

ROTTERDAM. MAKE IT HAPPEN.

Resident identification with the city brand Rotterdam
Make It Happen

An analysis of the drivers behind city brand identification and the role of socio-economic characteristics

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Summary

As a marketing strategy, places take on brands to compete with other places. Today places form brands based on their main characteristics. Brands have the potential to bond people to a place, which in turn can result in support of the brand, but also the place. Furthermore, brands have the potential to overcome social problems within society. Still, internal target audiences like residents often lack identification with place brands.

The Dutch city Rotterdam is an example of a city that employs branding strategies. In 2013, the city introduced the city brand 'Rotterdam Make it Happen'. This thesis aims to research the drivers behind city brand identification with this brand. The secondary goal of this study is to research the impact of socio-economic characteristics on city brand identification. In order to achieve these goals, a qualitative approach was taken to study the drivers: brand self-similarity, brand uniqueness, brand prestige and brand social benefits.

Furthermore, the socio-economic characteristics: age, occupation, education, and ethnic background have been applied as moderator variables. Perceptions of one of the essential target groups of Rotterdam Make it Happen – residents - were examined to reach these goals. Additionally, to gain an understanding of the context of the brand, this study applied interviews with city marketing professionals and analysed official documents.

The study concludes that the driver brand self-similarity has an impact on city brand identification. Additionally, the socio-economic characteristics of age and occupation have been found to play a role in city brand identification. The study also revealed unexpected drivers like the expected outcome on relationships between citizens, visibility of the brand and emotional connections with the city. While this study yields some interesting findings, the research field will benefit from a more comprehensive approach to the examination of the drivers behind city brand identification. Examples are quantitative approaches and comparative approaches to this research objective. Lastly, this study achieved some practical advice in terms of brand management. Here, this study advises city brand managers to increase the visibility of the brand and to use the brand in the objectives of the organizations of the Brand Alliance.

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I hope you enjoy your reading.

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List of abbreviations

CBI	Consumer-based identification

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background information and problem statement

The marketing of urban places to generate investment, tourism, and revenues has been a common practice since the 19th century and has intensified over the past decennia (Karavitz, 2004, p.59). The increasing competition between places has made the marketing of places even more relevant. Place branding, a more intensified marketing approach forms a strategic guideline in the marketing of places (Kravitz & Hatch, 2013). The idea of place branding stems from the perception that cities can be branded by features such as culture, art, heritage, or natural resources (Kasapi & Cela, 2017; Karavitz & Hatch, 2013). Together, these factors form complex identities in the minds of customers.

The branding of places requires a broad set of efforts made by governments and multiple stakeholders such as residents and businesses (Hudson et al., 2016, p.365). Here, the marketing of places occurs with a business-like approach. Local, but also national governments draw on characteristics like culture, innovativeness, and sustainability to alter perceptions and images that individuals form in their mind. The main goal of this phenomenon, branding, is to increase their position in a competition among the cities for investments, tourism, and political power (Ham, 2008, p.3). These unique brand identities are necessary for places to be recognized and perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing superior qualities compared to their competitors (p.130). In competition with other cities, cities need to find a brand niche, engage in place branding, and ensure customer satisfaction to create brand loyalty. Since place brands should (re)position actual identities of places, there is a need for a new art of brand building and reputation management, which differs from the branding of products. This need for a new art has resulted in much attention from city officials and researchers (Kasapi, 2017; Ham, 2008).

As argued by many in the research field, brands should be connected to the image that people have of the place (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p.75). As Rivas (2013) concluded in a report for URBACT, branding initiatives are often addressed with little empathy to the feelings of local communities (Rivas, 2015, p.3). Still, internal target audiences and heavy users have a profound knowledge of the branded object (Zenker et al., 2017, p.16). Therefore, they could disagree with the simplified brand message. As a consequence, they feel distant from the meaning and essence of the place brand (Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker, 2013, p.18).

To gain broad support, places should be promoted in a way that will work for the collective and equitable benefit of all residents. In this, governments optimize public participation and the analyses of the brand formulation processes in which a collective place brand identity is formed. As has been stated by Zenker and Beckmann (2013), a close connection between the place brand and resident can lead to a more positive attitude towards the brand, which in turn will lead to support. Also, brands have the potential to create socially inclusive visions or a shared sense of belonging, which bonds a citizen to a place (Belabas & Eshuis,

2018). Therefore, the relationship between residents and the brand plays a critical role in the effectiveness of the brand since it can result in word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth is more effective than other promotional tools since it plays a sizable role in the tourists' image formulation of a place, decision-making, and financial behaviour (Andersson, 2009, p.43). Additionally, place brands can provide the means to address social problems such as social exclusion and cultural diversity (Kavaratzis, 2008).

On the other hand, Braun et al. (2013) argued that non-identification with place brands could lead to potential conflicts between interest groups with different perceptions about the place (p.23). Therefore, identification with the brand is essential to make the brands effective and sustainable. Moreover, non-identification could make one feel like they are not part of a place, or like they do not belong in a place (Balabas & Eshuis, 2018, p.212). This makes a deeper understanding of place brand identification even more critical (Kavaratzis, 2008).

Still, brands are selective since they tend to highlight specific characteristics of the real identity of a place. Therefore, brand strategies require a comprehensive understanding of identities that exist in a place since its goal is not exclusively to attract tourists and investment (Baxter et al., 2013). Nevertheless, branding research has paid little attention to the reasons behind the resident-identification with city brand has not received sufficient attention (Insch & Walters, 2018, p.153).

7 **1.2 Research and relevance**

Aiming to fill the gap that exists around place brand identification, this contribution will focus on place branding on the city level, and therefore city branding. Numerous studies have focussed on how to build effective and attractive brands, how brand images are formed, and best practices in place branding. Still, little attention has been paid to why these citizen-place brand relationships are formed and how these relationships differ between individuals, despite the considerable importance to both academics and practitioners. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to determine the drivers behind the state of identification of the residents of Rotterdam with the city brand 'Rotterdam Make it Happen'.

By analysing the relationships that the residents have with the brands, this research aims at a more in-depth approach to the connection between residents and the city brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. Using the line of argument from social identity theory and social stratification theory, the main goal of this study is to explain how the factors: brand self-similarity, brand uniqueness, brand prestige, brand social benefits, affect the state of city brand identification. By doing this, this thesis aims at building a base for organizations to create more effective and inclusive city brands in the future. The secondary goal is to examine the role of socioeconomic characteristics in the state of identification. The final goal of this thesis is to gain more understanding of the perception of the residents of the city and its city brand. In practice, the outcome and recommendations of this research will provide (local) governments with a basis to create more inclusive

brands in the future. Despite the limited generalizability of this study, the recommendations and conclusions of this study can provide other cities insights on how to create a more inclusive and therefore, effective brand.

1.3 Case

Rotterdam is a perfect example of a city that has been investing in improving its image to stimulate development and attract tourism, new residents, and investors (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019). Since 2003, Rotterdam has had several branding campaigns. Due, to the lack of identification under residents, Rotterdam has reviewed its branding policies. Since then, the city branding policies have incorporated the advantages of the multi-cultural character of the city to address a broad set of residents. In 2014, the city started with a new branding strategy under the Brand alliance 'Rotterdam Make it Happen' as part of their reputation strategy. Parallel to the development of the brand, the city gained success and popularity. This success is mostly due to internationally known architectural icons like Central Station, the Markthal, but also the transformation of neighbourhoods and the changed image of the city (Liukki & Mandias, 2016). As a result, the city has developed renewed attractiveness of the city, resulting in broad popularity. From this, one can conclude that externally, the city marketing efforts, in general, can be considered a success.

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Rotterdam Make it Happen aims at external audiences like investors and tourists, but also at internal audiences like its citizens (Vree-van Wagtendonk, 2019). As she stated, the communication of the municipality shows a one-sided story when it comes to its population. She argued further that it is the municipality's goal to enable *'all Rotterdammers, despite their ethnical background, to recognize themselves and feel addressed in its communication'*. This goal of the brand makes the case of Rotterdam Make it Happen suitable for the research goal of this study. Furthermore, the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen can be considered to be a good case, due to Rotterdam's name as a city with the highest unemployment rates, lower income levels, and lower educated people compared to the other large cities in the Netherlands. These facts, combined with the multi-cultural and diverse character of the citizens of Rotterdam, has resulted in a broad range of societal sub-groups. As a result, insights on the drivers behind the identification of the city brand could be of importance for the governance of Rotterdam's marketing strategy.

Therefore, this thesis will focus on the following central research question:

'What are the different drivers behind city brand identification, and what is the role of socioeconomic characteristics in this identification in the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen brand?'

Additionally, to answer this research question, this study will be structure along the following sub-questions:

1. *What are the drivers behind the state of identification?*
2. *Which socio-economic characteristics influence identification?*
3. *What is the context of the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen?*
4. *What is the city brand identity of the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen?*

1.4 Outline of the study

This thesis will be structured as follows: Chapter 2 will consist of an overview and discussion of existing literature on city branding and city brand identification. Based on the literary findings, several expectations will be formulated in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the methodology and design of this study will be outlined. Based on interviews with city marketing professionals and official documents, Chapter 5 discusses the context of the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. Chapter 6 will present the findings of this study, based on interviews with residents of Rotterdam. These findings will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 7. Finally, the thesis will conclude the findings of this study and will discuss its limitations and recommendations of this research in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2: Theory

This chapter examines the existing literature on city branding and city brand identification. First, the definition of branding will be established, after which the phenomenon will be further explained. Secondly, the lessons from city branding literature will be discussed. Thirdly, the existing identification literature will be discussed, followed by a review of the factors that play a role in identification with place brands.

2.1 Introduction to city branding

2.1.1 Defining city branding

Places have always been promoting their attraction and images throughout history, as there always has been a need to attract settlers, customers, visitors, traders, investors, and 'influencers' or ambassadors (Anholt, 2010). Govers (2011) described the phenomenon as an evolution of place marketing, which, in his view is *a means to influence target audiences to behave in some positive manner with respect to the products or services associated with a specific place* (p. 228). Place branding has become a prominent strategic tool with a focus on the quality of the place as a competitive advantage (Pirnar et al., 2017, p.26). The branding of places can be found on different spatial scales: city level, national level, neighbourhood level, and even district level brands exist (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Due to the focus on place branding on the city level, this study will focus on city branding.

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Brands are names, terms, signs, symbols, landmarks, or other graphics that both identifies and differentiates the product or in this case, the city (Odabasi & Oyman, 2004). By carrying specific symbolic and functional features, brands lead to associations with the city (Jolic, 2018; Pirnar et al., 2017). Besides the logo's and symbols, brands reflect identity, personality, reputation, images, promises, added values, and advantageous elements comparing to other places (Pirnar et al., 2017). City branding is not limited to selling the city. However, it is also seen as a tool to satisfy the needs of the citizens of the city by filling the need to build self-esteem (Insch & Stuart, 2013, Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p.407). As found by Belabas & Eshuis (2018), brands have the potential to create an inclusive social vision or a shared sense of belonging that all members of the city can relate to. In city branding management, the goal is to influence people or private actors by putting the city on the map and stimulating the positive perception of it (Jolic, 2018, p.150). This goal has become extra relevant in the context of global migration, in which there is an additional need for a collective identity and a shared sense of belonging (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018, p.210).

Several frameworks of branding processes have been formulated that propose several city branding methods and activities (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2004; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Andersson, 2014). Ashworth and Voogd (1990) have proposed the term 'geographical marketing mix' for city brands, consisting of promotional measures, spatial-functional measures, organizational measures,

and financial measures. Furthermore, activities like large-scale physical redevelopment, public art, and civic statutory, mega-events, cultural regeneration, and public-private partnerships are essential city branding activities (Kavaratzis, 2004; Lucerelli, 2012). Finally, flagship projects and policy-oriented activities have been found essential components of the branding processes (Andersson, 2014, p.144).

2.1.2 Target groups of city branding

In city branding, the main target groups are the residents, businesses, and visitors (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Externally, cities are branding in order to secure visibility to gain more clients in terms of investors, tourists, and new citizens. In terms of tourism, brands promise a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination. It serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience (Aaker, 1991).

Internally, the main focus in this research, branding efforts aim at the creation of a sense of belonging and loyalty under residents. Furthermore, the brands can internally be used as a tool to develop the city and as a construct to build a particular place identity (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018, p.209). The existence of these different target groups leads to conflicts and synergies between the needs and wants of the different groups (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Within these target groups, smaller groups can be identified that all have different desires from a place and therefore hold different perceptions about the brand. These factors should be kept in mind in city branding processes.

Within this thesis, the more comprehensive definition of city brands provided by Zenker & Braun (2017). This definition pays attention to the different associations between target groups of the city brand and the resulting complexity of this. Since this thesis argues that the associations of internal audiences can defer from external audiences, the following definition will be applied:

“A place brand is a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place and its’ stakeholders. These associations differ in their influence within the network and importance for the place consumers’ attitudes and behaviours (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p.275).”

2.1.3 City branding complexity

The nature of city branding leads to a high level of complexity. As noted by Kaplan et al. (2008), the branding of places is more complicated, and complex compared to the branding of goods and services. The complexity originates from the lack of control over the branded entity, conflicting interests of stakeholder groups, and social sensitivity (Karavitz & Hatch, 2013; Insch & Stuart, 2015). Moreover, governments are not the only owners of the brand, but various public and private stakeholders are actively involved in the branding processes (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Another thing that adds to the complexity of city branding is its multidisciplinary character, in such that it is based in several domains like economic literature, marketing literature but also literature focussed on local governance (Warnaby & Medway, 2013; Lucerelli, 2017). Still, while city branding often originates from businesses, the political context in which the city brands are made adds to the complexity (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p.275).

As mentioned in 2.1.2, the difference in the perceptions between the numerous subgroups that a city houses, adds to this challenge (Zenker & Peterson, 2014, p.715). Besides, the perceptions of residents have been found to differ from the perceptions of non-residents. The city Rotterdam consists of lots of subgroups due to the highly diverse composition, making an understanding of the differences in city brand identification more relevant. Therefore, this study will aim at providing more insight into the differences in the perceptions of social sub-groups.

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The uniqueness of the essential idea of the brand is reflected in the brand identity. This identity consists of a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategists aspire to create or maintain and can be applied as a tool to show what the place represents (De Silveira et al., 2013). The function of that identity is to express the meaning, intention, and reason for the brand. To create and preserve the city brand identity, several marketing instruments are applied (Florek, 2012, p.544). The identity that is reflected in the brand can differ from the place identity, which can be understood as the mental representations that can exist of a place. This can result in a gap between the identity as portrayed by the brand and the identity as experienced by individuals. This may even be more the case because different groups may have different perceptions of the place and the brand. Therefore, some societal groups may perceive a significant gap between place identity and city brand identity. This, in turn, makes an understanding of the perceptions of the brand an essential part in creating and maintaining effective city brands.

2.1.4 Approaches to city brand formulation

Despite city brandings' success as a means to gain competitive advantage by creating an image of the city, several disadvantages of internal branding have been found, especially for specific groups of residents in the city (Bonakdar & Audirace, 2019; Anholt, 2008). The first being the asymmetry in the political processes which results in social inequity and exclusion for specific groups of citizens. Bonakdar and Audirac (2019) argued that this is one of the costs of applying city branding as a tool for future growth, since residents,

especially disadvantaged residents, can no longer afford to live in the area (p.5). In line with this argument, Purcell (2002) argued that the recent rounds of urban regeneration have led to changes in urban governance institutions that tend to forget the opinions of the urban inhabitants in their decisions. Moreover, brands are selective and emphasize particular values and topics over another, which raises questions about the relationships that the citizens have with the city brands.

As stated by Govers (2011), internal branding is crucial to build a successful relationship with the city (p.230). Internal brands have been found crucial for building relationships between cities and residents (Tuskej, 2012, p.53). From his perspective, in internal branding, a non-marketing-oriented approach to city branding is required. The risk of a marketing-oriented approach is to ignore that citizens produce the shape and substance of places. Insch and Stuart (2015) argued that a misalignment between the perception of a place by residents could exist between what local government authorities are promoting. Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) stated that if brands do not reflect a broad scale of place identities, the branding effort can only lead to estrangement from the place, especially to its internal audiences (p.75). Therefore, brands should aim at strengthening the identification of current residents with the place (Zenker et al., 2017, p.16).

13 Both in research and practice an identity driven-approach in which identities are formed to which people can relate has been found to be promising since it plays an essential role in differing the brand from others and creating brands to which people can relate (Rojas-Méndez, 2015). It is based on the idea that identities of places derive from *“intrinsic features and history of a given place and the shared relationship to these elements”* (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p.74). Identities can be tapped, defined, and manipulated. This approach argues that branding is an attempt to communicate a particular place identity. Moreover, this approach argues that the role of branding is to define the identity, identify how the defined identity is relevant to several audiences and attempt to convince these audiences that it is indeed relevant to their group in society. This approach goes against the marketing-oriented approach of branding, which is focused on external actors and is not aligned with internal resources and capabilities (Baxter et al., 2013). Here, city marketers believe that the city brand is fully controllable and manageable, and often apply a one size fits all city brand in which they forget the perceptions of the different groups that consume the brand (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p.271).

Within the identity-based approach, however, brand orientation, a holistic identity-driven approach, exists. Here, the city branding processes revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target groups to achieve lasting competitive advantages in the form of the brands (Baxter et al., 2013). The approach argues that city brand management should include the

communication and design of the city brand identity in which the residents and their thoughts and feelings about the place (p.1085). By assisting the consistency of messages, protecting the brand identity, and development of superior value, a sustainable competitive advantage can be created (Baxter et al., 2013 p.1083).

2.2 City brand identification

Identification can be defined as *“creating a meaningful connection between the self and the target of identification, the place (Zenker et al., 2017, p.17)”*. It is the extent to which the consumer sees one’s self-image as overlapping with the self-image (Choo & Petrick, 2011). In this study, this definition will be applied. Therefore, (city) brand identification will be defined as *“the creation of a meaningful connection between the self and the city brand”*.

This definition is built on the notion that brands should reposition and represent a broad set place identity since different groups of citizens have to identify with the city brand (Baxter et al., 2013). Since city brands aim at different target groups, different groups of citizens have to identify with the city brands. This forms a base of self-categorization based on the membership to a locally defined group (Rollero & Piccoli, 2010). Brand identification occurs since people feel a sense of self-definition by using a brand and communicate it with others (Choo & Petrick, 2011, p.2). Therefore, they are more likely to identify themselves with a brand whose image is congruent with their self-concepts and use of the brand. Brand identification is derived from the natural tendency to strive for a sense of self to know ourselves, feel ourselves relatively unique, and our tendency to feel good about ourselves (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2011). People may thus draw on a brand they like, to accentuate their own (unique) identity and feel good about themselves. These fundamental needs drive identification and will be further explained in section 2.2.1.

In this study, consumer-brand identification (CBI) will be used due to the comprehensiveness and boundaries that exist in this concept. The concept describes the consumers, in this case, residents, state of oneness with the brand. It is the consumer’s psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness to the brand (Lam et al., 2012). This definition is built on the cognitive, affective, and evaluative aspects of identification that social identity theories describe. These aspects will be discussed in the next paragraph. The relationships that the consumers have in the form of CBI is distinct from the process of comparison of self traits with brand traits that may contribute to CBI as it goes beyond cognitive overlap between the brand and self by including affective and evaluative facets of psychological oneness with the brand (Lam et al., 2012, p. 236). Here, emotional factors like brand attachment and brand love will not be applied to describe the relationship between residents and the brand. Along the same line, the definition of

CBI will be followed, which is built on organizational identity and the relationship consumer-company identification. Brand identification, and in this case, city brand identification is especially relevant in the case of Rotterdam Make it Happen since non-identification induced the development of the brand. This relationship will be translated into resident-based identification, conceptualized as city brand identification in this study. This can be measured as the state of identification. By applying this definition to brand identification, this study focuses on a more in-depth analysis of the underlying reasons for the state of identification.

2.2.1 Social identity theory

A useful approach in the analysis of city brand identification is the interpretive or sociological approach which focusses on the structures within which the identification unfolds (Tuskej, 2010). Here, identification means that the consumer perceives the meanings and characteristics of the brand as its own. Moreover, social identity theory provides a structure for further understanding of identification (Donovan et al., 2006). The perspective has focussed on the identification processes on the level of the individual. From this perspective, identification refers to the degree to which the brand expresses and enhances the identity of the consumer. This study will follow this perspective, focussing on how individual residents identify with the brand and the drivers behind it. The theory describes that city brands play a role in creating a social identity, and therefore have the potential to address social problems such as social exclusion and cultural diversity (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019). The theory argues that social identity is part of an individual's self-concept which is derived from their knowledge and their membership of social groups, along with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Johnson & Morgeson, 2009, p.1). The theory focusses on in-group relations, group processes, and their relationship with self-concept (Üner & Armultu, 2012, p.252). These social memberships form the self-concept. In short, the theory argues that the answers to the question 'who am I' can be found in the social groups and entitled social identities. The perspective argues that social identity consists of aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which it believes to belong to (Donovan et al., 2006, p.126).

The theory is built on the notion that people seek to maintain a positive social image. Additionally, it describes that people focus their identity on their distinctiveness compared to other groups. At the same time, the commonalities with the in-group are emphasized. Moreover, the theory argues that social identity consists of a cognitive and affective dimension. The cognitive dimension of social identities provides a way for individuals to place themselves and others in society such that individuals define themselves as members of a certain social group (Johnson & Morgeson, 2005, p.1). The dimension can be defined as "*the thoughts or beliefs regarding the extent to which individuals define themselves on the basis of a social referent*". The affective dimension of social identities can be defined as "*the feeling's individuals experience about*

themselves in relation to the social referent and the value they place on that social identity (p.2)". These feelings provide positive feelings about one's membership, like pride, enthusiasm, and belongingness.

2.2.2 Why is brand identification important

Finding a sustainable city brand that is accepted by residents is vital since their relationship with the brand plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the brand (Insch & Stuart, 2018). The multiplicity of stakeholders and thereby their identities in a place can result in a lack of unity of purpose and decision-making, which both are necessary conditions to build a strong brand (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Therefore, brands, and the identity it expresses, should include the needs of citizens, and respond to them (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). Braun et al. (2010) have pointed at the risks for the effectiveness of the city brand by not listening to the voices of residents in city brands. Therefore, one should allow the hidden voices to bring their narratives and increase the inclusiveness of the brand (p.9). This is especially the case for a city as diverse as Rotterdam.

Baxter et al. (2013) argued that multiple place identities could exist within one place due to the diversity of residents. Therefore, brands should reflect the existing identities in the place in a pluralistic fashion. As a result, different states of identification with the brands can occur. Achieving a certain level of identification with the brand can build a foundation for residents to forge a connection to a brand (Insch & Stuart, 2015, p.5). Brand identification has been found to result in more attachment, commitment, and satisfaction (Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Additionally, it has been argued that a higher level of brand identification can lead to more participation, increased self-esteem, low turnover, brand advocacy, loyalty and more positive word-of-mouth, making internal branding crucial for external branding (Choo & Petrick, 2011; Donovan et al., 2005; Sauer et al., 2012; Tuškej, 2011). On the other hand, if residents have a low state of identification with the brand, it can impact the image of the city since residents can voice their discontent with their city brand or spread a negative word of mouth (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Therefore, one can argue that identification with city brands plays a significant role in the behaviour of the consumers and the effectiveness of the brand.

2.2.3 Antecedents of brand identification

Perceptions of city brands can differ among individuals and stakeholder groups (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Numerous factors have been identified that underlie identification with a city brand. This thesis will focus on the motives that social identity theory has found as the main drivers of identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). From human nature to seek for self-definition, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) have derived three key antecedents for brand identification. Here, a particular brand self-similarity, reflected in core values and core attributes in the brand play a sizable role in the state of identification. Since people are in search of a sense of self, the perceived congruity between the brand and self-personalities plays an essential role in consumers' affiliations with the brands. This notion of similarity is based on the concept of person-

organization fit in marketing and organizational research, which posits that people are attracted to organizations that share similar values (Lam et al., 2012, p.236). More specifically, self-similarity leads to city brand identification since city brands fulfil the natural need for a sense of self by assessment of congruity or similarity between self and the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) argue, this self-similarity is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for identification.

The second key driver that can contribute to a higher state of identification is the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the brand. Derived from that in the social context, people want to distinguish themselves from others to increase the level of self-esteem. This antecedent can be defined as *“an individual’s pursuit of differentness in the consumption realm”* (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p.408). In essence, this pursuit contends that individuals experience a negative emotional reaction when they feel overly similar to others (Berger & Heath, 2007, p.121). This is in line with the brand element, which gives places and their resources specificity and distinctiveness (Kavaratzis & Kaladides, 2015). Therefore, the brand uniqueness will entail the perceived distinctiveness and uniqueness that the brand expresses compared to others. Thirdly, brand social benefits, the perceived opportunity to strengthen its membership of social groups, the perceived connection that the brand enables (formation of brand communities) and a shared commitment to the brands have been found to enhance self-definition and therefore city brand identification. This antecedent will be conceptualized as brand social benefits.

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The fourth antecedent, brand prestige, can also be traced back to human nature’s tendency to increase their self-esteem. This goes hand in hand with the need for self-enhancement, which entails the maintenance and affirmation of self-views (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p.408). Therefore, brand prestige is another key driver of identification. In this study, this factor will be the perceived quality of the outcomes of the brand (Lam et al., 2012). In short, this indicates that the associated status or esteem of the brand will enhance city brand identification.

Several studies have found other, more contextual, factors that influence the state of identification. The perceived outcomes of individual success, residential satisfaction, and place protective behaviour are important to enhance motives that contribute to identification (Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Moreover, ownership of the branding processes has been found as an essential factor that can influence identification (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Residents may feel like the brand is directed towards an external audience, or the brands might not connect with the view that the residents have of the places that are subject to the brand (p.18). Other contextual drivers that have been found to influence identification are social cohesion, perceived homogeneity, and time spent in the neighbourhood on working days (Lewicka, 2009). Finally,

social structures like the circulation of brand stories and myths have been identified as factors that influence the state of identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Due to the limited scope of this study, we were not able to research the contextual drivers of brand identification. Instead, this research focuses on self-defining and enhancing motives as emphasized in social identity theory.

In sum, this study will focus on the following four antecedents behind city brand identification:

1. Brand self-similarity
2. Brand uniqueness
3. Brand prestige
4. Brand social benefits

2.2.4 Socio-economic characteristics for city brand identification

Now the four antecedents that influence city brand identification have been established in 2.2.3; this paragraph will discuss how the effect of the antecedents differs between social sub-groups. The way brands are consumed is a personal experience and is therefore partly formed by people's practices and their relations (of power, gender, socio-economic class, and production) (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p.76). These factors cannot be controlled by brand management (Lam et al., 2012).

From these characteristics, individuals define themselves as part of certain social groups or classes. Within research, socio-economic status has been found to influence individuals (Williams, 1990). In the context of Rotterdam, with a broad range of social groups, these socio-economic characteristics may play an important role in identification with the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. Therefore, in this study, socio-economic characteristics will be defined as: *"Uncontrollable traits of residents that play a sizeable role in how individuals define themselves by effecting social environments and their attitude towards the brand"*.

Social stratification theory can also provide insights into why and how perceptions can differ between socioeconomic groups. The theory argues that relative ordering exists, which involves the ordering of a population along a value hierarchy, distinguished by divisions such as sex and age (Pfautz, 1953). Other factors can be class or estate, in other words, social order or status. Along the same line, Merrilees et al. (2014) found that perceptions of residents, including city brand attitudes, differ between different socio-economic groups (p.271). Roth (1995) explained further that socio-economic conditions affect how brands and the city brand identity are perceived.

This study will also focus on ethnic background as a socio-economic characteristic since this factor plays a significant role in the formation of social groups. This is especially relevant in the case of Rotterdam since its ethnic composition is one of the core characteristics of the city (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019). Still, Belabas &

Eshuis (2019) found that the municipality struggles with diversity in its branding and positioning of the city, making ethnic background an even more relevant socio-economic characteristic to add to this study.

By adding socio-economic characteristics as a moderator, the validity of the conceptual framework is strengthened. In this thesis, socio-economic characteristics will consist of age, level of education, current profession, and ethnic background. This also adds to the relevance of this study since limited research has focussed on the impact of these characteristics, despite the evidence of their contribution to city brand identification.

Chapter 3: Conceptualization and operationalization

This chapter will set out the conceptual framework that has been applied in this study. The second part of this chapter will go into the operationalization of the used concepts in this study.

3.1 Conceptual framework

Based on the existing literature, the expectations, grounded in the theoretical framework, were formulated.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework and Table 1 gives an overview of the formulated expectations

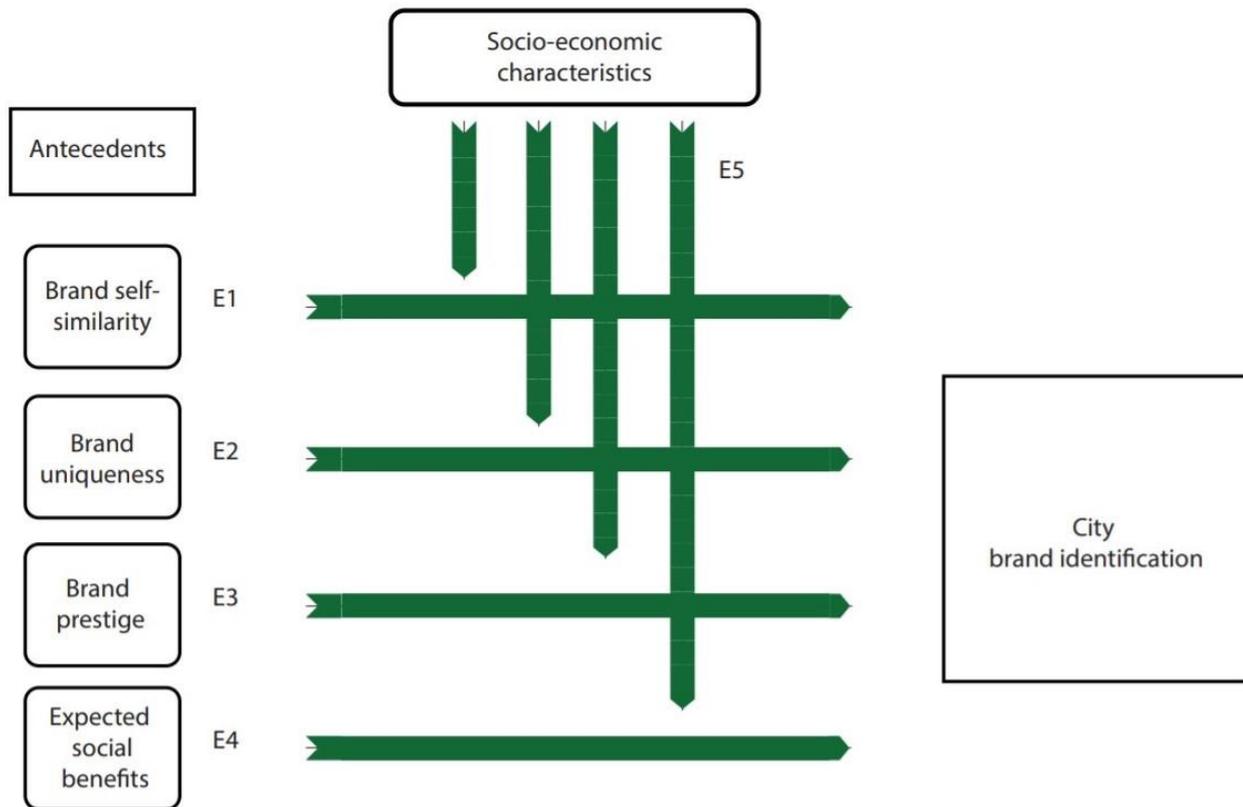


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

#	Expected relation	Expectations
E1	+	City brand self-similarity is positively related to city brand identification.
E2	+	City brand uniqueness is positively related to city brand identification.
E3	+	City brand prestige is positively related to city brand identification.
E4	+	The expected social benefits from the city brand are positively related to city brand.
E5	+/-	Socioeconomic characteristics moderate the impact of the antecedents.

Table 1: Expectations

3.2 Operationalization of concepts

To be able to measure the dependent variable, city brand identification with the brand “Rotterdam Make it Happen”, the following antecedents of city brand identification were operationalized: sense of belonging, identification with the brand, self-definition and the importance of the brand. This was based on the work of Lam et al. (2012). Additionally, the independent variables or the antecedents of brand identification have been conceptualized and operationalized based on the framework as provided in Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) ’s contribution on brand identification in products, translated to the context of city brands. This will be shown in Table 2. Furthermore, Table 3 will represent the operationalization of the socio-economic characteristics that will be used as moderator variables.

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Concept – Definition	Indicators	Example questions
City brand identification – The creation of a meaningful connection between the self and the city brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel a sense of belonging - I feel like I identify with the city brand: identification - I feel like the city brand is part of the person: self-definition - The city brand means something to the person: importance of brand. 	<p>Where do you feel at home?</p> <p>Would you describe with yourself with this brand or not?</p> <p>Do you think this brand suits you or not?</p> <p>Would you say that this brand means something to you or not?</p>

Table 2: Operationalization of the Dependent Variable “brand identification.”

Concept— Definition	Indicators	Example questions
Brand self-similarity— Residents recognize themselves and their values in the brand	Similarities	Can you recognize yourself in the? identity of the brand?
	Norms and values	Do you think that this brand suits your norms and values or not?
Brand Uniqueness— Perceived distinctiveness and uniqueness that the brand expresses compared to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel like the brand presents a distinctive city brand identity - I feel like the city brand is unique - I feel like the city brand stands out from its competitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the brand (with the list of words) - What kind of quality do you? think that this brand has compared to its competitors
Brand prestige – Perceived quality of the outcomes of the city brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel like the city brand is prestigious - I feel like the city brand is the best of [city brands on the same geographical level] - I feel like the city brand is a first-class, high quality brand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the brand (list of words) - What kind of quality do you? think that this brand has compared to its competitors
Brands social benefits – Perceived opportunity to strengthen membership of social groups, connection to others in the brand community enables and the shared commitment to the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel like brand offers opportunities to socialize - I feel like a sense of kinship with other residents, - I feel like on can gain interactions with other residents or external users of the brand - I feel like I belong to a social group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think the brand? offers opportunities to interact/socialize? - Do you feel a sense of kinship? with other citizens of Rotterdam - Do you identify as a Rotterdammer?

Table 3: Operationalization of the Independent Variables “Antecedents of brand identification

Concept— Definition	Variables	Indicatoren
Socio-economic characteristics— Uncontrollable traits of residents that play a sizeable role in how individuals define themselves. They effect social environments and people’s attitude towards the brand	Age	Amount of years
	Level of education	High school/MBO/HBO/University
	Current profession	Ex. Manager, Nurse, Teacher.
	Ethnic background	Ex. The Netherlands, Suriname etc.

Table 4: Operationalization of the moderator variables “Socio-economic characteristics”

Chapter 4: Research design, methods, and limitations

In this chapter, the applied methods to analyse brand identification will be introduced. The final part of this chapter will set out the challenges and limitations.

4.1 Research design and methodology

This study approached the examination of city brand identification through an empirical study involving input from residents. The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying context of the drivers of city brand identification by aiming at the underlying feelings about the experience, meaning and perspective. This research was done with a qualitative approach since it enables to explore the complexity and multiple realities of societies and communities (Olsen & Pedersen, 2004, p.152). By conducting interviews, this study was able to detect the underlying dynamics of the factors that contribute to brand identification, rather than testing hypotheses (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2000). Moreover, the case study of the brand 'Rotterdam Make it Happen' provided us with a deeper understanding of how brand identification works in a real-life setting. This approach has provided us with deeper insights into perceptions, experiences, and opinions that residents hold. In this, it 'renders a richly detailed and extensive description of the phenomenon under study' (Thiel, 2007, p.86). Additionally, a semi-structured set up of interviews has been applied since it enabled us to gain background information and knowledge about the drivers of identification. Furthermore, the interviews have provided insights into the images and feelings that residents have about both the city and Rotterdam Make it Happen. This approach adds to the internal validity of this thesis.

To gain a deeper understanding of the case, interviews with city branding professionals have been conducted. This is followed by an analysis of official (classified) documents like the Rotterdam Make it Happen Meerjarenstrategie 2020-2024. The findings on the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen can be found in Chapter 5 of this thesis as the description of the case. The second step of this research consisted of 13 semi-structured interviews with citizens between the ages between 23-100 that have lived in Rotterdam for longer than three years. The duration of these interviews varied between 20-60 minutes. In sum, this approach provided us with a comprehensive understanding of brand identifications and the drivers behind it. The purpose was to study how and why city brand identification develops.

Since this study evaluates the identification, and thereby the specific city brand identity of Rotterdam Make it Happen, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other cities. This limits the external validity of this study. Still, the findings might provide more insight into how identification works in general. On the other hand, the semi-structured form of interviews can increase flexibility. For these semi-structured interviews, an interview manual was used, which can be found under Annex 2.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

In order to gain a deep understanding of city brand identification, the primary data source were respondents, with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted. The results of these interviews can be found in Chapter 6. Additionally, three in-depth interviews were conducted, via video and phone calls with professionals strongly connected to the city branding process. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen. The interview with a city branding manager led to the exchange of (classified) official documents which were also used to analyse the context. The analyses of these sources can be found in Chapter 5. The list of interviewees can be found in Annex 2.

Additionally, these insights have provided input for the interview guide for the primary respondent group, existing of 13 citizens of Rotterdam. Face-to-face contact was limited during the period of this study due to the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, the interviews were conducted over Zoom, Microsoft Office, Skype, or phone calls. However, this has led to some limitations that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The specific case of 'Rotterdam Make it Happen' has been selected, since it is a relatively new city brand. The diverse and multi-cultural population, of Rotterdam, makes its the population especially interesting to study the expectations of this study. The research domain will represent mostly Rotterdam's citizens to enhance the external validity of this research since the outcome might be limited to a particular context. By adding the moderator, socio-economic characteristics can be generalized to a bigger context. Still, different antecedents might exist in smaller communities. Therefore, the research field can use more in-depth analysis of the drivers in the contexts of smaller municipalities. Moreover, the limited unity of study endangers the reliability and validity of this case. By documenting the specific steps that are taken in this research, these effects are controlled.

The sampling has taken place based on convenience and referral sampling to create a sample of respondents with a broad range of knowledge of the brand, and a range of socio-economic characteristics. This, in turn, yields a more interesting sample, since it allows us to form a more authentic representation of the diverse population of Rotterdam. The respondents were found from several social media sources, combined with referral sampling to create a broader range of knowledge under the respondents. The goal of this method was to obtain a diverse sample. However, due to the limited scope of this study, the sampling is limited. Therefore, there will remain a certain level of subjectivity and selectivity under the respondents. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with Amber script and coded manually in Excel. The codebook can be found in Annex 4.

4.3 Expected challenges and limitations

Despite the considerations in the research methodology, the limited scope of this thesis has led to a limited sample of residents. Therefore, there are limitations in reliability, mainly replicability; applying the findings to other city or city brands might lead to different outcomes. Besides that, another limitation is the case of Rotterdam might be unique, due to the specific context of the brand and the city, which makes the results of this study less generalizable. Furthermore, due to financial and time limitations, not all socio-economic groups can be included in this research.

In terms of validity, the qualitative setup of the research might lead to the differences between socioeconomic groups that will be measured might be influenced by other factors. In an attempt to limit these effects, different indicators were combined to measure the states of identification. The final tool that will be applied is an open design, in which each data source will be comprehensively explained, without compromising the privacy of the respondents.

The main limitation of this study is the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in a society of social distancing for the time being, which limits the ability to have face-to-face interviews. This context has also limited the options for the research methods, for example, experiments and focus groups. In contrast, a positive outcome can be that more people were available to do online interviews. This design also brings some research challenges. Researchers and respondent – biases can occur, which will be coped with by writing a comprehensive interview guide for the interviews with the residents, recording and quoting the answers.

Chapter 5: Rotterdam Make it Happen

In this chapter, the context of the case, Rotterdam Make it Happen, will be discussed. The content of this chapter is based on the interviews that have been conducted with city marketing and city branding professionals. The professionals will be referred to with pseudonyms which can be found under the list of interviewees in the appendices. Furthermore, the content of this chapter is based on official documents. The list of interviewees can be found under annex 2.

5.1 Historical perspective

The city's history of the bombing and the reconstruction have played a significant role in the formation of the mentality of the city. The reconstruction led to an optimistic vision of the future of the city. This optimistic vision was expressed in a period of events and exhibitions that portrayed this future (Wegen-Delhaas, 2018). This was combined with the construction of several landmarks that promoted the city like the Euromast, the funicular in the 1970s, and a pool in the Nieuwe Maas. Starting in 1984, the municipality started with a more active marketing approach that consisted of a mix of geographical, public administrative, and marketing components with a strategic goal. Around the end of the century, Rotterdam was known as a city with innovative architecture, cultural and social amenities (Riezebos, 2014).

27 Between 1990 and 2004 Rotterdam became more confident about its promotion due to the establishment of Rotterdam Festivals and the creation of the Erasmusbrug. Under the supervision of the Stichting Rotterdam Marketing, which has been established in 2001, Rotterdam profiled itself as the Cultural Capital city of Europe. In 2003, the city marketing efforts got connected to an identity: young, international city by the water with a sober, decisive mentality (Riezebos, 2014, p.5). Still, the image of the city remained: uninviting, dirty, and low educated. As a consequence, Rotterdam Marketing took on the external marketing slogan '*In Rotterdam kom je de wereld tegen*'. This was followed up by the campaign '*Rotterdam Durft!*' which started in 2004. The campaign was successful, but not applicable internationally.

In 2006, the city started to take a more structured approach to economic development and city marketing. This resulted in a new and innovative branding strategy for the city and the harbour, *World Port World City*. The brand was based on the identity of the city and expressed the cities ambition, change, commitment, and paid attention to its international character by focussing on the harbour (Riezebos, 2014, p.6). Moreover, the responses to the brand lacked enthusiasm, and research found that the citizens mostly lacked identification (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). The Economic Board of Rotterdam argued that lack of governance of *World Port World City* was another weakness of the brand (Blankert, 2008). The board further argued that the brand lacked formal agreements and essential components of a successful

brand. Therefore, they advised to create a stronger partnership between the different partners in the city directed by a common identity.

5.2 Origins of Rotterdam Make it Happen

The advice and the lack of enthusiasm about the brand resulted in the reconsideration of the city brand identity. This led to a renewed identity of the city, adjusted to the changed context of the city: groundbreaking, worldly, no-nonsense, or raw, entrepreneurial, and international, under the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. This identity was adjusted to the new context of the city, where there is more physical and mental space for taste, empathy, and the more space for the people themselves (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). As Peter further explained:

“The battle that the city is currently delivering is smarter, more creative and allows it to push forward. We can see this mentality in for example the stairs at Central station or Wednesday night skate, all these things are possible in Rotterdam.”

The goal of the new brand was to connect the citizens with the marketing of the city since they lacked identification with the former brand (Riezebos, 2014, p.7; Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). Simultaneously, the Erasmus University, the Port Authority (Het Havenbedrijf) and Rotterdam Festivals were working on a new positioning strategy (Peter & Ralph). This resulted in a renewed city marketing strategy that consists of a collaboration between different partners in the city to attract international and national target audiences. This strategy is based on distinctive characteristics of the city to ensure that people become ambassadors of the city (Nancy, personal communication, May 25th, 2020).

The renewed strategy resulted in the development of the Brand Rotterdam Make it Happen, a brand with a focus on the unique DNA and mentality of the inhabitants of the city. A brand that covers the harbour and the city to attract, bind and hold on to the target groups (Citizens, students, visitors, and investors) (Nancy, personal communication, May 25th, 2020). The Brand alliance collaborates in international profiling and projects in which they benefit from collaboration (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). Besides these areas, the organizations in the brand alliance can use the brand; however, they want as long as the project fits the Make it happen mentality and its target groups. In the first five years, the parties (Erasmus University, Port authority, Rotterdam Partners, and the municipality of Rotterdam) worked together in the ‘Merkalliantie Rotterdam Make it Happen’ (the Brand alliance). After that, several stakeholders have been added to the collaboration like Rotterdam Festivals, Erasmus MC, and Rotterdam TopSport. As stated by Peter, by bundling the organizations and their potential, a more significant scope of the brand was created.

5.3 City brand identity of Rotterdam Make it Happen

The main goal of the brand was to not only reflect the identity of the city but also to include the mentality and DNA of the city since it could strengthen the collaboration between the stakeholders in the city. The DNA provided the partners something to hold on to in their joint activities (Ralph, personal communication, July 24th, 2020). This approach has been viewed as a strength of the brand by all city marketing professionals (Peter, Nancy, and Ralph). One of the respondents explained what the DNA entailed to them.

People that had ideas that did not exist, like the Erasmus University, the new Waterway by Caland that increased the capacity of the harbour, or Clara Sies that developed 'de Voedselbank' by just feeling what is happening in society, even if that idea was ground-breaking. These people all had something in common:

They had an idea, they saw the opportunity, took the room, went for it, and lived up to it That is characterising for Rotterdam, the city offers the room and invites you to act.

– Peter

This mentality and identity are expressed in the **brand promise**:

*Do you have an idea?
Do you see an opportunity?
Rotterdam. Make it Happen.
(Van Wegen-Delhaas. 2018)*

This mentality can be found on both the individual level and the company level. *“Even if you are not making it happen right now, you can just believe in this mentality. This mentality is of all times, which makes the brand sustainable”* (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). The mentality and **DNA** of Rotterdam can be summarized as:

International, bold, forward, worldly, ground-breaking, and no-nonsense (RMH Meerjarenstrategie 2020-2024).

Peter explained that entrepreneurship, success, the harbour, and social innovation are a big part of the identity of the city. Another part of the identity is the international and worldly character, which comes from the international trade orientation of the city but also the multi-cultural character of the city with 180 nationalities (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020). Additionally, Ralph argued:

“The city is characterized by its openness, with 180 cultures, which leads to clashes, but still enables the city marketers to frame a message that “expresses the nuanced view of the image that people can have of the city.”

Figure 2: Brand values Rotterdam Make it Happen



1

Figure 2 summarizes the **brand values** that have been processed in the brand. The goal of the brand is to position the city internationally to create economic value that fits modern expectation, that will lead to increased wellbeing and welfare for all ‘Rotterdamers’ (Merkalliantie Make it Happen, 2019). Within the city itself, the goal is to create visibility of the brand and thereby creating ambassadorship. Here, the city is positioned as a testing ground for experiments and pioneers. The main focus of this position is the smart city, the healthy city, the inclusive city, and the circular city.

5.4 Strengths of the brands

During the interviews with the city marketing professionals, some strengths of the brands were expressed. Rotterdam Make it Happen was viewed as unique due to its unique governance. The strong collaboration between partners in the city, the Brand Alliance Rotterdam Make It Happen, a collaboration to bring the city forward, can be seen as one of the biggest strengths of the brand (Peter & Ralph). Ralph argued that the success behind this collaboration could be explained by the role of the stakeholders in the development of the city brand, which made them all part of ‘a movement’.

Additionally, all professional respondents argued that the fact that the brand goes deeper than the identity of the city by involving the mentality and the DNA of the city. They further argued that the DNA could be

¹ Reprinted from: Rotterdam partners (2019). Rotterdam Make it Happen Guide. Retrieved from: <https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/app/uploads/2019/06/RMIH-presentatie-website.pdf>

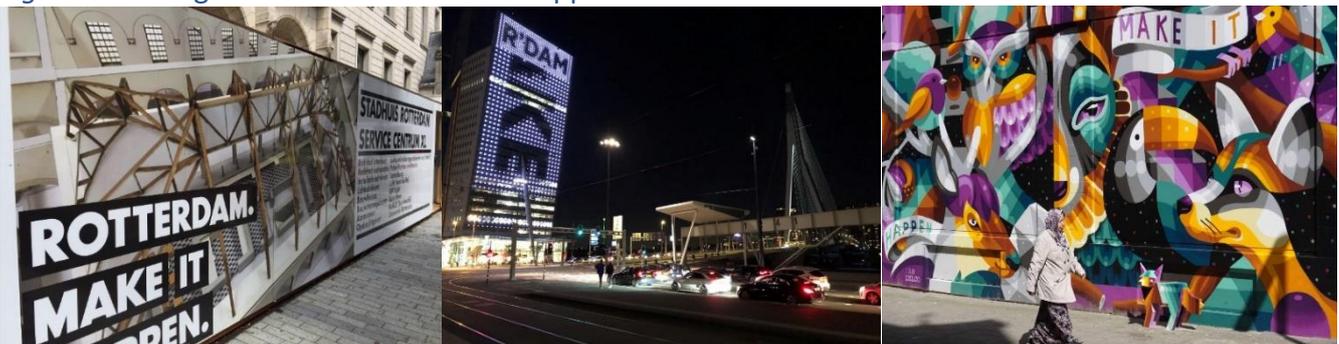
traced back to the history of the city, referring to the bombing in the second world war. Nancy explained that the use of the city's DNA leads to a shared perspective. Moreover, Nancy argued that one of the strengths of the brand is the combination of the cultural development of the city with the expressions of the brand. This combination distinguishes Rotterdam Make it happen from other brands. Finally, the professional respondents argued that Rotterdam Make it Happen was able to strengthen the connections between the citizens since the DNA it expresses acts as a common code for different stakeholders in the city. The third strength of the brand is the proactive approach to branding, which goes further than authentic branding. Examples of this proactive approach are murals all over the city, which makes the brand more appealing and approachable to the broader public (Ralph, personal communication, July 24th, 2020). Along the same line, Nancy argued:

“Rotterdam Make it Happen differs from other brands like I Amsterdam since it adds a message and really tells you something about that things can happen in this city.”

5.5 Presence of the brand

When Ralph, Peter and Nancy were asked about internal visibility of the brand they pointed at: the use of the brand on construction signs, the screen on the KPN building and street art. Additionally, people should be able to recognize the brand on social media, branding at important peak moments, events, or other campaigns in public space.

Figure 3: Outings of Rotterdam Make it Happen²



² Retrieved from: <https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/>

5.6 Expectations of city marketing professionals

In the interviews with professionals, they were asked what expectations they had of this study. Firstly, the city branding manager, Nancy, expected the relationship between the city and the citizens to be based on proudness. Secondly, she predicted that the respondents would be able to recognize themselves in the brand since the brand is based on the mentality of the citizens of the city. Moreover, she expected that this brand self-similarity plays a role in identification with the brand. Thirdly, she expected that the brand could lead to social benefits since the brand is not only focussed on attracting external actors. She further explained that the brand also aims at the creation of connectedness, resilience, and perseverance. As an example, Nancy pointed at the hashtag #Rotterdamzetdoor that has been used to show support for the pandemic-related initiatives of companies, organisations, and entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, Nancy argued that the brand would be viewed as a more reliable brand than others, since it is more focussed on the 'collective' rather than the 'individual', like in IAmsterdam. Lastly, Peter and Nancy predicted that age would have the most significant moderating effect on city brand identification. As they stated:

Due to the language barrier, older people might have a lower level of identification. Maybe people from lower socio-economic backgrounds will not be able to completely identify with the brand. But what the brand tells us is that there is room for improvement, despite the social structures

- Peter

I expect that older, more traditional Rotterdammers have a focus on the past – Nancy

Chapter 6: Research findings

The purpose of this study is to investigate the drivers behind citizen city brand identification. In this chapter, the results of the interviews that were conducted with citizens of Rotterdam will be presented. The findings will be presented around four themes: resident-city relationships, resident-city brand relationship, moderator effects, and the dependent variable, city brand identification, divided by the key questions of the interviews. The final part of this chapter will exist of suggestions for the management of the brand, both based on advice from city marketing professionals (Peter & Ralph) and the citizens of Rotterdam. These suggestions, together with the insights about city brand identification, have led to important recommendations for the organizations in the Brand Alliance, which can be found in 8.3. The list of interviewees and the interview guide can be found in the annexes.

6.1 Findings on resident-city identification

This paragraph will focus on the relationship between the respondents and the Rotterdam.

6.1.1 Brand social benefits

Do you feel like a 'Rotterdammer', or not?

All interviews started with the question 'Do you feel like a 'Rotterdammer', or not'. All respondents felt like they were part of this social group. The reasoning behind this membership of the social group differed between the respondents. Here, the amount of time they lived in the city was used as an argument, together with the fact that they feel like the city is their home, or that they 'just belong' in Rotterdam. For example, Aria, who stated:

"Yes, actually, not really because I have lived in this city my entire life, but mostly that when I leave the city and come back to Rotterdam. I always feel like, this is home."

Others directed at emotional aspects of the relationship that they have with the city. These aspects existed of proudness, the connectedness of the city, openness, and the resilience of the city. The reasoning behind these emotions stems back to the reconstruction, the diversity of citizens and the cities iconic architecture. Mostly the respondents with older age and a Dutch background used the bombing and reconstruction of the inner city in their explanation of their membership of the social group and the emotional factor 'proudness'. For example, Eleanor stated:

“Yes, I feel like a Rotterdammer, that is maybe because I am proud of the city because I have experienced the bombing of the city. The way in which the city is built and the mentality of the average Rotterdammer, yes I like that.”

Overall, it can be concluded that the respondents all felt that they were part of the social group ‘Rotterdamers’. This was mostly due to the amount of time spent in the city, a sense of belonging, proudness, connectedness, together with the resilience and openness of the city.

Do you feel a sense of kinship with other Rotterdammers, or not?

Most respondents argued that they felt a sense of kinship with other citizens due to social proximity. In contrast, others noted that the sense of kinship motivated them to mean something to the community. For example, Alex argued that this kinship drives them in their work for the municipality of Rotterdam to create a better living environment for the citizens of the city. Others pointed out that they felt a sense of kinship during important events for the city, for example, winning soccer championships or attracting the Eurovision song festival. For instance, Cameron argued:

“I feel proud when I find Rotterdam on important lists, I am proud that the city becomes a city to travel to, I am proud when Feyenoord, Sparta or Excelsior wins, despite not being a football fan. When you decide to stand in the fountain because Feyenoord won, you naturally feel related to other people in the city.”

Additionally, some respondents argued that they felt like it was easier to connect with people that have lived, studied, or worked in Rotterdam. For instance, Victoria argued that she felt like she would not be able to build sufficient relationships with people from other cities due to a lack of a common mentality. Nevertheless, some respondents stated that they were able to connect with all people in society or are inherently motivated to mean something for people and society in general. Cameron noted that the brand allowed interaction with other cities in the world with the same mentality. In sum, most respondents felt a sense of kinship with other citizens in Rotterdam since they felt that it is easier to connect with other citizens. Others claimed that important events for the city trigger this feeling. Finally, this study found that the sense of kinship sometimes works motivating in meaning something to other people within the social group.

6.1.2 Sense of belonging

Where do you feel at home?

4 out of 13 respondents argued that the amount of time that they have spent in Rotterdam played a role in the degree to which they felt like it was their home. The reasoning behind this was mostly that they felt a connection with other citizens, that the city feels familiar or that the city feels 'small' despite its status as the second city of the Netherlands. Lillian argued:

"It feels like home because it feels like a village – I have lived in Amsterdam, and even if you know your way around the city, it feels like home because I always run into people, it feels small and is easy to oversee.

Despite being a metropolis."

Victoria felt like home in Rotterdam but argued that it had nothing to do with the city itself and more with the fact that all her family lives in the city. Cameron was another exception and argued that he feels like he is at home wherever their laptop is. He argued further that *"it does not matter if I work in another city, in my own home or wherever"*. Overall, one can conclude that almost all respondents felt a sense of belonging. A factor that played a role in the sense of belonging is that the respondents found it easier to connect to other people that are from Rotterdam because they are 'a particular kind of people'. The sense of belonging was due to the amount of time spent in the city, the connections that they have with other 'Rotterdamers', the fact that the city feels small or the mentality of other citizens in the city.

6.1.3 Place uniqueness/distinctiveness

Do you feel like Rotterdam is comparable to other cities or not?

Most respondents stated that they thought that the city was unique or distinctive compared to others. The arguments were formulated around three main themes. Firstly, the architecture is seen as an essential part of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the city. They argued that the inner city of Rotterdam was like no other within the Netherlands, mostly due to the open and modern appearance. Again, several respondents pointed at the history of the city and its reconstruction. This 'changed the path' (Alex, personal communication, May 15th, 2020) of the city and changed the direction of the architecture of the city, which brings us to the second theme. For instance, Alex stated *"this city is just unique and the history and the economic plan of action, the mentality of the citizens both contribute to the character of the city"*. He further argued that the city was not comparable to other cities since it has grown from a sad situation to a mini-metropolis and had gained opportunities due to the Second world war. Others argued around the same lines, like Grace, *"When I think about the recent changes of the city, for example, de Markthal, I always think, Rotterdam just did it"*. Finally, diversity was a reoccurring theme. The culture and composition of the city were found appealing by 5 out of 13 respondents, mostly at a lower age. For example, Ava expressed that the 'openness' of the city and its people were appealing to them since it feels safe and reliable. Lillian

claimed that the open feeling of the city leads to diversity and makes that there is room for everybody to connect with others. Others pointed to the fact that they felt that others might have the same feeling towards other cities. To sum up, the city itself is perceived as unique and distinctive. This is mostly due to its architecture, together with the diverse and open culture of the city.

6.2 Findings on resident-city brand relationship

In this part of the thesis, the relationship between the citizens and Rotterdam Make it Happen will be analysed.

6.2.1 Brand prestige

Do you know the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen, or not?

As part of the sampling process, we aimed at a broad range of knowledge about the brand. Most citizens did not know about the brand, but 'recognized' it, or were not sure from where they recognized the font and black blocks (Lillian, personal communication, June 1st, 2020). Some respondents were able to come up with specific examples, mostly connected to knowledge from their work (for example, Intranet or Rio of the municipality or job events). A small group of respondents was able to recognize it from the marathon or in the street scene like on construction sites. Others pointed out the screen of the office building of KPN, or Toren op Zuid, which also shows an advertisement for the brand. They argued that the location made the expression of the brand 'inspiring' and 'motivating'. As Chloe explained: *"When you cross the Erasmus bridge at night you have a perfect sight of the screen that says Make it happen, I do not know, it just makes me happy"*. When the citizens were provided with more information about the locations where they should recognize the brand from, almost all respondents were able to remember outings of the brand. The guidance was mostly needed for older respondents.

What quality does Rotterdam Make it happen have compared to other city brands?

Some respondents were able to name I Amsterdam, mostly pointing to the letters on Museumplein; others were able to recognize it after we provided them with the example. 2 out of the 13 respondents stated that they thought I Amsterdam had better quality since 'it speaks to the person'. The respondents did not recognize other city brands. Besides that, the main consensus was that Rotterdam Make it Happen was a broad brand which was able to speak to several groups of citizens. Eleanor argued that the brand expressed the essential characteristics of the economy of the city. Along the same line, other respondents argued that the brand was inclusive in the sense that the brand was able to cover all aspects of the city. They further argued that the inclusive approach compared to the other city brands played a sizeable role in their perceived quality for the brand. For example, James argued that Tilburg was a 'self-proclaimed' capital of the city of social innovation. The broad, inclusive character of the Rotterdam Make it Happen has been a

recurring theme in this study. Besides, the respondents argued that the motivating and stimulating character of the city brand was appealing to them and was, therefore, more comfortable to remember compared to other brands. For instance, Grace stated that she felt like the brand had a robust appearance and that the brand showed ambition. Others pointed at the city brand identity, that is connected with the *'niet lullen maar poetsen'* mentality of the city. Without explaining the city brand identity at the beginning of the interviews, 12 out of 13 respondents were able to recognize the city brand identity as set out in Chapter 5.

How would you describe the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen?

The respondents were presented with a list of descriptions, as shown in table 5 and asked the respondents to pick three out of the list of words. Down-to-earth and honest were the most popular options, mostly due to the applicability of those words to both the brand and the mentality of the city. For example, Victoria thought that the brand was down-to-earth since it is a modern harbour city where everybody can feel welcome. From this, one can conclude that overall, the brand was found to possess a high quality compared to other city brands and is viewed as prestigious according to the respondents.

Table 5: Descriptions of the brand

Description of brand	Number of respondents
Charming	
Down-to-earth	6
Honest	7
Intelligent	1
Outdoorsy	
Prestigious	3
Reliable	
Successful	2
Tough	
Unique	5
Upper class	
Wholesome	4
Distinctive	3

6.2.2 Brand uniqueness

Would you describe the brand as unique or distinctive?

As table 5 describes, 8 out of 13 respondents found that the brand was unique and distinctive. In their explanation, most compared the city brand to the other city brands and stated that due to the broad approach of the brand, they perceived it as unique and distinctive. When we explicitly asked the respondents whether they found the brand distinctive or unique, all respondents stated that they felt that the city brand allowed the city to distinguish itself from other cities. Blake expressed that the positive framing of the brand made it distinctive from others. He further argued that the brand was still not as strong as I Amsterdam since it did not 'speak to the person'. Others, like Aria, pointed at the broad approach, in which several subjects and several aspects of the city were included made the brand distinctive from others. Cameron argued that he thought the brand was distinctive due to the priorities that have been defined in its campaigns; he also argued that the brand has a 'catchy' sound. In sum, Rotterdam Make it Happen is perceived as a unique or distinctive brand. This was mostly due to the positive framing, the inclusive approach of the brand, the brand priorities, and the 'memorable' sound of the brand.

6.2.4 Brand self-similarity

What identity do you think that this brand express?

Most respondents were able to retrace the city brand identity or the mentality without further explanation. The identities that they found in the brand showed a mentality of 'rouwdouwers', 'schouders eronder' ('your back into it'), 'aanpakkers' ('go-getters'), and no-nonsense (Alex, James, Evelyn, Blake, Lillian & Cameron). They felt that the brand was expressing that the city has successes. According to Evelyn, the brand showed strength and resilience. Blake felt like it was about showing the change and profiling in a new way. Along the same line, Aria claimed that the brand expressed 'new and modern' ways of tackling challenges, 'together', which also indicates that the brand increases the sense of kinship.

After the respondents were presented with the incorporated city brand identity or mentality, as has been set out in 5.4, 12 out of 13 respondents were able to recognize the city brand identity. However, the degree to which they were able to identify the characteristics of the brand as characteristics of themselves differed. Some respondents indicated that the brand was a good reflection of themselves. Others have stated that the city brand identity was a perfect description of the city (Alex, Sofia, Aria, Victoria & Blake). Alex claimed "we do not see ourselves better than we are, we just do it. This is who we are". Furthermore, Aria stated: "The characteristics you just named are typically Rotterdam, but also no-nonsense and a world-oriented approach. Not only focussed on what happens in Rotterdam but also where the city stands right now."

Do you recognize yourself in the brand?

All respondents argued that they recognized themselves to some extent. They further argued that the expressed place brand identity leads to a feeling of being a part of the social group, Rotterdammers. All respondents stated that they would describe themselves with one or more characteristics of the city brand identity. Cameron noted that he missed 'quality' in the goals of the brand as he argues that sometimes quality is more important than quantity, even in the profiling of cities. 12 out of 13 respondents were able to recognize their norms and values in the brand, but only after an explanation of the city brand identity. Some of the Respondents (Alex, Evelyn, Ava, Aria, Blake Lillian), stated that the brand expressed their vision to life. Others, like Respondents 3 and 6 were also able to recognize their norms and values, but only to a certain extent. Aria noted that the imbedded norms and values of the brand were open for interpretation. One can conclude that the city brand expresses a clear city brand identity that matches the identity and mentality of the city.

6.2.5 Brand social benefits

Does the brand have the capability to increase the feeling of being part of a social group?

Here, almost all respondents had a positive response. Mostly referring to the 'DNA' or mentality that the brand expresses. According to Sofia, the brand shows 'strength', others argued that the brand works motivating, or as a 'boost', which in turn could lead to proudness about being a part of the social group 'Rotterdammers'. Furthermore, some respondents argued that the brand could lead to social benefits due to the brand management strategy. For instance, Aria argued that the capabilities of the city brand are due to the broad set of parties connected to the brand. She added that the brand needed more exposure to create a feeling of being a social group or being a Rotterdammer. Chloe had the firmest response and argued:

"If the brand would be promoted in a really good campaign, I am sure the brand would be able to activate people. If you end up in a deep place in life you will be able to say that you can make it happen because you are a citizen of the city."

Do you think that the brand has the capability to create opportunities to socialize or interact with others?

Half of the respondents stated that the brand provided opportunities to interact. However, most of them had not come across such an opportunity before this interview and needed further explanation of the expressions of the brand. For example, Alex argued that the used example of the street art outing on the Witte de With straat was a creative way of reaching the goals of the brand since it invites people to share the brand further over social media. Others, like Evelyn, argued that the brand was an alluring slogan, and a

tagline to bring like-minded people, with the same norms and values together. She further argued that the brand invited people to have a conversation. Some, like Aria, were more critical and argued that the brand offered opportunities to interact during specific activities, and pointed at the fact that the broad city brand identity and coverage of the brand made it easier to provide interaction between citizens. On the other side, James argued that “the brand was just ‘pasted on’ the city but did not invite people to interact”. Blake explained further that the activities would be the main topic of conversation, rather than the content of the brand. Here, one can conclude that despite the brand's capability to increase social benefits, the brand lacks visibility.

6.3 Moderator effects – Socio-economic characteristics

As explained in 2.2.4 and 3.1 (Expectation 5), some moderation by socio-economic characteristics was expected. However, the direction of the relationship was not specified. The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents can be found in Annex 3. As stated in 5.5, the city branding professionals, Peter & Nancy, also had expectations about the role of socioeconomic characteristics in city brand identification with Rotterdam Make it Happen. However, overall, the socio-economic characteristics did not play a sizable role in the state of identification. In short, the expectations were that mostly older people would have a lower state of identification due to the language barrier, but also because older people tend to be more traditional.

This study also showed a trend in the state of identification; older people without the knowledge of the brand were not able to completely identify with the brand. This trend can mostly be explained by a lack of recognition in the international and worldly aspect of the city brand identity. Also, people with a higher age mostly referred to the reconstruction of the city. At the same time, younger respondents used the culture (diversity and openness) of the city in their answers.

Furthermore, they expected that people from lower socio-economic groups would have a lower state of identification due to lack of leads for them to identify with the brand. This factor was measured by the current profession and the level of education of the respondents. These expectations have been confirmed by James and 4, who argued that the brand was not for ‘all’ citizens. Chloe agreed with this statement and argued that she could understand if not all people would feel as connected to the brand as others. In sum, despite that older people had a lower state of identification with the brand; however, only a limited effect was found by the moderator ‘age’. Furthermore, occupation played a role in the state of identification because the people that had a connection to the brand about the brand had a higher level of identification with the brand.

6.4 City brand identification

Would you describe yourself with the brand or not?

This study used city brand identification as the dependent variable. As has been stated previously, several respondents stated that despite recognizing the brand, it missed promotion, which therefore made them feel like the brand needed more promotion for them to identify with the brand. Most respondents that recognized the brand knew it through their occupation (Alex, Evelyn, Ava, Cameron). Cameron explained that as a former director of a significant art-institute, he was connected to the brand through Rotterdam Festivals. Others, like Alex, stated that he knew the brand from the online communication system of the municipality. Some respondents were able to recognize it from the KPN-screen (Aria and Chloe). The biggest group of respondents were able to recognize the brand. However, they were not able to come up with specific details about how they knew the brand. 10 out of 13 respondents implied that they lacked a 'deeper understanding' of the brand. However, people connected to the brand through their work did not view a deeper understanding of the brand and argued that visibility is a necessary condition to identify with it. For instance, Evelyn argued that the brand was loaded and that she was able to recognize the brand from different places, in the city. This respondent had the highest state of identification with Rotterdam Make it Happen. She responded enthusiastically, with a strong 'yes' to the question whether she would describe themselves with the brand and whether she thought the brand matched well with her personality. Under the other respondents, the responses differed. Alex argued:

"Yes, I feel like I can describe myself with this brand as a Rotterdammer, in Rotterdam, working for Rotterdam. The words describe how I am as a person. I am a go-getter, and I go for it."

Does the brand mean something to you, or not?

Nevertheless, 4 out of 13 respondents argued that in order for the brand to mean something to them, they needed more understanding of the brand, or argued that the brand lacked visibility. As stated by Victoria: *"This brand does not really mean something to me because I cannot really remember from which specific places, I recognize it "*. Despite the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the brand, 6 out of the 13 respondents stated that the appearance of the brand fitted the mentality of the city, they argued that therefore they thought that the brand was important to them. Lillian claimed that that might be the strength of the brand. Alex stated: *"Make it happen is only a confirmation that Rotterdam is all about action and experience"*.

Some respondents connected their identification with the brand with their occupations. For example, Ava argued that as a teacher, she prepares high school children for society, and thereby the success of the city. Others, like Victoria, argued that because she felt like a part of the city. She further argued that she could

describe herself with Rotterdam Make it Happen due to her ambition to grow and the opportunities that the city has brought to them.

Cameron further explained why he thought that Rotterdam Make it Happen did not directly connect to himself. Nevertheless, he argued that since the brand is connected history of the city, identification was not a necessary condition for them to promote the brand. The connection between the history of the city and the city brand has been a recurring argument that the respondents used to explain how they identified with the city, why they were proud of the city and why the city was like no other. Cameron further argued that brands are selective; it is a logical decision for the city to profile like a young, urban appealing city. As he stated:

“After the bombing, the mayor stepped in ruins with a shovel and said, and now we are going to renovate it. We are not going to look back and sorrow about what happened to us. No, we will pick up the shovel and will build a new, modern city. This mentality always maintained in the DNA of the city. The decision to make it happen fits with this DNA.”

From this, we can conclude that despite the perceived lack of visibility of the brand, the respondents were able to identify with it. In sum, a small portion of the respondents claimed that they identified with the brand due to self-similarity. All respondents argued that the city brand identity fitted the DNA, identity, and mentality of the city. Furthermore, most respondents argued that they were not able to completely identify with the brand due to the lack of visibility of the brand. 6 out of 13 respondents argued that they ‘missed the story behind the brand’, which they perceived as a necessary condition to identify with the brand. The group of respondents that were familiar with the brand are mostly employed by the organizations in the Brand alliance or have come across the brand due to their occupation.

6.5 Brand management

During the data collection process, the respondents started giving suggestions about how, especially the municipality, but the entire Brand Alliance Make it happen, could improve the management of the brand. These ideas differed from general campaign strategies to more practical advice. Since the sampling of this study aimed at a set of respondents with different levels of knowledge of the brand, we were able to select respondents employed by organizations in the Brand Alliance. This enabled us to gain their advises on the internal management of the brand in the organizations that are part of the Brand Alliance. This paragraph also discusses the advice that has been given by the city branding professional (Peter, personal communication, March 20th, 2020) and city marketing professional (Ralph, personal communication, July 24th, 2020) will be discussed.

As concluded in 6.2.1, all respondents agreed that Rotterdam Make it Happen lacked visibility. This observation by the respondents has led to strategic pieces of advice. For example, the brand could be used as a broad umbrella under which all city-wide communication should occur. Peter argued that more activities should be branded with Rotterdam Make it Happen by making it part of the processes of organizations within the Brand Alliance. In particular, initiatives by the Erasmus University, like science conferences or projects of the Port Authority, like energy neutrality could be branded with Rotterdam Make it Happen. Moreover, he argued that the business environments, in general, could apply the brand more often. Others found that the brand needed to be named more prominently, to increase the connection with the brand since they found that people 'lacked understanding' of the brand. Several respondents stated that events like job markets or festivals could be branded with Rotterdam Make it Happen.

More specific advice has been given about the current pandemic. Peter, the city branding professional, argued that the Make it Happen mentality in the small actions to help others or to create an impact during the crisis could be branded with Rotterdam Make it Happen³. Additionally, 10 out of 13 respondents found that the brand should invite people to fill the brand in themselves. Blake further argued that that was a condition for the brand to be successfully expressed to external actors. As stated in 6.2.1, Evelyn had the highest state of identification of all respondents. Still, she argued that the 'real Rotterdammer' from the lower economic level in the inner city would lack a connection with the brand. In order to overcome this, the brand should be connected to neighbourhood-level activities. As an example, 'Opzoomer', a widely known street activity that was created around the end of the '80s to renew the *Opzoomerstraat* in the Western part of the city (Opzoomermee, 2020). Peter stated: "*Opzoomeren was brilliant since it invited neighbours to work on the city together, without formal meetings, but just arose because people saw something and took action*". The concept spread out over the entire city. It became a concept for citizen-induced initiatives to tackle social problems in the city. City marketing professional Ralph agreed with this idea and argued that the brand could mainly be used in the southern part of the city since the brand belongs to all citizens and stakeholders in the city. He argued:

"I think we should try our hardest to celebrate the southern part of the city. Amazing people, but also architecture, amazing neighbourhoods and public spaces that deserve investment. This way, the brand can be used internally to build stronger connections between its citizens. But also, art and culture express the Make it Happen mentality."

³ After this interview, the hashtag #RotterdamZetdoor was used to brand such initiatives.

– Ralph

Peter stated: *“Opzoomeren was brilliant since it invited neighbours to work on the city together, without formal meetings, but just arose because people saw something and took action”*. Evelyn further explained that the concept showed the notion of Make it happen, because ‘those people also make it happen’.

Respondents Chloe and Lillian argued that the brand lacked storytelling:

“For example, by connecting the brand to an advertisement of a girl around 20-25 years old, that shows how she goes around her day, how the city motivates her and how she connects to the rest of the city”. –

Lillian

In the organizations of the Brand Alliance, Alex argued, the brand had the capabilities to increase motivation under the employees. However, to achieve this, the information about the brand should go beyond internal newsletters. He further explained that he felt that more awareness should be created about the brand by incorporating the mentality to the actions of employees of the municipality. As he stated, *“In the end, we do it for Rotterdam, and others can see that as well.”* Additionally, Grace, also an employee of the municipality, stated that with aiming at the employees of the municipality, a large part of the target audience would be reached. Nancy, the city marketing professional, did not agree with this position. She argued that the DNA, as expressed in the brand, is part of the employees of the organisations of the Brand alliance, it is a mission that drives them to contribute to the city. The branding management advice, as discussed in this paragraph, will be used in the recommendations in 8.3.

Chapter 7: Analysis of findings

7. 1 Analysis of resident-city identification

Generally, there are commonalities in how people felt about the city Rotterdam. All respondents in one way or another felt like they were part of the social group 'Rotterdammers' and felt a sense of kinship to others within that social group. Furthermore, all the respondents felt a sense of belonging in the city. The reasons behind these feelings were mostly based on the amount of time spent in the city, a sense of belonging and emotional reasons like proudness, connectedness, openness, and the strength of the city. In explaining their connection, the reconstruction of the city played a key role, especially under the older respondents. Furthermore, the city was perceived as more unique or distinctive than in other cities. The perceived uniqueness and distinctiveness were mostly due to the architecture of the city, the mentality and identity of other citizens in the city or the diverse and open culture that exist in the city. Again, the reasoning behind it is mostly directed at a feeling of proudness over the city.

7. 2 Analysis of resident- city brand identification

7.2.1 Brand prestige

From the analysis of the connection between the residents and the brand, it can be concluded that Rotterdam Make it Happen is perceived as a prestigious city brand. Despite that this study identified a lack of visibility of the brand, almost all respondents were able to recognize it. The ones that only recognized the brand claimed that they knew the brand from the street scene. Since the sampling of this study aimed at the creation of a sample with a broad range of the amount of knowledge of the brand, most respondents that knew the brand were connected to it through their occupation.

One can also conclude that the respondents overall did not know other brands besides the brand I Amsterdam. However, in general, Rotterdam Make it Happen was found to have a better quality than the other discussed city brands. This was mostly due to the inclusive and broad approach to the identity of the city. Some respondents ranked IAmsterdam higher due since it 'speaks to the person'. Moreover, all respondents argued that the city brand identity was connected to the identity of the city, even before the real city brand identity was shared with the respondents. From this, one can conclude that the brand evidently expressed the identity of the city and that the formulation of the city brand identity is strongly connected to the identity of the city, as experienced by its citizens. In their explanation, the respondents argued that the brand was able to connect people, which increases the sense of kinship. The final reason why the brand can be seen as prestigious is that the respondents described it as 'down to earth', 'honest' and 'motivating'.

7.2.2 Brand uniqueness

Generally, the respondents stated that Rotterdam Make it Happen has the capability to distinguish Rotterdam from other cities. The respondents argued that this was mostly due to the positive framing, memorable sound, brand priorities and the inclusive approach of the brand. From this, we can conclude that Rotterdam Make it Happen is perceived as unique and distinctive compared to other brands.

7.2.3 Brand self-similarity

Despite that not all respondents were able to recognize themselves entirely in the brand, most respondents claimed that they recognized themselves to a certain extent. Moreover, all respondents were able to retrace the city brand identity. The respondents who were not able to completely recognize themselves in the brand still thought that the brand was a correct frame of the city and its identity. Most respondents stated that they were able to describe themselves with at least one of the characteristics of Rotterdam Make it Happen. Additionally, a big part of the respondents was able to recognize their norms and values in the brand. Therefore, one can conclude that most respondents found that the city brand identity and the norms and values that are embedded in the brand are similar to their own.

7.2.4 Brand social benefits

This study found that the brand leads to social benefits since it can increase the feeling of being part of the social group and its capability to increase the sense of kinship between citizens. Another aspect of the brand that promotes social benefits is the brand management strategy in which the Brand Alliance carries the brand, a broad set of stakeholders in the city. The respondents that had a direct connection to the Brand alliance due to their occupations saw the brand as a way to bring like-minded people together. However, not all the respondents found that the brand offers opportunities to socialize or interact with other citizens. This was mostly because the brand does not invite people to discuss the brand due to the lack of visibility of the brand.

7.2.5 Socio-economic characteristics

Additionally, socio-economic characteristics were applied as a moderator in this study, to measure whether they influenced how and why citizens identify with the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. From this, one can conclude that age plays a role in city brand identification. This can be explained by the fact that older people did not recognize themselves in the 'international' and 'worldly' aspect of the city brand identification. This also influenced how they view the city since they mostly referred to the history of reconstruction. As explained in Chapter 5, this effect was also predicted by the city branding professionals Nancy and Peter.

Furthermore, younger people mostly used culture and diversity to explain why they identified with the city or the city brand. Some respondents, like Cameron, also expected this effect and argued that it is to be expected that brands cannot cover all citizens of the city. Another effect of socio-economic characteristics

that this study found is that citizen's knowledge of the brand is mostly formed by their occupations, resulting in a higher state of identification if the brand.

7. 3 City brand identification

Concerning the dependent variable city brand identification, all respondents were able to identify with the brand in one way or another. Generally, the identification was mostly due to brand self-similarity and the fact that the brand was similar to the identity, history, and DNA of the city. Another factor that we found to play a significant role in city brand identification was the connection between the brand and the occupations of the respondents. This connection was primarily formed by employment by the organizations in the Brand Alliance. Moreover, despite that the brand is perceived as prestigious and unique, these factors did not play a role in the state of identification with the brand. The brand was also found to have the capability to lead to social benefits. However, this did not play a role in the identification with the brand due to lack of visibility or understanding of the brand.

Furthermore, the socio-economic characteristics age and occupation played a sizable role in city brand identification since these factors play a role in the amount of knowledge about the brand. Nonetheless, most respondents were able to identify with the brand Rotterdam Make it happen. Additionally, this study found that factors like an expected connective outcome of the brand, proudness over the city, the history of the city, and the culture of the city might play a role in the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen. Unfortunately, due to the constraints of this study, these factors have not been researched sufficiently.

In sum, the most substantial factor in the state of identification was the reflection of the city in the city brand identity. Other factors that were found were brand self-similarity, knowledge about the brand, age, and occupation play a role in the state of city brand identification. From this, one can conclude that in the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen, the applied factors play a smaller role than expected. In fact, a proper reflection of the city in the city brand is the biggest driver behind city brand identification. The second conclusion that can be drawn is that city brand identification does not work in the same way as commercial brand identification.

Chapter 8: Discussion of findings

8.1 Conclusion

Since city brand identification is a necessary condition to gain wide support for city brands, this study researched the drivers behind it. In conclusion, this study researched the question: *'What are the different drivers behind city brand identification, and what is the role of socioeconomic characteristics in this identification in the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen brand?'*. To answer this research question, this thesis researched the relationship between city brand identification and the drivers: brand self-similarity, brand uniqueness, brand prestige and brand social benefits. Additionally, this study examined the role of socioeconomic characteristics in city brand identification. This was conducted with a qualitative approach, consisting of interviews and document analyses. Firstly, to gain an understanding of the context of the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen, official documents were analysed, and interviews were conducted with city marketing professionals. Secondly, as a primary data source, interviews have been conducted with residents of Rotterdam to research their state of identification with the brand.

This thesis aimed to determine drivers behind city brand identification. Based on the literature, several expectations were formulated based on self-enhancing and self-defining drivers that have been found to influence city brand identification. Generally, this research found little evidence supporting a relationship between the drivers as formulated by Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012). Except for the factor brand self-similarity, the other factors did not play a role in city brand identification with the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. Therefore, we can conclude that this study only confirms Expectation 1. While the brand was perceived as unique, prestigious, and was found to have the capability to lead to social benefits, these factors did not play a role in the state of city brand identification. Therefore, this study rejected Expectation 2, 3 and 4. According to the findings of this study, this can be explained by the lack of visibility of the brand, making visibility of the brand a necessary condition to create city brand identification. Still, this study found that almost all respondents in this study identified with the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen.

Furthermore, this thesis applied the socio-economic characteristics age, occupation, ethnic background, and the level of education as a moderator. Here, we found that the characteristic age plays a role in city brand identification. This relationship was also expected by the city marketing professionals Nancy and Peter. Additionally, the occupation was a socio-economic characteristic that influenced city brand identification, since certain occupations have been found to increase the knowledge of the brand Rotterdam make it Happen. Therefore, Expectation 5 can be confirmed.

In addition, this study has found unexpected factors that, according to the results, play a role in city brand identification. Factors like the expected connecting outcome of the brand, proudness over the city, the history of the city, and the culture of the city might play a role in city brand identification. From this, we can

conclude that in the context of Rotterdam Make it Happen; the drivers play a smaller role than expected. In fact, a proper reflection of the city in the brand is a sufficient driver behind city brand identification. The second conclusion that can be drawn is that city brand identification does not work in the same way as commercial brand identification. Finally, visibility of the brand is a necessary condition to create effective city brands.

8. 2 Implications, limitations, and recommendations

8.2.1 Implications and limitations

Generally, we concluded that the citizens of Rotterdam could identify with the brand Rotterdam Make it Happen. The main contribution of this study lies in the examination of the drivers behind city brand identification. Here, we found that not all antecedents as formulated by Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) play a role in the identification with Rotterdam Make it Happen. The antecedent self-similarity was the only factor that was found to play a substantial role in identification. Furthermore, brand prestige, brand uniqueness/distinctiveness and brand social benefits did not play a role in the level of identification, which might be explained by a lack of visibility and knowledge of the brand. Nevertheless, this study identified other factors behind city brand identification, namely: knowledge about the brand, similarity between the brand in the city, occupation, and age. Therefore, theoretically, this contribution added to the discussion of place brand identification and city branding in general by providing new insights into the drivers behind city brand identification. A secondary contribution of this research is the brand management recommendations that provide insights on how effective and inclusive brands can be created. These recommendations will be further discussed in section 8.2.3. Although this research yields interesting results, they should be considered against several potential limitations. Nevertheless, these limitations imply interesting future research directions which will be discussed in the next section.

First, due to the limited scope of this study, the size of the sample was restricted. Moreover, how the respondents were approached, via personal connections online and in real life, has led to a smaller network of respondents. Additionally, the specific focus on the context and city brand identity of Rotterdam Make it Happen makes that the conclusions of this study are not generalizable to all place or city brands. This limits the external validity of this study.

Furthermore, the fact that the interviews took place during a period of social distancing, resulting in the absence of events and time spent outside, might have led to a lack of recollection of outings of the brand, and therefore could have led to recall bias. This, in turn, might have influenced the conclusions about visibility and knowledge of the brand. The second potential limitation is related to a selection bias in the research approach, which also could have played a role in sampling. Moreover, due to the lack of research experience or in the translation of the transcriptions, an observation and confirmation bias may have

occurred. Another effect of the qualitative approach of this study is that it may have reduced the potential to replicate this study. Finally, the research methods and the analysis might have been a potential limitation to this study since a quantitative set up of this city might have provided us with more insights about the size of the effects of the antecedents and the socio-economic characteristics.

8.2.2 Recommendations for future research

The empirical and conceptual results from this study, combined with the limiting considerations expressed above, expose some interesting future research opportunities. First, the empirical results presented in this thesis imply the need for more comprehensive attention to the drivers behind city brand identification. Despite the contribution of this study, a more in-depth and more extensive study of these factors will provide us with more insights into city brand identification. Secondly, a quantitative approach in future research might provide more insights into the size of the effects of the drivers. Additionally, a comparative approach to this research objective might expose if the findings of this study are specific to the context and mentality of Rotterdam and Rotterdam Make it Happen. This can provide us with more insights about the generalizability of the findings of this study. Lastly, theoretically, the research field of city branding might benefit from more research into the specific antecedents and how they work in the specific context of city brands.

8.2.3 Strategic and practical recommendations

The strategic and practical recommendations are based on brand management advice, as discussed in 6.5. The first recommendation is to create more visibility of the brand to increase the level of identification. As this study found, Rotterdam Make it Happen has many capabilities; however, due to the lack of visibility, citizens lacked a connection with the brand. Especially in the time of the pandemic, a context in which the distance between citizens is amplified, the brand could benefit from more exposure. The visibility can be generated by allowing citizens to give meaning to the brand by allowing them to brand their activities with Rotterdam Make it Happen, like neighbourhood activities. 'Opzoomermee' is a popular example of such neighbourhood initiatives.

In the organizations that are part of the Brand Alliance, the brand has been found to have capabilities, mostly by motivating its employees. However, the respondents that worked inside those organizations stated that these opportunities are not seized to its full extent. Therefore, we suggest that internally, the organizations should increase knowledge of the brand, and connect it to the objectives of specific teams as a way to increase motivation and identification with Rotterdam Make it Happen.

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Annex 1: Interview Manual – Citizen interviews

INTERVIEW MANUAL

INTRODUCTIE

- Met dit onderzoek probeer ik te onderzoeken waarom en hoe mensen zich identificeren met het merk Rotterdam make it happen. Voor het merk hebben verschillende organisaties hun handen ineengeslagen om Rotterdam op de kaart te zetten. Het doel van het merk is om nieuwe inwoners, bedrijven, studenten en bezoekers aan te trekken en te binden aan de stad. Omdat er weinig aandacht is voor hoe mensen uit Rotterdam zich hierbij voelen ben ik benieuwd naar uw mening.
- Ik ben Naomi, masterstudent Urban Governance aan de Erasmus Universiteit.
- Uw antwoorden zullen anoniem worden verwerkt. Wilt u een verslag van dit interview ontvangen?
- Geeft u toestemming om dit interview op te nemen?

VRAGEN

- | |
|---|
| <p>1)</p> <p>A. Zou u uzelf omschrijven als Rotterdammer, of niet?</p> <p>B. Waarom zou je jezelf zo wel/niet omschrijven?</p> |
| <p>2) A. Waar voelt u zich thuis?</p> |
| <p>3) A. Voel je je verwant aan andere Rotterdammers, of niet?</p> |
| <p>4) Vindt u over het algemeen dat Rotterdam zich onderscheidt van andere steden, of niet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Heb je het gevoel dat je een band hebt met andere rotterdammers; overeenkomsten en/of een connectie heeft.</i></p> |
| <p>5) A. Vind u dat Rotterdam zich in het algemeen onderscheidt van andere de steden, of niet?</p> <p>B. Kan je dat uitleggen?</p> |
| <p>6)</p> <p>A. Kent u het merk, of niet?</p> <p>B. Waarvan kent u het merk</p> |
| <p>7)</p> <p>A. Zou je zeggen dat het merk iets voor je betekent, of niet?</p> <p>B. Denk je dat dit merk het gevoel van Rotterdammer zijn aansterkt, of niet?</p> |

8) Ken je andere dergelijke merken

☒ *Voorbeelden van andere soortgelijke merken zijn bijvoorbeeld [I Amsterdam, The Hague – International city of peace and justice, A-typisch Antwerpen, Tilburg- capital of social innovation]*

9)

- A. Wat voor kwaliteit straalt deze brand uit ten opzichte van de andere? [hoge kwaliteit/lage kwaliteit]**
- B. Kan je uitleggen waarom je dat vindt.**

10) A. Wat voor identiteit denk je dat dit merk uitstraalt?

☒ *Met dit merk proberen ze de identiteit van de stad te omschrijven: internationaal, ondernemend, rauw, werelds, grensverleggend en no-nonsense.*

B. Onderscheidt Rotterdam zich met deze identiteit, of niet?

11) A. Welke 3 van deze woorden omschrijven volgens u dit merk ☒ *Vragen verduidelijking uniqueness and distinctiveness.*

Uniek

Onderscheidend

Down-to-earth

Eerlijk

Geluk bevorderend

Betrouwbaar

Intelligent

Succesvol

Hogere klasse

Charmant

Natuur-achtig

Prestigieus

b. Waarom

12)

A. Herken je je eigen normen en waarden in deze [omschrijving en identiteit in vraag 9 en 10]?

b. Kan je uitleggen waarom je dit vindt?

13)

- A. Kan je jezelf met dit merk identificeren, of niet?**
- B. Kan je dat uitleggen**

14)

A. Denk je dat dit merk kansen biedt om met anderen te socializen/interactie/in gesprek te gaan, of niet

B. Waarom en wie?

15)

A. Zou je jezelf met dit merk omschrijven, of niet?

A. Waarom wel /niet?

16) Hoe zou gemeente Rotterdam of het merk kunnen inzetten?

17) Hoe zou uw organisatie (Gemeente of universiteit) intern het merk kunnen inzetten?

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Primary data source - Residents

Interviewee	Pseudonym	Socio-economic characteristics	Manuscript?
Respondent 1	Alex	Age: 54 Education: MBO Occupation: Public administrator – Gemeente Rotterdam Background: Dutch Date: 15 th of May 2020	X
Respondent 5	Sofia	Age: 51 Education: MBO Occupation: Matchmaker Background: Suriname Date: 15 th of May 2020	X
Respondent 3	James	Age: 23 Education: High school Occupation: none Background: The Netherlands Date: 15 th of May 2020	X
Respondent 4	Evelyn	Age: 49 Education: HBO Occupation: Entrepreneur [Coach and consultant Background: Suriname Date: 16 th of May 2020	X
Respondent 2	Ava	Age: 60 Education: HBO Occupation: Teacher Background: Suriname Date: 18 th of May 2020	X
Respondent 6	Aria	Age: 24 Education: HBO Occupation: Accountmanager Background: Dutch Date: 19 th of May 2020	
Respondent 7	Victoria	Age: 26 Education: HBO	X

		Occupation: Zorgmedewerker Background: Dutch Date: 20 th of May 2020	
Respondent 8	Blake	Age: 35 Education: HBO Occupation: Public administrator Background: Dutch Date: 20 th of May 2020	
Respondent 9	Grace	Age: 62 Education: MBO Occupation: Public administrator – Gemeente Rotterdam Background: Dutch Date: 23 rd of May 2020	X
Respondent 10	Chloe	Age: 23 Education: WO Occupation: Student Background: Congolese Date: 25 th of May 2020	
Respondent 11	Eleanor	Age: 93 Education: Occupation: Background: Dutch Date: 26 th of May 2020	
Respondent 12	Lillian	Age: 26 Education: HBO propedeuse Occupation: Fotograaf / ZZper Background: Dutch Date: June 1 st 2020	X
Respondent 13	Cameron	Age: 56 Education: Master Occupation: Schrijver Background: Dutch Date: June 16 th 2020	

Secondary source – City branding and marketing professionals

Respondents	Pseudonym	Details
Respondent A	Peter	City branding professional Date: March 20 th 2020
Respondent B	Ralph	City marketing professional Date: July 24 th , 2020
Respondent C	Nancy	City branding manager Date: May 25 th 2020

Annex 3: Code book Resident interviews

Dependent variables

Variable	Code	Indicator	Code
Non-identification - One expresses that there is no meaningful connection between themselves and the brand	0		
City brand identification - One expresses that there is a meaningful connection between themselves and the brand	1	Sense of belongingness - One expresses that they belong in this place	1.1
		Place identification - One expresses that they have a meaningful connection with the place.	1.2
		Self-definition - One expresses that they would define themselves as the brand and the identity the brand expresses	1.3
		Importance of the brand - One expresses that they brand mean something to them	1.4

Independent variables

Variable	Code	Indicators	Code
Brand self-similarity – One expresses that they can recognize themselves and their values in the brand.	2	Similarities – One expresses that they can see similarities between themselves and the brand.	2.1
		Norms and values – One express that they have the same norms and values as the brand describes.	2.2
Brand Uniqueness – One expresses that they perceive the brand as unique or/and distinctive compared to others	3	Distinctiveness – One perceives the city brand identity as distinctive	3.1
		Unique – One perceives the brand as unique	3.2
		Stands out – One feels like the brand stands out from their competitors.	3.3
Brand prestige – One perceives the outcomes of brand to be of high quality	4	Prestigiousness – One feels like the brand is prestigious	4.1
		Best of city brands – One feels like the city brand is one of the best of the city brands on the same level.	4.2
		High quality – One feels like the city brand is a first-class, high quality brand.	4.3
Brands social benefits – The perceived opportunity to strengthen membership of social groups, connection to others in the brand community and shared commitment.	5	Opportunities to socialize – One feels like the brand offers opportunities to socialize	5.1
		Sense of kinship – One feels a sense of kinship with other residents	5.2
		Interactions – One feels like the brand allows them to gain interactions with residents or external actors.	5.3
		Social groups – One feels like they are part of a social group	5.4

Moderator variables

Concept— Definition	Variables
Socio-economic characteristics— Uncontrollable traits of residents that play a sizeable role in how individuals define themselves. They effect social environments and people’s attitude towards the brand	Age
	Level of education
	Current profession
	Ethnic background