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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

District branding: content analysis toward identifying brand dimensions at the district scale

Salma Ghanem[1,2] · Sherif El-Fiki[2] · Marwa Khalifa[1] · Samy Afifi[1]

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Abstract

Place branding studies and practices have gained much attention in the last decades. Specifically in the globalized world, we are witnessing where both economic and marketing strategies transcend geographical boundaries. Nations, countries, and regions usually compete to attract more people to boost their economy. Similarly, districts within a city are also in intense competition with each other. However, this intimate scale has not met much attention from scholars. There seems to be a recognizable gap in the literature addressing the district scale in place branding theories. The objective of this literature review paper is to shed the light on the importance of district branding, and extract dimensions for guidance for future studies and empirical applications on this scale of branding. The research aims to answer the following questions: Why is place branding important on the district level? How is district branding addressed in literature? What are the branding dimensions related to the district level? Possible answers to these questions are given throughout the paper through a content analysis of place branding literature. Content analysis was used to elicit distinct scale place brand approaches within various articles, dissertations, books, and conference proceedings published in different disciplines. Findings confirm the significant effect of district branding on both the individual and the city. The paper also proposes dimensions for district branding that involves social and functional aspects. Future studies should aim to integrate this theoretical approach to the practice of place branding.

Keywords Place branding · District branding · Brand dimensions

Introduction

Place branding has gained much attention as one of the hot topics among both practitioners and academics (Caldwell and Freire 2004; Gerosa and Tartari 2021; Shedid and Hefnawy 2022; Yuksel 2016). Places are increasingly facing competition in both their domestic and even external markets (Grenni et al. 2020). Decision makers and developers are usually branding for a certain place vision, mission, and identity; however, urban inhabitants in contact with these places are affected both physically, socially, and economically (Bonakdar and Audirac 2020; Grenni et al. 2020; Hanna and Rowley 2008; Keatinge and Martin 2016; Ward 1998; Zenker et al. 2010). Much research is found studying place branding practices of major place branding scales (countries, regions, and cities) (e.g. Anholt 2006; Baalbaki and Zizka 2023; Caldwell and Freire 2004; Govers 2012; Govers and Go 2016; Kotler et al. 1993). However, little research is found grounding place branding theories to the smaller scale of a district. This intimate scale of district branding is directly influential to individuals and has significant impact on the city as a whole (Evans 2015; Hanna and Rowley 2008; Mugnano et al. 2022). The scarcity of research and academic focus on the district-scale branding results in the lack of approaches and dimensions that are convenient for the scale.

This literature review paper starts with identifying the research gap, then it defines the district as a geographical

✉ Salma Ghanem
salmaghanem@aast.edu

Sherif El-Fiki
s.elfiki@gmail.com

Marwa Khalifa
marwa_khalifa@eng.asu.edu.eg

Samy Afifi
samy.afifi@eng.asu.edu.eg

[1] Department of Urban Design and Planning, Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt

[2] Department of Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design, Faculty of Engineering, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo, Egypt

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classification in some cities. The methodology is detailed next, then the following section highlights the importance of branding on the district level. Then the paper discusses how district branding is present in the literature under different terminologies. The next section outlines place branding dimensions in different geographical scales in the reviewed literature, then the paper proposes dimensions of district branding through the juxtaposition of the outlined dimensions. Finally, conclusions are outlined, and further research is proposed.

Identifying the research gap

Based on the literature reviewed, this study identifies a gap of knowledge that should be addressed. Most of the studied literature focuses on the place branding in the city and the country. However, little research has studied the place branding in the local scale of the district (Hanna and Rowley 2008). This scale has a direct influence on both the individual level and the city level (Evans 2015; Mugnano et al. 2022).

However, this is not the first research to explore different understudied geographical scales in place branding. In 2004, Caldwell and Freire studied destination branding as it was relatively a new concept, and there was a lack of empirical and theoretical research on that topic. Caldwell and Freire (2004) argued that the same branding techniques should not all be applied to the different scales of places. Similarly Zenker and Braun (2017) stated that a one strategy of place branding should not fit all cases and places, and there should be a specificity according to the context and the conditions of the studied scale. Moreover, Zenker (2011) contended that branding practices continuously fall in the simple portrayal of a certain city brand without proper conceptualization of a place brand that employs different measurement approaches for the different elements of the brand. However, academic research can help correct these defects by laying a theoretical foundation that better addresses these issues.

Caldwell and Freire (2004) argued that there is a difference between branding a country, a region, and a city, mainly because of the differences in scale. Regions and cities are more closely tied to individuals' functional needs. As a result, the factors influencing the evaluation of a country are distinct from those affecting the assessment of a region or a city, which may be referred to the difference in scale. Moreover, Hanna and Rowley (2008) confirmed the absence of town (and the like scales) as a possible place branding term and a lack of empirical studies relating to this scale This paper highlights the importance of studying the place branding at the district level and aims to activate the role of district branding as an influential place branding geographical scale category.

The district as a geographical classification in some cities

In this research, it obviously matters what geographical scale we are talking about. A district can be described as a substantial part of a city that possesses a unique and identifiable character (Lynch 1960), Nonetheless, the definition of a district may vary depending on the country or the city's structure. However, several common elements can be identified. Districts are generally defined by boundaries, whether administrative boundaries or geographical features like roads, rivers, or natural landmarks. They are basically smaller subdivisions in a city and may include neighborhoods, commercial areas, cultural or historic sites, industrial or business areas, or a mixture of these (UN Habitat 2013). Some districts can hold a specific physical character like a coherent sky line, coherent materials, facades, and buildings. Others could be accommodated with a specific ethnic or cultural group (Lynch 1960). Moreover, the district is usually constituted of coherent areas, common physical characteristics, and a collective image (Brattbakk 2014).

In all cases, the purpose of dividing the city into defined districts is to establish small, stable geographical units that could facilitate regional analysis, administration, planning, and development (City of New York n.d.; City of Seattle n.d.; Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region n.d.; Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Cairo 2018; Norway Statistics n.d.; World Bank 2014). Districts often have their local governing structures, a board or a council with a director, which are responsible for managing local affairs, implementing policies, and addressing specific needs within the district. However, this governing structure may differ in different parts of the world. These governing bodies may have decision-making powers related to zoning regulations, land use planning, public services, and infrastructure development within their respective districts.

Methodology

This research is adopting a qualitative content analysis method which is described as the study of content of communication (Holsti 1969; Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Krippendorff 1989; Mayring 2000; Prasad 2008; Trace 2001; Williams 2007). Several literature adopted different methods of application of content analysis in place branding studies and related fields (Govers and Go 2004; Hereźniak et al. 2018; Ishikawa 2012; Kumagai and Filion 2012; Oliveira and Panyik 2015). These sources analyzed

different kinds of content like academic books, journals, interviews, reports, and social media sources.

The present study primarily aims at exploring the possibility of developing a model for district branding. Due to the holistic nature of the study, and the specificity of the adapted methodology, the concluded dimensions are likely to overlap, intersect, and influence one another. This particular influence can be addressed in future research. For that, it is a highly complex and profound subject.

According to Prasad (2008), studies using content analysis usually involve six phases. This section will explain in detail how this paper adopted each phase in the empirical study.

Formulation of the research question or objectives

The first step involves a clear statement of the research question and objective (Prasad 2008; Williams 2007). The objective of this paper is to formulate a theoretical foundation for the development of a district branding in different disciplines to juxtapose its major approaches to answer the following questions: why place branding is important on the district level? How district branding is addressed in literature? And what are the brand dimensions that could be adopted at the district level branding? However, this literature review paper is a preliminary step of many coming steps the researcher wishes to undertake.

Selection of communication content and sample

This step involves the allocation of the relevant communication content to answer the research questions (Mayring 2000; Prasad 2008). Scientific research papers about place branding from different disciplines, (branding, place branding, city branding, urban design, place marketing, place management, tourism). The selection criteria of the content could be divided on two phases, phase one to answer the first and second questions and to establish a theoretical foundation for the development of district-scale place branding, the research encompassed a comprehensive review of relevant literature. This involved examining various types of publications, such as books, papers, published dissertations, and conference proceedings, from disciplines including urban studies, place branding, place marketing, and place management. This thorough examination of the literature contributed to formulating a robust theoretical framework for the study of district-scale place branding.

Phase two was meant to extract district brand dimensions. It included: (1) papers published from 2010 till present; (2) language of the publication in English language, and (3) scientific domain was more focused on place branding and urban design disciplines mainly.

Developing content categories

Prasad (2008) described content categories as distinct compartments used to code units of content for analysis. The process involves dividing the material into specific units for content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Mayring 2000). The content is categorized according to the geographical scale of place branding implementation in the studied literature. Categories mainly included city scale branding, location branding, and urban branding. Nation, country, and region branding were excluded to better focus on the relevant scale that is closer to the district.

Finalizing units of analysis

This step focuses on allocating the units of content under the classified categories (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Prasad 2008). In this step, the researcher classified the content units according to the geographical scale of place branding (city, location, destination). However, the district branding scale appeared under different terminologies in literature and empirical place branding literature, so similar terminologies were classified under the term of district branding to be more consistent and less confusing.

Preparing a coding schedule

Preparing a coding schedule with the defined content categories is done simultaneously. This step involves pilot testing and checking inter-code reliabilities (Prasad 2008; Williams 2007). The coding schedule involves the juxtaposition of different brand dimensions with different geographical scales. The coding schedule was done on several phases. Phase one involved all geographical scales and all brand dimensions, and phase two focused more on the elaborated and clear brand dimensions and the smaller geographical scales (e.g., neighborhood scale, urban space scale).

Analyzing and interpreting the collected data

This step usually involves complex analysis comparing two or more dimensions together (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Mayring 2000; Prasad 2008; Williams 2007). In the final coding table, brand elements are compared together to extract the common dimensions that are relevant to the district-scale branding.

Why "District Scale" branding

The urban morphology of large cities is characterized by a distinct diversity of its entities (Chase et al. 1999; Jacobs 1961). Cities seek to be inclusive yet exhibit their

multicultural mix represented in the variety of urban quarters composing the city (Worpole 1997). Place branding aims to introduce order and consistency to this diversity (Florian et al. 2002). Florian et al. (2002) further explained that brands facilitate the readability of the environment around us described branding as "a source of identification, recognition, **continuity and collectivity**" (p. 34).

Besides studying city or country branding (larger scales) or location branding (smaller scale), this paper argues that to reach a better coherent, collective yet identifiable city brand, branding agents should equally focus on the entities that form these cities, which are the districts. The focus on different district branding within the city should allow for a more equivalent and balanced recognition of different city entities and potentials. By consequence, that should promote sustainable, resilient, and more inclusive cities and reduce inequalities between residents residing different districts within the cities (see Goal number 10 Reduced inequality and 11 sustainable cities and communities in the SDGs UNDP 2023).

Moreover, the focus on district branding should help in developing and sustaining individual districts. As Kotler et al. (1993) described that places are subjected to "internal growth and decline cycles [along with] external shocks and forces beyond their control" (p. 4). So, place branding paves the way for sustainable development policies and ensures that place is competing with each other (Hanna and Rowley 2008). This continuous territorial competition aims to attract human and economic capital (Bonakdar and Audirac 2020; Grenni et al. 2020) and sustains the growth and development of different districts and keeps them on track. Place branding promotes different geographic locations and maintains visibility in a dynamic market (Evans 2003).

According to Simmel, "branding city quarters in the past provided a link between the individual and collective culture and identity of the society, reconnecting the locale with a sense of socio-cultural 'belonging', whether to a city, neighborhood" (see notes on Simmel writings Bouchet 1998). Moreover, in his book chapter entitled "Selling the suburb," Ward (1998) emphasized the effectiveness of the place branding of this intimate scale as it touched on the soul of popular aspiration. Similarly, Scholars highlight the significance of intimate geographical places on residents' lives and its effect on their individual characteristics (e.g., Andersson and Musterd 2010; Brattbakk 2014; Galster 2008; Jenson 2007; Johnston et al. 2004; Overman 2002; van Ham et al. 2012; Wessling and Meng 2021). In line with this, addressing the branding of these intimate geographical scales will shift the branding process to be more individual centric, by focusing on the local contexts within which individuals operate.

Taecharungroj (2018) highlighted the relationship between the personality of cities and their districts, to help city administrations improve their city experience in accordance with residents' perspectives. The district administrators can then tailor the district's brand to align with its unique characteristics. The study builds on the brand relationship spectrum (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000).

One the other hand, place branding faces challenges in addressing the diverse demands of contrasting target groups within a city (Zenker 2011), whereas the needs, wants, perceptions, and aspirations vary widely between residents of the same city (Chase et al. 1999; Zenker 2009; Zenker et al. 2010). However, focusing on specific districts with coherent resident groups can bridge this gap.

Furthermore, cities can enhance their brand offerings and diversify the range of place qualities to a attract visitor and compete in the residential market by branding individual entities like districts, which possess distinct place brand potential (Evans 2015; Mugnano et al. 2022).

District branding in place branding literature

Although the use of the term district branding has been relatively scarce and was found explicitly only a few times in the literature reviewed, however, other terms were used that implied the same or similar scale of places as the districts. Table 1 highlights the terms found in the literature reviewed that implies same or similar scale of the district branding.

-*Urban branding* is mostly a general term that is used in many scales: Vahabian et al. (2021) used it when studying the branding of the City of Hamadan (metropolis). Similarly, Rehan (2013) used the term while analyzing the City of Stuttgart, Germany, and the City of Port Said, Egypt, while Vanolo (2008, 2015) used it to study the branding of Turin which is an industrial town in Italy. Finally, Gerosa and Tartari (2021) used urban branding, territorial branding, and neighborhood branding terms, while identifying the case study of Nolo in Milan as a "district" in the body of text.

-*Neighborhood branding* some scholars pointed out that the definition of the scale of a neighborhood lacks precision and clarity (Dietz 2002). Some studies use the term "neighborhood" to study the immediate residential area around one's house, yet others point to a larger district or region (Brattbakk 2014; Dietz 2002). Similarly in place branding literature, the term neighborhood branding was used yet implying different geographical scales. Neighborhood branding term was used by Gerosa and Tartari (2021), Keatinge and Martin (2016), Masuda and Bookman (2018), and Mugnano et al. (2022). To start with, Keatinge and Martin (2016) studied Etobicoke municipality in Toronto. Gerosa and Tartari (2021), as mentioned above, used the terms urban branding, territorial branding, and neighborhood branding simultaneously to imply the branding of

Table 1 Deferent terminologies found in the literature implying the same scale as "district"

	Mentioned as	Author	Paper	paper type	Notes
District Branding	**Urban Branding**	(Vanolo, 2008)	The Image of the Creative City, Eight Years Later: Turin, Urban Branding, and the Economic Crisis Taboo.	Case study paper	study the branding of Turin, a town in Italy
		Vanolo, 2015	The Image of the Creative City: Some Reflections on Urban Branding in Turin.	Case study paper	
		(Rehan, 2013)	Urban branding as an effective sustainability tool in urban development.	Case study paper	analyzing the city of Stuttgart, Germany, and the city of Port Said, Egypt
		(Vahabian et al., 2021)	Explain the Components of Urban Branding, Emphasizing the Dimensions of Tourism.	Case study paper	studying the branding of the city of Hamadan (metropolis)
		(Gerosa and Tartari, 2021)	The Bottom-up Place Branding of a Neighborhood: Analyzing a Case of Selective Empowerment	Case study paper	used several terms: urban branding, neighborhood branding and territorial branding terms. Identify the case study as a district in text
	Neighborhood branding	(Keatinge and Martin, 2016)	A 'Bedford Falls' kind of place: Neighborhood branding and commercial revitalization in processes of gentrification in Toronto, Ontario	Case study paper	studied Etobicoke municipality in Toronto
		Masuda, Bookman, 2018	Neighborhood branding and the right to the city	Theoretical paper	examines the role of local movements in the collective right to the city, emphasizing the potential of neighborhood branding in urban activism under neoliberal conditions
		(Gerosa and Tartari, 2021)	The Bottom-up Place Branding of a Neighborhood: Analyzing a Case of Selective Empowerment	Case study paper	used several terms: urban branding, neighborhood branding and territorial branding terms. Identify the case study as a district in text
		(Mugnano et al., 2022)	Neighborhood branding and residents' engagement: evidence from NoLo - in Milan - to TomTom - in Istanbul	Case study paper	Analyzed two districts one is Nolo in Milan and the other in Tom Tom in Istanbul
	Quarters	(Evans, 2003)	Hard-Branding the Cultural City –From Prado to Prada	Theoretical paper	reflected on several place branding geographical scales, (cities, districts and locations) like Newark, New Jersey, Oxford Street and Nike Town in London
		(Evans, 2015)	Rethinking Place Branding and Place Making Through Creative and Cultural Quarters	Case study paper	Several case study such as :"Liberty Village, Toronto", " The Distillery Historic District, Toronto", "Digital Shoreditch, London", "Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam", "Amsterdam Noord",
	Suburb	(Ward, 1998)	Selling the suburb: Selling Places The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities 1850-2000	Book, book chapter	residential suburb with a special focus on suburbs in the UK
	Town branding	(Hanna and Rowley, 2008)	An analysis of terminology used in place branding	Theoretical paper	Content analysis extracted place brand terms and geographical entities from diverse articles across disciplines.
		(Taecharungroj et al., 2019)	Sustainability as a place brand position: a resident-centric analysis of the ten towns in the vicinity of Bangkok	Case study paper	ten towns in the vicinity of Bangkok, Thailand
	Territorial branding	(Gerosa and Tartari, 2021)	The Bottom-up Place Branding of a Neighborhood: Analyzing a Case of Selective Empowerment	Case study paper	used several terms: urban branding, neighborhood branding and territorial branding terms. Identify the case study as a district in text

Nolo district in Milan. Moreover, Mugnano et al. (2022) used neighborhood branding to analyze two districts: one is Nolo in Milan and the other in Tom Tom in Istanbul. Finally, Masuda and Bookman (2018) implicated the entrepreneurial phenomenon of neighborhood branding as a primary enabler of urban gentrification and dispossession.

-*Quarter* is an important scale in urban planning and design (Evans 2003; Oc et al. 2010). Quarters are mainly dividing the city intro discrete zones that reflect their morphology, economic and social mix, and land use (Evans 2003). A quarter is a build expression of a community of collective and individual self-interests (Krier 2009). A quarter provides for all the periodic local urban functions within a limited piece of land (Evans 2003). In 2003, Evans reflected on several place branding geographical scales (cities, districts and locations) like Newark, New Jersey, Oxford Street,

and Nike Town in London. Later in 2015, Evans studied several case studies such as: "Liberty Village, Toronto," "The Distillery Historic District, Toronto," "Digital Shoreditch, London," "Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam," and "Amsterdam Noord," mostly all ranging around the district scale.

-*Suburbs* Ward (1998) discussed the notion of "suburban marketing" in section three entitled "Selling the Suburb" in the book "Selling the City." Ward (1998) mainly focuses on the "residential suburb" and discusses the branding in the housing scale projects.

-*Towns* in their study of ten towns near Bangkok, Thailand, Taecharungroj et al. (2019) employed the term "town" to encompass small cities, towns, and subdistricts, ensuring clarity and consistency. Moreover, Hanna and Rowley (2008) revealed the absence of the term "town" as a potential place brand term and there was a lack of case studies focusing on towns.

-*Territorial branding*: Gerosa and Tartari (2021) suggested that a territorial branding is led from a group of local residents that can engage a part of the community and more of a bottom-up re-branding approach. But at the same time, the community's practices are not sufficient to empower it as a whole. Gerosa and Tartari (2021) used urban branding, neighborhood branding, and territorial branding terms and identified the case study as a district in the description.

Proposed measuring dimensions for the district scale branding

After discussing how district-scale branding (or similar scales) was studied in literature, this section outlines different strategies for district brand dimensions from the interdisciplinary origins (see Table 2). Table 2 highlights the following information: the source, publication titles, research object (which identifies the geographical scope of place branding), and brand measurement dimension.

The literature on place branding often draws from corporate branding theories of Braun et al. (2014). In addition to this, several scholars have proposed evaluating branding in terms of social meaning and functional utility (De Chernatony and McWilliam 1989; Levy and Rook 1999; Munson and Spivey 1981; Solomon 1983). Caldwell and Freire (2004) and Kavaratzis (2009) have further supported the value of examining place brands through these two dimensions. The first dimension focuses on the social aspects, where individuals choose to visit a place to express their own self-concept. The second dimension, functionality, captures consumers' interest in the performance and practical aspects of a place. Others classified branding dimensions according to visual, verbal, and behavioral expression (Nandan 2005; Zenker 2011).

Place branding

According to Kavaratzis (2004), a model was developed to assess the communication aspect of branding places. It consists of primary communication, which encompasses the physical elements and behaviors of the place; secondary communication, involving formal advertising efforts; and tertiary communication, which relies on word-of-mouth from various city users. Zenker (2011) identified three key outcome variables for place branding: resident-city identification, place satisfaction, and the intention to stay or leave a place.

In their work, Braun et al. (2014) discussed three types of place brand communication: physical place, traditional space, and place word-of-mouth. The physical space refers to the tangible offerings of a place, such as buildings, public spaces, infrastructure, and amenities, as well as the behaviors exhibited by the people in that place. Traditional space encompasses all forms of advertising and how the place is communicated through advertisement, logos, and slogans. Lastly, place word-of-mouth involves informal conversations among different stakeholders.

Kavaratzis (2009) identified eight significant factors to consider in place branding: vision and strategy, internal culture, local communities, synergies, infrastructure, cityscape and gateways, opportunities, and communications. These factors include defining a future vision for the city, fostering a brand-focused mindset, prioritizing residents' needs, involving the community in brand development, building consensus among stakeholders, providing appropriate infrastructure, ensuring the physical environment aligns with the brand, promoting opportunities available in the place, and skillfully refining deliberate messages to convey the brand identity and values effectively.

Furthermore, Braun et al. (2014) and Kavaratzis (2009) distinguished between intentional and unintentional communication of a place. Intentional communication primarily involves planned marketing practices through advertising, logos, and slogans. On the other hand, unintentional communication refers to the effective actions and strategies undertaken when communication is not the primary objective. This includes landscape strategies, infrastructure projects, organizational structures, and the city's behavior. Schopf (2015) also emphasized that unintended branding influences are crucial drivers and critical dimensions of any place brand.

City scale

Yuksel (2016) conducted an analysis of two cities, Leeds in the UK and Istanbul in Turkey, focusing on four main categories: social process, place attachment, sense of place, and the built environment. These categories form the Place

Table 2 Brand dimensions in different geographical place branding scales

Sources	Title	Research object	Scale/case	Brand dimension
Kavaratzis (2004)	From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands		City	– Primary communication: involves architecture, urban and city behaviors – Secondary communication: formal and intended communication through advertising – Tertiary communication:word-of-mouth
Zenker (2011)	How to catch a city? The concept and measurement of place brands			Resident-city identification, place satisfaction, and the intention to stay or leave a place
Braun et al. (2014)	The effectiveness of place brand communication	Netherlands	City	Are the physical place, the traditional space and the place word-of-mouth
Kavaratzis (2009)	Cities and their brands: Lessons from corporate branding		City	Vision and strategy, internal culture, local communication, synergies, infrastructures, cityscape and gateways, opportunities, communications
Schopf (2015)	Branding Cairo (un)intended influences on the German tourist 's perception of Egypt 's capital	Cairo	City/region	Intended influences, unintended elements
Yuksel (2016)	Toward an understanding of an inside out perspective on city branding: A grounded theory study of Leeds and Istanbul	Leeds, UK and Istanbul, Turkey	City	Place brand identity mosaic: social process (SP), place attachment (PA), sense of place (SoP) and built environment (BE), processual, dynamic, and time and context specific
Trueman et al. (2004)	Can a city communicate? Bradford as a corporate brand	Bradford, UK	City	Presence, purpose, pace, power, personality
Taecharungroj et al. (2019)	Sustainability as a place brand position: A resident-centric analysis of the ten towns in the vicinity of Bangkok	Ten towns in the vicinity of Bangkok, Thailand	10 Case studies- 2 cities, 3 towns 5 subdistricts	11 Sustainability dimensions (Ambassadorship and citizenship behaviors, Natural environment, Social equity, Economic growth, Built environment, Landscape, Livability and health, Conviviality, Transport, Energy, Water and waste management, Governance)
Hereźniak et al. (2018)	On measuring place brand effectiveness: Between theoretical developments and empirical findings	66 Polish district cities	City	Image/identity related, business related, behavioral, institutional, infrastructural
Vahabian et al. (2021)	Explain the components of urban branding, emphasizing the dimensions of tourism	Hamadan, Iran	City	Social, economic, cultural, and physical dimensions
Taecharungroj (2018)	City–district divergence grid: A multi-level city brand positioning tool	Bangkok, Thailand	City–district	Activities, economy, nature, socialization, and transport
Keatinge and Martin (2016)	A 'Bedford Falls' kind of place: Neighborhood branding and commercial revitalization in processes of gentrification in Toronto, Ontario	Etobicoke, Toronto	Neighborhood	Local development, neighborhood identity, commercial identities, place making, land use, residential gentrification
Serin (2016)	Commodifying urban space: The case of branded housing projects in Istanbul, Turkey	Branded housing projects developed in Istanbul, Turkey	Housing	Discursive formation and development processes, enabling mechanisms, spatial practice

Table 2 (continued)

Sources	Title	Research object	Scale/case	Brand dimension
Evans (2015)	Rethinking place branding and place making through creative and cultural quarters	Several cases: "Liberty Village, Toronto, The Distillery Historic District, Toronto," "Digital Shoreditch, London," "Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam," "Amsterdam Noord"	Districts—squares—urban quarters-	Legacy and historic association; physically (morphology and architectural quality and style); ethnic or other cultural experiences (festivals, food, cultural activities and business), e.g., specialty retail, street markets and trade fairs, etc
Almatarneh and Mansour (2013)	The role of advertisements in the marketing of gated communities as a new Western suburban lifestyle: A case study of the Greater Cairo Region, Egypt	Gated housing communities in Egypt	Housing	Architectural and urban factors, environmental factors, lifestyle factors, social factors
Abdelaal and Hussein (2012)	Branding urban spaces as an approach for city branding: Case study: Cairo City, Egypt	Abdeen Square, Cairo	Urban space	Economic, historic, cultural, urban. environmental and social
Shedid and Hefnawy (2022)	Historic preservation as a tool for city branding case study: Khedivial Cairo	Opera Square, Cairo	Urban space	Urban aspect (visual image—surrounded buildings, surrounded streets, street scape elements unique buildings, signature architecture, events), environmental identity, social identity (different activities-, unique brand image)

Brand Identity Mosaic, which is considered a dynamic, time-specific, and context-specific measurement.

Trueman et al. (2004) introduced the "five Ps" or "place branding toolkit," which includes presence, purpose, pace, personality, and power. Presence refers to the visual elements, built environments, and emotional landscape connected to the local social fabric. Purpose is associated with clearly defined boundaries that facilitate brand location, ownership, and communication channels. Pace represents how quickly a place responds to internal and external market conditions. Personality encompasses the emotional landscape, and power relates to social empowerment.

Taecharungroj et al. (2019) conducted research on sustainability in the context of place branding, considering economic and social perspectives. They developed a branding tool to help towns establish a brand position that involves residents and promotes sustainability. The study adopted 11 key dimensions of place sustainability derived from their previous work (Taecharungroj et al. 2018). These dimensions include the natural environment, future economic growth, social equity, the built environment, landscape, livability and health, conviviality, transport, energy, water, and waste management, and governance. By focusing on these dimensions, places can create sustainable environments that prioritize resident involvement, expert collaboration, and stakeholder participation.

Hereźniak et al. (2018) proposed a structure of city brand effectiveness indicators that includes: image/identity related, business related, behavioral, institutional, and infrastructural. On a similar note, Vahabian et al. (2021) highlighted the significant factors contributing to the economic advantages of urban branding, specifically focusing on tourism and physical space. They identified and emphasized the components and indicators of urban branding, considering dimensions such as social, economic, cultural, and physical aspects.

Furthermore, Taecharungroj (2018) utilized a framework based on five key attributes—activities, economy, nature, socialization, and transport, to assess brand relationships and identify suitable brand positions for cities and districts. This framework was built upon Taecharungroj (2016)'s conceptual model, which aimed to study residents' ambassadorship and citizenship behaviors.

Neighborhood scale

Keatinge and Martin (2016) conducted an analysis of the neighborhood of Etobicoke in Toronto, focusing on dimensions such as local development, neighborhood identity, commercial identities, place making, land use, and residential gentrification. Serin (2016) studied branded housing projects in Istanbul, examining discursive formation and

development processes, enabling mechanisms, and spatial practices.

Evans (2015) examined cultural quarters, encompassing districts, urban spaces, and squares, through three dimensions: legacy and historic association, physical aspects (including morphology, architectural quality, and style), and other cultural experiences (festivals, food, cultural activities), as well as business-related aspects (e.g., specialty retail, street markets, trade fairs).

Almatarneh and Mansour (2013) conducted a study on gated housing communities in Egypt, considering factors such as architectural and urban factors, environmental factors, lifestyle factors, and social factors. Abdelaal and Hussein (2012) expanded the scope to analyze Abdeen Square in Cairo, considering factors such as economic, historic, architectural, urban, and environmental aspects. Shedid and Hefnawy (2022) focused on The Opera Square in Cairo, analyzing dimensions such as the urban aspect (visual image, surrounding buildings, streetscape elements, unique buildings, signature architecture, events), environmental identity, and social identity (including different activities and a unique brand image).

However, the process of place branding as Petrea et al. (2013) stated requires the involvements of the local government, the local population, and the business community. Their collaboration is needed to address key questions such as target audience prioritization, selection of suitable activities for the branding strategy, and effective promotion of the city to the external world. As mentioned in the literature review, it is widely acknowledged that place branding is crucial for local public authorities in effectively managing their territories (Petrea et al. 2013).

To conclude to the district brand dimensions, the present study puts together the aforementioned brand dimensions, as employed by scholars in the branding of different urban scales such as neighborhoods or quarters. After matching the similar variables in these models and excluding the ones that are not most relevant to the context of the study, the present research formulated the following model for district branding (see Table 3). The model is based on two main pillars, namely the socio-cultural and the functional pillars. The socio-cultural pillar addresses five main dimensions that are the social, the cultural the historic, governance, and communication dimensions with their factors. On the other hand, the functional pillar addresses four dimensions, i.e., urban/ architecture, economic, mobility, and energy, water, and waste management with their factors. The following discussion outlines the factors comprising each of these dimensions.

A: the socio-cultural pillar that incorporates:

A1: the social dimension includes the following factors, life style (Kavaratzis 2004; Keatinge and Martin 2016; Vahabian et al. 2021), social equity; including affordability of housing and the promotion of social interaction (Almatarneh and Mansour 2013; Abdelaal and Hussein 2012; Shedid and Hefnawy 2022), residents perception of the place, self-concept representing residents' identification with the place, ownership, loyalty, relatedness, involvement, and pride (Yuksel 2016). Furthermore, livability and health aspects encompass various factors, such as ensuring a stable environment that protects residents from external risks, providing adequate shelter, and promoting physical and mental well-being. Additionally, it involves creating a safe environment that facilitates social gatherings and encourages social and cultural activities (Taecharungroj et al. 2019).

A2: the cultural dimension includes festivals, food, cultural activities, arts, and commercial identity (Evans 2015; Abdelaal and Hussein 2012).

A3: the historical dimension, includes legacy, morphology, architectural style, architectural age, and developmental process (Abdelaal and Hussein 2012; Evans 2015; Serin 2016),

A4: the governance dimension includes local government governance (Keatinge and Martin 2016), involvement and participation of residents, experts, and other stakeholders (Taecharungroj et al. 2019).

A5: the communication dimension includes the formal and intended communication through advertising and word-of-mouth (Braun et al. 2014; Hereźniak et al. 2018; Kavaratzis 2009, 2004; Schopf 2015).

B: the functional pillar that comprises:

B1: urban/architectural dimensions encompass the built environment and physical factors, streets, iconic buildings, land use, street scape elements unique buildings, signature architecture, landscape architectural quality and style, location, and topography (Abdelaal and Hussein 2012; Almatarneh and Mansour 2013; Evans 2015; Keatinge and Martin 2016; Shedid and Hefnawy 2022; Yuksel 2016).

B2: economic dimensions include economic growth, specialty retail, street markets and trade fairs, and corporation headquarters (Abdelaal and Hussein 2012; Evans 2015; Hereźniak et al. 2018; Kavaratzis 2009, 2004; Keatinge and Martin 2016; Vahabian et al. 2021).

B3: mobility dimension consists of public transportation and mobility (Taecharungroj et al. 2019).

B4: energy, water, and waste management dimension includes renewable energy usage and production such as passive solar design, effective water quality monitoring, water reuse, and waste recycling (Taecharungroj et al. 2019).

Conclusion

This research identifies a gap in the literature concerning the district-scale place branding and the dimensions that are related to this scale, so the study aimed to introduce

Table 3 The categories proposed for the dimensions of district branding (developed by the author)

Pillars	Brand Dimension	Factors	Sources
Socio-cultural	Social	**Life style- Social equity** (including affordability of housing and promoting social interaction) - **social capital-** residents **perception** of the place- **self-concept**(identification of residents in relation to the place)- **ownership** and loyalty, **relatedness**, involvement and **pride-**	Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2009; Abdelaal and Hussein, 2012; Almatarneh and Mansour, 2013 ; Braun el.at., 2014; Evans, 2015; Yuksel, 2016; Keatinge and Martin, 2016; Hereźniak et al., 2018; Taecharungroj, el. al., 2019; Vahabian et al., 2021; ; Shedid and Hefnawy, 2022
	Cultural	Festivals, food, cultural activities - arts- commercial identity	Abdelaal and Hussein, 2012; Evans, 2015; ; Vahabian et al., 2021.
	Historic	Legacy- morphology- architectural style- architectural age- developmental process	Abdelaal and Hussein, 2012; Evans, 2015; Serin, 2016.
	Governance	Local Government governance, involvement and participation by residents, experts and other stakeholders,	(Kavaratzis, 2009; Keatinge and Martin, 2016; Taecharungroj et al., 2019)
	Communication	Formal and intended communication through advertising and word of mouth	(Braun et al., 2014; Hereźniak et al., 2018; Kavaratzis, 2009, 2004; Schopf, 2015)
Functional	Urban/ architectural	Urban spaces, streets, iconic buildings, land use, street scape elements unique buildings, signature architecture, landscape architectural quality and style, Location, topography,	Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2009; ; Abdelaal and Hussein, 2012; Almatarneh and Mansour, 2013; Evans, 2015; Yuksel, 2016; Keatinge and Martin, 2016; Hereźniak et al., 2018; Taecharungroj, el. al., 2019; Vahabian et al., 2021; Shedid and Hefnawy, 2022.
	Economic	economic Growth, specialty retail, street markets and trade fairs, corporation headquarters	Kavaratzis, 2009; Abdelaal and Hussein, 2012; Evans, 2015; Keatinge and Martin, 2016; Hereźniak et al., 2018 ;Taecharungroj, el. al., 2019; Vahabian et al., 2021.
	Mobility	public transportation and mobility	Taecharungroj, el. al., 2019;
	Energy, Water and waste management	renewable energy usage and production such as passive solar design- good processes for monitoring water quality, reusing water and recycling waste	Taecharungroj, el. al., 2019;

district branding as a possible term in place branding and develop district branding dimensions. The paper follows content analysis of the relevant literature, and the paper sheds the light on the importance of district branding and the positive outcomes it brings to the individual and the city. Furthermore, the research points out similar terminologies that are used in the literature when referring to the scale of the district, like neighborhood branding, urban branding, territorial branding, and branding quarters. Then the research outlines different branding dimensions from the branding and the place branding literature. The final layer of analysis involved the juxtaposition of relevant branding dimensions to extract a district branding dimension.

The proposed dimension for district branding could be categorized under socio-cultural and functional pillars. Brand dimensions under the socio-cultural pillar factors include social, cultural, historical, governance and communication dimensions. As for the functional pillar, it includes the urban, economic, mobility, and energy, water, and waste management dimensions.

Having realized the aim of the present review research by concluding to the main variables which may influence district branding, it is important to emphasize the significance of establishing a theoretical foundation to inform future empirical examinations in relevant contexts. In future research, it would be valuable to explore the practical applications of district branding and expand upon the proposed

framework through empirical studies involving various districts. Additionally, investigating the role and influence of tourists and investors holds significant potential for providing valuable insights. Exploring this aspect further would be particularly intriguing, as it could offer additional guidance for the development of practical strategies.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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Salma Ghanem is a Full-Time Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Architectural Engineering at the Arab Academy for Science and Technology and Maritime Transport in Cairo. She is a PhD Candidate at the department of Urban Planning in Ain Shams University Cairo. She has obtained her MSc and BSc. degree from the Department of Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design in the Arab Academy for Science Technology and Maritime Transport. She worked on several urban development projects in urban and rural areas in Egypt, with non-profit organization and hand in hand with the communities involved.

Sherif El-Fiki Professor of Architecture—is the Vice Dean for Educational Affairs in the College of Engineering and Technology—Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo. He acted as Head of the Department of Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design between 2013 and 2023. He obtained his PhD in Architecture from Edinburgh College of Art, UK in 2003. His research interests are mainly in design process, environmental behavior and architectural education. His research-work is published in reputable journals and international conferences in Egypt, Japan, Portugal, Greece, Canada and the UK. He acted as a referee for numerous international journals and conferences, and a jury member in several international competitions. He is a Licensed Practicing Architect. His professional practice involved the design and construction of a wide range of residential, healthcare, office and educational enterprises.

Marwa Khalifa Professor of Urban Planning—has obtained her BSc (1995) and MSc (2000), "Urban Planning" specialization from Ain Shams University (ASU), Egypt while her PhD (2007) was a joint supervision between ASU and the University of Sheffield, UK. She has been affiliated to the Department of Urban Design and Planning since 1996, and promoted to a Full Professor in 2017. Currently, Professor Khalifa acts as a Director of the Graduate Engineering School for Research (GESR) and a Coordinator for two programs: BSc "Environmental Architecture and Urbanism" (ENVR) and the Interdisciplinary Master on "Resource Efficient Cities" (IMaREC). Professor Khalifa has major interest in informal settlements upgrading, participatory planning approaches, environmental assessment and risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and resource efficient cities. She combines the advantages of having both the theoretical grounds and practical experience. Additionally, she has active international links and cooperation projects with partner universities in EU, Latin America, South Asia, Africa, and the MENA Region.

Samy Afifi is an Associate Professor at Urban Planning Department—Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University. He is a Member of a team who is responsible for teaching many courses such as Theories and History of Urban Planning, Urban Economics, City Planning and Housing, and Urban Informatics. In Professional practice, Samy is a Cofounder for Urban Development Centre. His elder colleague allowed him to participate in establishing their own firm in 2008. His career allowed him to act, discuss, negotiate, and deal with spectrum of people with different backgrounds and governmental organizations all over Egypt. His main interest is in tracing and analyzing dynamics during evolution of traditional and contemporary urban settlements.