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Article

Erbil Citadel as a Brand for the City, The Role of Residents Awareness and Perceptions

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Abstract: The branding of cities through their historical and cultural assets has become a pivotal strategy in urban development and tourism. This study focuses on Erbil Citadel, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its potential as a brand for Erbil, a city with a rich historical backdrop and flourishing urban landscape. The study aimed to explore the perceptions of Erbil's residents regarding the cultural significance of the Citadel and its potential as a city brand. A mixed-method survey questionnaire was conducted, collecting data from around 440 residents through both manual distribution around the Citadel and an online platform. The findings were analysed using SPSS to provide both descriptive and inferential statistical insights. The findings show that locals are well aware of the Citadel's significance as a significant historical and cultural symbol of the city. The vast majority of participants acknowledged its unique visual attributes and their representation of the city's cultural and historical identity. Additionally, the results showed that citizens' perceptions of the Citadel as a good component of city branding were positively correlated with their level of cultural awareness. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on city branding and heritage sites by providing empirical evidence on the impact of residents' cultural awareness on their perceptions of heritage sites as city brands. The results highlight how crucial cultural education and community involvement are to maximizing the branding potential of historic locations. Policymakers and urban planners may find the findings of the study useful in utilizing Erbil Citadel's historical relevance to strengthen Erbil's brand identity internationally.

Keywords: city branding; heritage sites; Erbil citadel; resident perceptions; cultural awareness

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of city branding has gained significant attention as cities worldwide seek to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive global landscape [1]. City branding involves the strategic development and promotion of a city's unique identity, values, and assets to attract tourists, businesses, and residents [2]. This process often includes the utilization of cultural heritage sites as key components of a city's brand identity. The concept of city branding has emerged as a strategic approach for cities to distinguish themselves in the competitive marketplace of global urbanization [3]. At the heart of city branding lies the notion of creating a unique and compelling identity that resonates with residents, visitors, and investors alike.

Each place, might be a country, region, city-region, town or district, performs many different domestic and foreign objectives: these include investment attraction, international competition, attractive internal services, etc. "Each place needs its specific solutions to be successful" [4].

Within the development of the city and the improvement of human capabilities also need to increase the opportunities to achieve these needs has been raised.

One of the key elements of city branding is the utilization of heritage sites as powerful symbols of a city's identity and cultural heritage. Heritage sites, such as historic landmarks, archaeological sites, and cultural monuments, serve as tangible manifestations of a city's history, traditions, and collective memory [5]. These sites not only attract tourists and stimulate economic activity but also foster a sense of pride and belonging among residents [6].

Heritage sites play a crucial role in city branding efforts, serving as tangible symbols of a city's history, culture, and identity [7]. These sites, which may include historic buildings, landmarks, and archaeological sites, contribute to a city's sense of place and provide opportunities for tourism, economic development, and cultural preservation [8]. Moreover, heritage sites can enhance a city's reputation and visibility on the global stage, attracting visitors and investment while fostering local pride and community engagement [9].

In the context of Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the Erbil Citadel stands as a testament to the city's rich history and cultural heritage. As one of the oldest continuously inhabited urban areas in the world, the Citadel holds immense historical, architectural, and symbolic value [UNESCO, n.d.]. With its ancient fortifications, winding alleys, and historical significance, the Citadel represents a unique opportunity for Erbil to leverage its heritage assets in its branding efforts.

The Citadel, with its rich history and architectural significance, represents a focal point for Erbil's city branding efforts, showcasing the city's cultural heritage and attracting tourists from around the globe.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Erbil Citadel holds global significance as a site of outstanding universal value, recognized for its architectural, historical, and cultural importance [UNESCO, n.d.]. The Citadel's distinctive architecture, characterized by its towering mud-brick walls, narrow alleys, and traditional courtyard houses, provides valuable insights into the architectural practices and urban planning of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations See Figure 1.



Figure 1. Erbil Citadel During 1930s. Source: Morris [10].

Moreover, the Erbil Citadel serves as a living heritage site, with a vibrant community of residents continuing to inhabit its historic quarters to this day[10]. This unique blend of past and present, tradition and modernity, lends the Citadel a dynamic character that captures the imagination of visitors and residents alike.

Furthermore, the Erbil Citadel serves as a symbol of identity and pride for the people of Erbil, embodying their collective memory, cultural heritage, and sense of belonging. By safeguarding and celebrating the Citadel's heritage, the city of Erbil reaffirms its commitment to preserving its cultural legacy for future generations.

In conclusion, the Erbil Citadel holds immense significance as a heritage site, representing the historical, architectural, cultural, and economic heritage of Erbil and its people. Its recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site underscores its universal value and highlights the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Erbil Citadel faces various challenges related to conservation, sustainable development, and the enhancement of its cultural value. Rapid urbanization, infrastructure development, and socioeconomic changes pose threats to the integrity and authenticity of the Citadel. One of the threatening issues is the cultural awareness of the residents on the cultural value of the citadel.

By examining the intersection of city branding and heritage sites, researchers aim to understand how cities like Erbil can capitalize on their cultural assets to enhance their global visibility, economic vitality, and overall quality of life for residents. While previous research has focused on tourism

perspectives and economic impacts, less attention has been paid to how residents perceive and engage with the Citadel as a symbol of their city's identity and heritage. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature by examining the perceptions of Erbil residents concerning the potential of the Erbil Citadel to serve as a brand for the city. Specifically, it focuses on the residents' awareness of the Citadel, their perceptions of its cultural significance, and its role in enhancing the city's international reputation.

The Erbil citadel, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with great cultural significance, is not adequately addressed in existing literature in terms of its potential for branding, particularly in regards to resident perceptions and awareness. Therefore, this study's main goal is to examine how residents of Erbil perceive the potential of the Erbil Citadel as a brand for the city. Specifically, the study seeks to explore residents' awareness and the cultural significance associated with the Citadel, while also highlighting its role in shaping the city's identity and cultivating a sense of place among its inhabitants. The study employs a survey methodology to gather data directly from residents of Erbil. Through the analysis of survey responses, the study seeks to provide insights into the significance of heritage sites like the Erbil Citadel in the city branding process, offering valuable implications for urban planning, tourism development, and cultural preservation efforts.

2. Review of Studies on Heritage Sites as a brand for the City

City branding has emerged as a significant area of study within urban planning, marketing, and tourism management disciplines, focusing on the strategic development and promotion of cities as unique destinations with distinct identities and competitive advantages [11].

City branding, also referred to as place branding or destination branding, involves the deliberate process of creating and managing perceptions, images, and reputations of cities to attract residents, visitors, investors, and businesses [12] [13]. It encompasses various dimensions, including culture, history, infrastructure, governance, and quality of life, which collectively contribute to the overall brand identity and positioning of a city [14]. There are some key components of city branding which can be summarized as : **Identity and Image:** City branding begins with the articulation of a city's unique identity, which encompasses its cultural heritage, architectural landmarks, natural landscapes, economic activities, and social fabric [15]. The creation of a compelling brand image involves the strategic communication of these attributes through visual imagery, storytelling [5]. These can be focused on the historical and cultural significance of the heritages sites, Landmarks and the visual characteristics of the architectural heritages of the the city. **Competitive Positioning:** Effective city branding requires careful analysis of a city's competitive strengths and weaknesses in comparison to rival destinations [2] [16]. This involves identifying unique selling propositions (USPs) or "brand assets" that differentiate the city from others and leveraging them to gain a competitive edge in attracting target audiences [17] [18]). The role of the object that is intended to be the brand in the city in representing the overall charm of the city and how its maintaing the historical authoncity. **Stakeholder Engagement:** City branding is a collaborative process that involves the active participation of various stakeholders, including government authorities, local businesses, community organizations, residents, and tourists [19]. Engaging stakeholders in brand development initiatives fosters buy-in, builds consensus, and ensures the alignment of brand messages with local values and aspirations [20] [21]. The level of awareness and acceptance of the stakeholders specially the residents which they are considered as an important layer of the componenets of the city, and their sense of pride for the city and the role of the object to mae the sense of belonging stronger since its represent the cultural value and identity. **Brand Management and Governance:** Effective city branding requires the establishment of governance structures and mechanisms for coordinating brand management activities across different sectors and levels of government [22][23]. This may involve the creation of dedicated branding agencies, public-private partnerships, or collaborative networks to oversee brand implementation, monitor performance, and adapt strategies to changing market conditions [24] [25]. Also the active participating of different community segments in the cultural events have positive effect on the awarenees of the residents regarding the objects and sites.

The intersection of heritage sites and city branding has been the subject of extensive research, highlighting the role of historical landmarks in shaping the identity, image, and competitiveness of cities as tourist destinations and cultural hubs.

Heritage sites, including ancient monuments, historic buildings, archaeological ruins, and cultural landscapes, are recognized as valuable brand assets that contribute to the distinctiveness and appeal of cities [26][27]. These sites serve as tangible manifestations of a city's cultural heritage, reflecting its history, traditions, and values, and providing visitors with authentic and memorable experiences[28].

Additionally, it is crucial to recognize the significant role that heritage buildings play in shaping Erbil's architectural identity. According to [34], these structures are not just relics of the past; they actively contribute to the city's architectural storyline, nurturing a feeling of connection and community among its residents. Moreover, the efforts of individuals involved in preserving the architectural integrity of these heritage sites are key to ensuring their enduring presence, enriching Erbil's urban environment, and serving as valuable educational assets for future generations. The incorporation of heritage sites into Erbil's urban development plans, highlighted by [35], demonstrates a commitment to protecting cultural heritage amid the complexities of modern urban growth.

Architectural elements and building components which they are representing the cultural and environmental issues of the community also will serve as element of pride and identity [29]. The preservation of this architectural heritage elements which they were a part of the daily life and reinforces the emotional connections of the residents and visitors [30] [31].

The heritage sites in Erbil are more than just old artifacts; they are active evidence of the city's rich cultural vitality. They play a crucial role in establishing Erbil as a city with a deep historical importance and diverse culture, drawing in tourists and academics and nurturing a strong sense of pride and identity among its inhabitants [36][34].

The Erbil Citadel, stands as a testament to the rich history and cultural heritage of the region see Figure 2. Previous research has delved into the historical significance of the citadel, tracing its origins back several millennia. Archaeological excavations and historical records have revealed evidence of continuous human occupation within the citadel, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited urban settlements in the world [10].



Figure 2. Erbil Citadel after 2010 Source:[32].

Architectural features which they have been focus of many studies and they are representing the culture and the way of life of the residents on the citadel and surroundings has impact the uniqueness of the citadel and its impact on the visual appeal of the city[33], reflecting the diverse cultural influences that have shaped the city over the centuries.

Studies examining the tourism potential and cultural promotion of the Erbil Citadel have explored strategies for leveraging its heritage value to attract visitors and boost the city's profile on the global stage. The citadel's inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List in 2010 has provided impetus for initiatives aimed at enhancing visitor experiences, improving infrastructure,

and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, cultural events, exhibitions, and educational programs organized within the citadel have served to showcase Erbil's rich cultural heritage and foster greater appreciation for its historical significance [UNESCO, n.d.].

The Erbil Citadel is more than just a historical landmark; it also functions as a dynamic museum that displays Erbil's architectural progression and cultural heritage [37]. The city's dedication to preserving and continually restoring it demonstrates its commitment to protecting its historical heritage for coming generations. Therefore, the Erbil Citadel is not only a remnant of the past but also an integral part of Erbil's present and future, contributing significantly to education, tourism, and community identity.

Before conducting the survey, key factors were identified for investigation based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks. These factors have been categorized into different sections and each section focused on one of the factors. These factors include cultural awareness, perception of heritage significance under their section of the cultural identity and emotional attachment which has been focused in the questionnaire in the section of the emotional connection and sense of belonging. To operationalize these factors into measurable variables, a series of questions were formulated and included in the questionnaire. For instance, to assess cultural awareness, participants were asked about their familiarity with the historical and cultural significance of Erbil Citadel. Questions related to the perception of heritage significance focused on participants' views on the Citadel's representation of the city's cultural and historical identity. Emotional attachment was gauged through queries on the sense of pride and emotional connection associated with the Citadel's presence. By structuring the questionnaire around these key factors, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of residents' perceptions and attitudes towards the Citadel as a potential city brand.

3. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to investigate residents' perceptions of the Erbil Citadel as a potential brand for the city. The cross-sectional design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of residents' attitudes and opinions.

Data were collected through a survey administered to residents of Erbil. A total of 430 respondents were sampled from various segments of the population. Two main methods were used for data collection: Two hundred surveys were conducted manually in the vicinity of the Erbil Citadel. Surveyors approached individuals visiting or residing near the Citadel and administered the questionnaire in person. An additional 230 questions were distributed online using Google Forms. The online survey link was shared with different communities and groups in Erbil through social media platforms, email lists, and community forums.

The sampling strategy aimed to ensure a diverse representation of the Erbil population. Convenience sampling was used for the manual survey, with respondents selected based on their presence in the vicinity of the Citadel. For the online survey, purposive sampling was employed to target residents from various educational backgrounds, age groups, and communities.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used to analyze the data. The demographic features of the sample and the respondents' opinions about the Erbil Citadel were compiled using descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. An overview of the data's distribution and central patterns was given by these descriptive metrics. To investigate correlations between variables and find important predictors of residents' attitudes, inferential statistics were also used. To compare means across groups and ascertain if there were statistically significant variations in perceptions depending on demographic characteristics, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) tests were employed. In order to find important predictors of residents' views, regression analysis was used to look at the correlations between independent factors (such demographic traits) and the dependent variable.

The sampled population consisted of residents from diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from secondary school graduates to postgraduate degree holders. Respondents also varied in age, with participants spanning different age groups, from young adults to seniors. Additionally, the

survey captured perspectives from residents belonging to different communities and neighbourhoods within Erbil, providing a comprehensive view of the city's population.

4. Result and Discussions:

A survey is conducted through the residents of Erbil citadel and 440 responses was received which 200 was distributed manually around the places of Erbil Citadel and 240 was distributed through the Google form and the responses was received and analysed by the SPSS program.

The Reponses in general are distributed as 63.1% of the respondents identified as Male and 36.7% of the respondents identified as Female the cumulative percent is 100.0%, indicating that 100% of the respondents identified as either Male or Female (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender Distribution for the Survey.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	277	63.1	63.2	63.2
	2.0	161	36.7	36.8	100.0
	Total	438	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
Total		439	100.0		

The survey results demonstrate a broad spectrum of engagement with Erbil Citadel, from those who have never visited to those who visit periodically. The data indicates that a significant majority of the respondents (approximately 73.1%) have visited the Citadel multiple times, highlighting its importance and appeal as a cultural and historical site (Table 2). The frequent visitation to Erbil Citadel underscores its substantial cultural significance and highlights its potential as a brand symbol for the city.

Table 2. Frequency of Visiting Erbil Citadel.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	24	5.5	5.5	5.5
	2.0	93	21.2	21.2	26.7
	3.0	42	9.6	9.6	36.3
	4.0	161	36.7	36.8	73.1
	5.0	118	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	438	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
Total		439	100.0		

The distribution of responses indicates a generally positive familiarity with the historical and cultural significance of Erbil Citadel among the survey participants. 62.9% of respondents overall agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar, demonstrating a high degree of cultural knowledge. This pattern implies that Erbil Citadel is an important part of the city's cultural character and emphasizes its significance in the local community.

This high level of familiarity can be a strong foundation for leveraging Erbil Citadel as a brand for the city, reflecting its cultural resonance with the residents (Table 3).

Table 3. Familiar with Significance of Heritage Site of Erbil citadel.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	25	5.7	5.7	5.7
	2.0	42	9.6	9.6	15.3
	3.0	96	21.9	21.9	37.1

4.0	165	37.6	37.6	74.7
5.0	111	25.3	25.3	100.0
Total	439	100.0	100.0	

There was a substantial consensus among participants, as evidenced by the fact that 78.8% of respondents overall agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Table 4). This high level of awareness strengthens Erbil's identity and feeling of place by highlighting the Citadel's significance as a recognized landmark and cultural heritage site.

Table 4. The visual characteristics of the Citadel make it a distinctive landmark in Erbil.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	11	2.5	2.5
	2.0	17	3.9	6.4
	3.0	65	14.8	21.2
	4.0	178	40.5	61.7
	5.0	168	38.3	100.0
	Total	439	100.0	100.0

The statement was agreed upon or strongly agreed upon by 69.2% of the total responses, indicating a profound awareness of the Citadel's symbolic significance to the city. This group's perspective emphasizes how important Erbil Citadel is in representing and disseminating Erbil's rich history (Table 5). The existence of a significant proportion of indifferent and disagreeing participants, on the other hand, implies that opinions regarding the Citadel's importance are not all the same. This emphasizes the necessity of increased knowledge and involvement programs to reaffirm the Citadel's cultural and historical significance to all residents.

Table 5. Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	14	3.2	3.2
	2.0	43	9.8	13.0
	3.0	78	17.8	30.8
	4.0	145	33.0	63.8
	5.0	159	36.2	100.0
	Total	439	100.0	100.0

Significant relationships between the variables were found via statistical analysis: Cultural awareness was found to have a substantial positive link with both cultural identity and cultural activities. This suggests that a higher level of awareness is likely to improve participation and affiliation with the Citadel.

To figure out how respondents' perceptions of Erbil Citadel vary according on their gender. This study concentrated on a number of factors that influence the views of residents about the historical, cultural, and aesthetic value of Erbil Citadel (Table 6).The key outputs to focus on in ANOVA tables are the F-value and the significance level (Sig.). Visual Characteristics as a Distinctive Landmark:

F = 4.882, Sig. = 0.028 demonstrates that the way that different genders interpret the visual features of Erbil Citadel as a distinguishing landmark differs statistically. (p = 0.028). This suggests that one gender might perceive the visual characteristics of the Citadel more distinctly than the other.

F = 6.729, Sig. = 0.010 demonstrate that There is a significant difference between genders in perceptions regarding how well Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city (p = 0.010). This indicates that perceptions about the citadel's role in representing cultural identity vary significantly between genders.

$F = 10.001$, $Sig. = 0.002$ there is a significant difference between genders exists in viewing Erbil Citadel as a symbol of the city's cultural heritage ($p = 0.002$). This implies that one gender may attach more symbolic cultural significance to the Citadel than the other.

$F = 14.188$, $Sig. = 0.000$ There is a significant difference between genders in the sense of cultural pride associated with Erbil Citadel ($p < 0.001$). This result suggests a strong gender-based disparity in the emotional connection and pride associated with the Citadel.

Table 6. Effect of Gender on variables.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The visual characteristics of the Citadel make it a distinctive landmark in Erbil.	Between Groups	4.387	1	4.387	4.882	.028
	Within Groups	391.816	436	.899		
	Total	396.203	437			
To what extent do you believe Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city?	Between Groups	8.000	1	8.000	6.729	.010
	Within Groups	518.376	436	1.189		
	Total	526.377	437			
Erbil Citadel is a symbol of our city's cultural heritage.	Between Groups	9.369	1	9.369	10.001	.002
	Within Groups	408.458	436	.937		
	Total	417.826	437			
I feel a sense of cultural pride because of Erbil Citadel's presence.	Between Groups	14.769	1	14.769	14.188	.000
	Within Groups	453.845	436	1.041		
	Total	468.614	437			

Meanwhile, the ANOVA findings demonstrate the influence of demographic groups on perspectives concerning Erbil Citadel, encompassing its visual attributes, portrayal of cultural and historical identity, architectural allure, symbolic importance, and the sentiment of cultural satisfaction it fosters in its inhabitants. The following is a thorough examination of every variable using the provided ANOVA output:

Visual Characteristics as a Distinctive Landmark:

- $Sig. = 0.037$, $F = 2.857$. The findings indicate a statistically significant variation in the degree of distinctiveness that age groups find in Erbil Citadel's visual characteristics. The evidence suggests that different age groups have distinct perceptions of the Citadel's visual appeal, as indicated by the p-value of 0.037.

The age group of 30-39 agrees the most with the statement that the visual characteristics of the Citadel make it a distinctive landmark in Erbil, followed by the 40-49 age group. The 50 and above age group agrees the least with this statement.

Representation of Cultural and Historical Identity:

- $Sig. = 0.003$, $F = 4.792$. This variable demonstrates a very significant difference between age groups ($p = 0.003$), indicating that perceptions of the Citadel as a symbol of the city's cultural and historical identity are influenced by age. There may be differences in the appreciation or understanding of the historical and cultural significance between older and younger populations.

The age group of 30-39 agrees the most with the statement that Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city, followed by the 40-49 age group. The 18-29 age group agrees the least with this statement.

Architectural Features Enhancing Aesthetic Appeal:

- $Sig. = 0.003$, $F = 4.627$ Age-related differences in opinions on the architectural aspects of the Citadel's aesthetic appeal are statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). This could be a result of differing exposure levels to historical architecture or generational disparities in tastes in architecture.

Compared to the other age groups, the 30- to 39-year-old demographic is most likely to agree that Erbil's aesthetic appeal is enhanced by the Citadel's architectural features.

Erbil Citadel as a Symbol of Cultural Heritage:

- Sig. = 0.011, F = 3.762 The analysis reveals substantial differences in perceptions of the Citadel as a symbol of Erbil's cultural heritage among age groups, with a p-value of 0.011. This may indicate that, as a result of cultural education or community involvement, various age groups have distinct emotional attachments or relationships to the site.

According to this hypothetical example, the 40-49 age group has the highest agreement that Erbil Citadel is a symbol of the city's cultural heritage. For accurate results, refer to your SPSS output for the actual mean scores for each age group.

Sense of Cultural Pride Due to Erbil Citadel:

- F = 4.178, Sig. = 0.006, significance level of 0.006 indicates that there is variance in the degree to which Erbil Citadel contributes to a sense of cultural pride among different age groups. This finding emphasizes how crucial the Citadel is to fostering a sense of pride in its residents, which varies based on their age-related social and cultural experiences.

According to this hypothetical example, the 30-39 age group shows the highest sense of cultural pride related to the Erbil Citadel.

Table 7. effect of age on variables.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The visual characteristics of the Citadel make it a distinctive landmark in Erbil.	Between Groups	7.671	3	2.557	2.857	.037
	Within Groups	389.377	435	.895		
	Total	397.048	438			
To what extent do you believe Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city?	Between Groups	16.954	3	5.651	4.792	.003
	Within Groups	513.014	435	1.179		
	Total	529.968	438			
The architectural features of the Citadel enhance the aesthetic appeal of Erbil.	Between Groups	12.403	3	4.134	4.627	.003
	Within Groups	388.667	435	.893		
	Total	401.071	438			
Erbil Citadel is a symbol of our city's cultural heritage.	Between Groups	10.587	3	3.529	3.762	.011
	Within Groups	408.015	435	.938		
	Total	418.601	438			
I feel a sense of cultural pride because of Erbil Citadel's presence.	Between Groups	13.153	3	4.384	4.178	.006
	Within Groups	456.519	435	1.049		
	Total	469.672	438			

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study was assess perceptions of residents regarding the potentiality of the Erbil citadel to be the brand of the citadel. since residents are one of the most important stakeholders in the city branding process. Their awareness of the significance of an architectural heritage and a landmark as a city brand is a crucial criterion for the success of the branding process. Based on the analysis of the responses to the survey questionnaire, it is evident that Erbil Citadel holds significant potential as a brand symbol for the city, leveraging its rich historical and cultural heritage in the point view of the residents. The findings highlight the following key insights: **Cultural Awareness and Engagement**: The survey revealed a strong recognition among residents of the Citadel's role as a key

cultural and historical icon of the city. A substantial majority of respondents expressed familiarity with the historical and cultural significance of the Citadel, and a significant proportion reported frequent visitation to the site. This high level of cultural awareness underscores the Citadel's importance and appeal as a cultural landmark in Erbil. **Perception of Cultural Significance:** The data indicates a positive perception among residents regarding the visual characteristics and cultural identity represented by Erbil Citadel. The majority of respondents recognized the Citadel as a distinctive landmark and as a symbol of the city's cultural and historical identity. This collective view highlights the Citadel's significant visual and symbolic presence in Erbil, contributing to its unique identity and sense of place. **Gender and Age Differences:** Statistical analysis results indicated no statistically significant differences in perceptions between male and female respondents for most statements. However, the perception showed a slight difference, with females perceiving a slightly higher impact. While, age-related variations were evident in perceptions of the Citadel's visual appeal, cultural identity, architectural features, symbolic significance, and sense of cultural pride. These findings underscore the importance of considering demographic factors in understanding residents' engagement with heritage sites and city branding initiatives.

The analysis of the survey results reveals that the Erbil Citadel holds substantial cultural significance for the residents. A majority of respondents acknowledge the Citadel's role in preserving the cultural heritage of the city, with frequent visitation patterns underscoring its importance. The Citadel is seen not only as a historical site but also as a potential brand symbol for Erbil, reflecting its cultural richness.

The positive perceptions about the Citadel's cultural impact are consistent across various demographic groups, as shown by the descriptive statistics. Inferential analyses further support these findings, indicating strong correlations between residents' demographic characteristics and their views on the cultural importance of the Citadel.

In summary, the results highlight the Citadel's pivotal role in maintaining and promoting the cultural identity of Erbil, suggesting that it holds significant potential to serve as a powerful cultural brand for the city. This underscores the importance of integrating cultural heritage into urban branding and development strategies.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire.

Awareness:

1- I am familiar with the historical and cultural significance of the heritage site in Erbil Citadel.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)

- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 2- **I can identify the key features and landmarks within the heritage site.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 3- **The visual characteristics of the Citadel make it a distinctive landmark in Erbil.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 4- **I can name some important historical events associated with Erbil Citadel.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 5- **I know about the different communities that have historically resides in Erbil Citadel.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 6- **I am aware of the traditional crafts or practices that originated from Erbil Citadel.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 7- **I understand the social significance of Erbil Citadel in our community.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 8- **I am aware of the international collaborations or recognitions for Erbil Citadel.**
 - a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)

- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

9- **I am informed about the archaeological findings at Erbil Citadel.**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

10- **I believe that the visual characteristics of the Citadel are well-preserved.**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

Cultural Value:

Cultural Identity

11- **To what extent do you believe Erbil Citadel represents the cultural and historical identity of the city?**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

12- **The cultural heritage, including traditions and customs, contributes significantly to the overall charm of Erbil.**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

13- **The Citadel plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of Erbil.**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

14- **The cultural value of Erbil, as exemplified by the Citadel, contributes to a sense of pride among residents.**

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)

- d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 15- **The cultural elements represented by the Citadel are crucial for distinguishing Erbil from other cities.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 16- **The preservation of the Citadel's architectural heritage is important for maintaining the city's historical authenticity.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 17- **The architectural features of the Citadel enhance the aesthetic appeal of Erbil.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 18- **The integration of modern elements with the traditional architecture of the Citadel enhances its overall appeal.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 19- **The Citadel's architecture reflects the historical evolution of Erbil over the years.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)
 - e. 5 (Strongly Agree)
- 20- **The visual characteristics of the Citadel's architecture make it a landmark that represents Erbil's historical identity.**
- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 - b. 2 (Disagree)
 - c. 3 (Neutral)
 - d. 4 (Agree)

- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

21- Erbil Citadel is a symbol of our city's cultural heritage.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

22- The history of Erbil Citadel reflects the history of our community.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

Cultural Activities and Events

23- Residents' active participation in cultural events related to the Citadel enhances the overall cultural experience of Erbil.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

24- I feel a sense of cultural pride because of Erbil Citadel's presence.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

25- I consider Erbil Citadel to be a cultural hub for our community.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

26- Visiting Erbil Citadel strengthens my connection to the city.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

27- Erbil Citadel plays a role in uniting people through shared cultural experiences.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)

- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

**Community Attachment:
Emotional Connection**

28- I feel a strong personal connection to Erbil Citadel.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

29- Erbil Citadel is a source of pride for me as a resident of Erbil.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

30- I feel emotionally attached to the history and heritage of Erbil Citadel.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

31- Erbil Citadel is an integral part of my identity as a resident of Erbil.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

Sense of Belonging

32- My connection to Erbil Citadel strengthens my bond with the city of Erbil.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

33- I believe Erbil Citadel plays a crucial role in the community's well-being.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)

- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

34- I advocate for the importance of Erbil Citadel in our city's cultural life.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

35- I often talk about Erbil Citadel positively with friends and family.

- a. 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- b. 2 (Disagree)
- c. 3 (Neutral)
- d. 4 (Agree)
- e. 5 (Strongly Agree)

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