of self-brand connection. Equipped with this practical information about their own city, brand leaders could encourage the development of a strong brand by directing investment into city attributes that are known to facilitate the formation of self-brand connection.

Self-brand connection as an antecedent of brand advocacy and loyalty. This study showed that the formation of a self-brand connection increased the likelihood that a person

would become a brand advocate or be loyal to the brand. This is significant because primary purposes of any brand are to increase consumer loyalty and advocacy (Keller, 1993; Johansson & Carlson, 2014). While multiple studies have examined the interaction between self-brand connection and a city brand (Kemp et al., 2012a, 2012b; Schade et al., 2018), only one (Kemp et al., 2012b) established a link between self-brand connection and brand advocacy, and none sought to show that self-brand connection contributed to brand loyalty. This finding helps demonstrate that self-brand connection can be a practical and effective tool for city brand managers; not only can it help to identify specific attributes that contribute to brand strength, but it is also a direct antecedent of key brand outcomes such as loyalty and advocacy.

Antecedents of self-brand connection are unique to each city brand. A self-brand connection can only be formed when a brand's image and personality align with a consumer's current or aspirational image of themselves (Escalas, 2004). When a person forms a self-brand connection with a city brand, it is motivated by this same desire to use the brand as a means of self-expression. Because any official city brand will by its nature be unique (with official names, logos, and slogans protected by trademark) and carry a unique set of associations that contribute to a unique personality, people will form self-brand connections with city brands for unique reasons. This is important because it also means that city attributes that are antecedents of self-brand connection for one city brand will not necessarily be antecedents of self-brand connection for another. For a city brand manager then, understanding the broader city brand literature will not be enough to adequately understand and manage their own brand. Following prescriptive approaches that encourage city brands to improve as much as possible according to standardized scales (GFK, 2019) is an approach that is likely to overlook the brand's unique strength and

potential. Instead, city brand leaders should invest in primary research to discover what city attributes are associated with self-brand connections in their particular city. This study has presented a conceptual model for undertaking such research in any city.

Self-brand connection and negative city attributes. A notable outcome of this study is that many respondents who exhibited self-brand connections also held negative views of some city attributes. Of 70 respondents who had a self-brand connection of five or more (a moderate to very strong self-brand connection), 38% of them held a negative view (response of three or below) of Columbus' access to public transportation, and 27% held a negative view of Columbus' access to K-12 education. This can be partially explained by self-brand connection research that has shown that when consumers form a self-brand connection, they are likely to become more tolerant of the brand's service failures, and even disposed to defending the brand from disparaging information or views (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Thomas & Saenger, 2017). Another aspect of the observation is that because self-brand connection is about using the brand as a means of self-expression, it is likely that a city brand can perform poorly with some attributes (such as access to public transportation or access to K-12 education) because they do not directly threaten the person's concept of the brand's meaning or their own identity. If for example, a person's concept of the Columbus brand as being "open and smart" is rooted in their experience within the Columbus business community, that person may, to a certain point, be willing to ignore some negative attributes like access to public transportation and K-12 education – for them those attributes are not what gives the brand its meaning. City brand managers need to understand which attributes can be ignored (or at least receive less emphasis) without threatening the core strength of the brand. Future studies concerning city brands and self-brand

connection might consider not only asking participants to evaluate specific city attributes as this study has done, but also asking respondents to rate the importance of each of those attributes.

The Official City Brand and Unofficial City Brand. This study measured individuals' self-brand connections with Columbus' official city brand. Self-brand connections, however, are ultimately built on an individual's entire set of associations with the brand – associations which may originate partially or entirely from unofficial sources (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998). In the context of this study, this means that it is possible that city residents could feel no connection to the official Columbus brand, but a strong connection to the brand (the city) as they understand it. A comparison of survey response scores for loyalty, advocacy, and self-brand connection suggest that this may be the case. Histograms of scores for loyalty (Figure 8) and advocacy (Figure 9) show greater frequencies of high scores than those seen for self-brand connection (Figure 10).

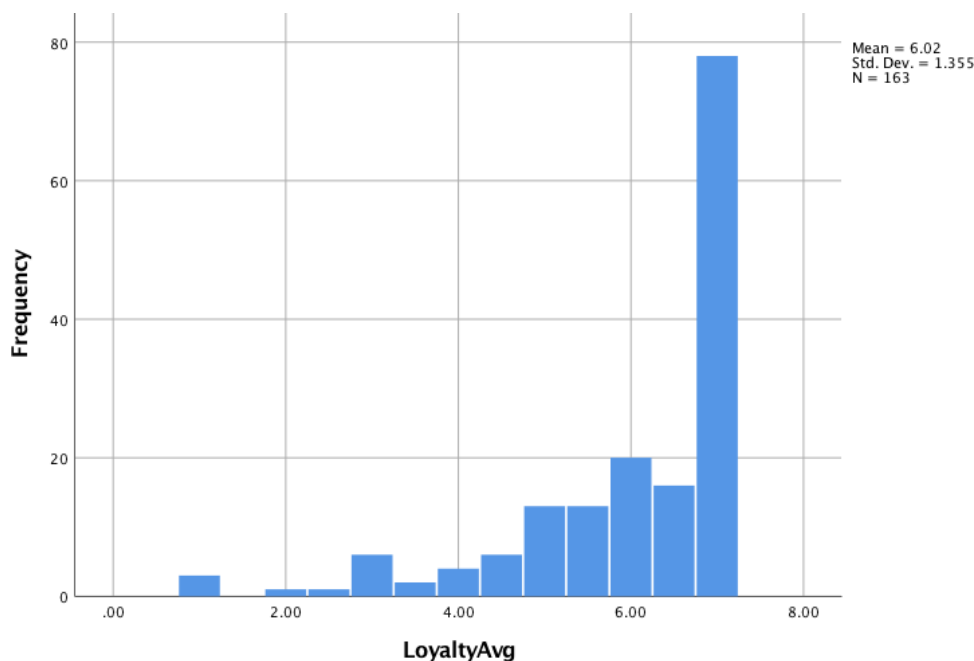


Figure 8. Histogram of brand loyalty scores.

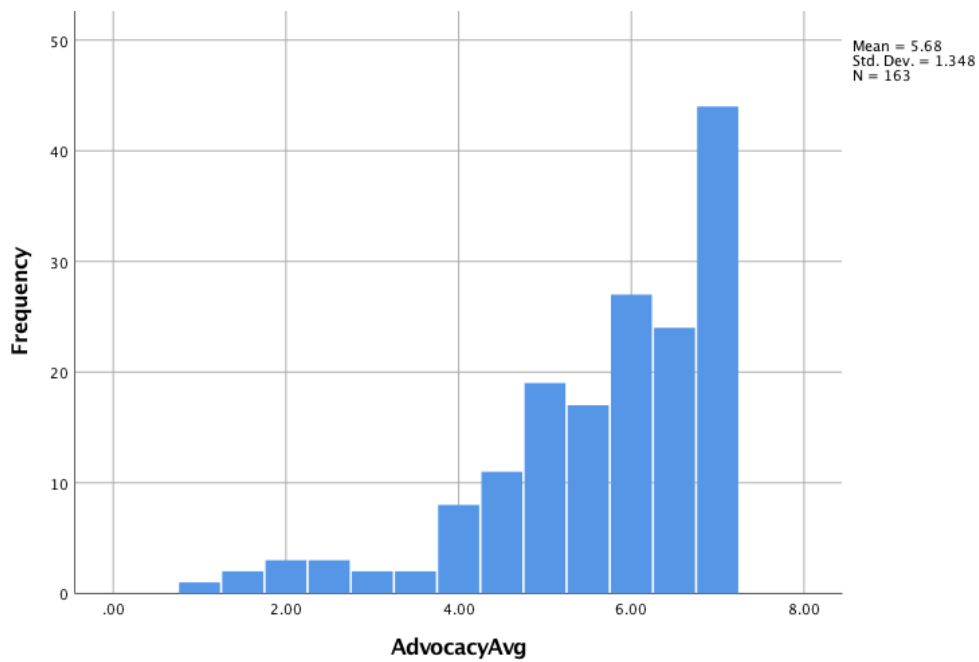


Figure 9. Histogram of brand advocacy scores.

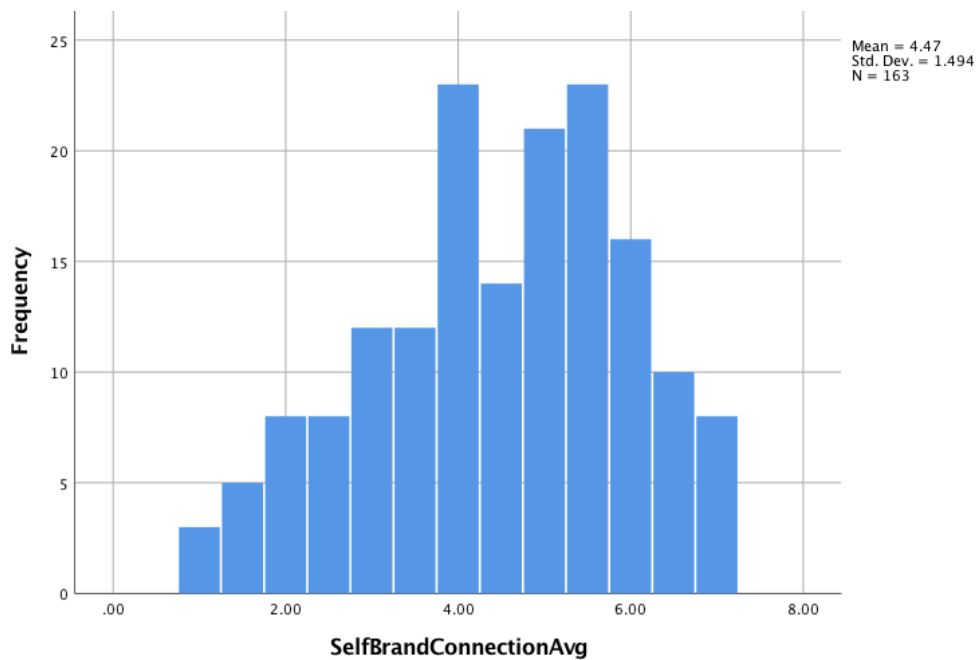


Figure 10. Histogram of self-brand connection scores.

If brand loyalty and advocacy are expected outcomes of self-brand connection as this study and others suggest (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Kemp et al., 2012b; Sameeni & Qadeer, 2015; Thomas & Saenger, 2017) it would be expected that scores and frequencies for the three would be more consistent. One explanation might be that many residents experience a self-brand connection with the unofficial brand, but not the official brand, which was measured in this study. This could be an indication that the official brand is not well understood, or that there are some fundamental differences between the official and unofficial brands that if accounted for, could help produce stronger self-brand connections (and better brand outcomes) with the official brand.

Future Research

This study laid conceptual groundwork for understanding the relationship between city attributes, self-brand connection and brand outcomes. Future research could expand on these findings in several ways.

Expand the scale of the study in a single city. This study focused on a single area of one city, and its sample was not representative of the city's population. Now that this study has shown that a relationship between city attributes, self-brand connection with a city brand, and city brand outcomes exists, a logical next step in research would be to replicate the study on a scale that would allow results to be generalizable to an entire city's population. Such a study would ideally gather sufficient data to reliably compare differences in antecedents to self-brand connection between the city's various neighborhoods and demographic groups. This study would be important because it would allow the city's brand managers to a) understand if there are city attributes that help facilitate self-brand connections across the city's sociodemographic groups;

b) understand if there are city attributes that are more important among some groups or areas of the city than others; and c) gain an understanding of what strength (or weakness) means for a specific city attribute by reviewing the actual related infrastructure in areas of the city where extreme scores exist (e.g., if a single neighborhood had an average score for the outdoor opportunities variable that was far above the citywide average, reviewing the physical environment of that neighborhood could provide a practical example of how to create high scores in that category).

Expand the scale of the study to include multiple cities. Although city brands and the opportunities for self-expression they afford are necessarily unique, studies of self-brand connection in multiple cities could reveal that there are some city attributes that are common antecedents to self-brand connection. This would be an important discovery, especially for cities that have little budget to invest in researching and developing an official brand. While such information would not provide a complete picture of what underlies self-brand connection for any one city, it could provide a helpful starting point for cities that want to put self-brand connection at the center of their brand strategy.

Consider additional stakeholders. This study focused on self-brand connections formed by residents of a city. These stakeholders are the most important to a city brand and the true source of its identity (Zenker & Braun, 2017), but other stakeholders such as tourists and external businesspeople are the brand's intended audience too (Muñiz Martinez, 2012). Research into what if any differences exist between the attributes that facilitate self-brand connections for these constituencies and those that are important to primary stakeholders' self-brand connections could provide needed guidance to city brand managers.

Explore additional attributes. This study explored the impact of 15 city attributes on the formation of self-brand connections, which together were able to explain only 37.8% of the variance in self-brand connection. Clearly, there is still much more to explain in regard to what attributes are associated with the creation of self-brand connections. The literature has identified many more attributes (Merrilees et al., 2009; 2013; 2018) that could be important to self-brand connection and may be worthy of future study. Attributes that are focused on social factors should be considered of particular interest. The self-brand connection literature repeatedly notes that the influence of reference groups plays a key role in the formation of self-brand connections (Fournier, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Tian & Bearden, 2001; Chaplin & John, 2005; Thomas & Saenger, 2017), and other seminal theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior draw clear connections between social influences and a consumer's feelings toward a brand (Hegner, Fenko, & Teravest, 2017).

Compare official and unofficial brands. The implications section of this chapter noted that there is reason to believe that city residents can form self-brand connections with the unofficial city brand but not the official city brand and vice versa. Future research might explore if this idea is valid, and if so, what differences exist between self-brand connections with unofficial and official city brands. Such research could help city brand leaders understand if and how their brand is misaligned and point toward strategies to make the official brand more effective.

Conclusion

A self-brand connection can motivate a person to be loyal to a brand, advocate for it, defend it, forgive it, and engage with it. This study has shown that residents of a city can not only

form self-brand connections with a city brand, but that the formation of these connections can be associated with specific city attributes that may be influenced by city leaders. This emphasis on self-brand connections and city attributes is significant because it allows city brand managers to be somewhat removed from the near impossible task of defining the meaning of a city on behalf of the thousands or millions of people who live there. Instead of pursuing a brand strategy intently focused on *what* a brand is, brand leaders can build a strategy around *how* a brand comes to be. A city brand manager's goal may not be that all residents can articulate the brand in the same way, but that all of them will develop a self-brand connection to the brand, even if they understand the brand in a multitude of ways. This strategy acknowledges the inherent complexity of a city brand, and still remains focused on desirable brand outcomes such as loyalty and advocacy, which this study has shown are associated with strong self-brand connections.

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Columbus Brand Survey

Thank you for your help! The purpose of this survey is to improve understanding of how particular aspects of life in Columbus impact residents' perception of the official Columbus brand. By completing this survey you are also helping to **earn up to \$400 for the Eastmoor Civic Association** (donation amount is linked to the number of Eastmoor residents who complete the survey). Your **responses are anonymous** and voluntary, and you may quit the survey at any time by closing your browser window or tab.

We'll start with your perceptions of Columbus...

- * 1 Columbus offers good access to outdoor recreation

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

* 2 Columbus offers good access to natural beauty

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

* 3 Columbus is a good place for families

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

* 4 Columbus is culturally diverse

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree 7

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly Agree

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

* 17 I plan to live in Columbus for as long as possible

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 18 I recommend to other people that they visit Columbus

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 19 I tell others why I like living in Columbus

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Columbus Brand

Please read the Columbus brand statement and then rate how you personally relate to the Columbus brand (brand description and logo below). The official Columbus Brand Guide defines the Columbus brand this way:

Columbus has an open-minded approach to life and business. It's a smart region with a progressive attitude, where people are free to go out on a limb. Where diversity isn't just a state of being, but a state of mind. Columbus is made real through ideas, lifestyles and neighborhoods—every day. Because we share the philosophy that Columbus is open to all, we are always thinking forward, always thinking big, and always open to new ideas. In Columbus, we are not only able—we are encouraged—to thrive.

COLUMBUS

* 20 Columbus' branding reflects who I am

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 21 I can identify with Columbus' branding

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 22 I feel a personal connection to Columbus' branding

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 23 I can use Columbus' branding to communicate who I am to other people

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 24 I think Columbus' branding helps me become the type of person I want to be

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 25 I consider Columbus' branding to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

* 26 Columbus' branding efforts suit me well

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

About You

This information will remain anonymous. We are only collecting it to make sure we have a good representation of the whole city, and not just one or two groups of people.

* 27 What is your zip code?

* 28 Which option describes your household?

☐ 1-person household

☐ 3-person household

☐ 2-person household

☐ 4-or-more-person household

* 29 Which option describes your annual household income?

☐ Less than \$50,000

☐ \$50,000 or above

* 30 Which age bracket do you fall into?

☐ Below 20

☐ 40 - 59

☐ 20 - 39

☐ 60 or above

* 31 What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

* 32 How long have you lived in Columbus?

☐ Less than a year

☐ 6 - 10 years

☐ 1 - 5 years

☐ More than 10 years

Thank you for your help! Please feel free to contact columbusbrandsurvey@gmail.com with any questions or concerns.

Appendix B

Self-Brand Connection Scale Questions

1. Columbus' branding reflects who I am (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
2. I can identify with Columbus' branding (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
3. I feel a personal connection to Columbus' branding (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
4. I (can) use Columbus' branding to communicate who I am to other people (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
5. I think Columbus' branding (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
6. I consider Columbus' branding to be "me" (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
7. Columbus' branding suits me well (strongly disagree/strongly agree)

Appendix C

City Attribute Scales and Questions

Scale	Questions Seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
Outdoor Spaces	Columbus offers good access to outdoor recreation
Outdoor Spaces	Columbus offers good access to natural beauty
Cultural Environment	Columbus is culturally diverse
Cultural Environment	Columbus offers many leisure activities
Cultural Environment	Columbus offers many cultural events and festivals
Business Environment	Columbus encourages business innovation
Business Environment	Columbus businesses are thriving
Business Environment	Columbus offers good job opportunities
Access to Education	Columbus offers access to quality K-12 education
Access to Public Transit	Columbus offers adequate public transportation
Shopping Environment	Columbus offers a wide choice of retail shopping
Shopping Environment	Columbus offers a wide choice of eating and drinking establishments

Appendix D

Brand Outcomes Scales and Questions

Scale	Questions Seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree/strongly agree)
Loyalty	I am content to live in Columbus for the next year or two
Loyalty	I plan to live in Columbus for as long as possible
Advocacy	I recommend to other people that they visit Columbus
Advocacy	I tell others why I like living in Columbus