Explanation of the City Brand Equity Role on Specialists' Identity and Immigration (Case of Study: Mashhad)

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Abstract: Brand equity is one of the significant categories in the international competition field, through which we can decrease the rate of immigration from cities and protect urban human resources. The purpose of this text is to find an organized and a coherent answer in regards to reasons of reduction of immigration of specialists who are post graduated in Mashhad and their sense of belonging to their own city as well. There are numbers of reasons for promotion of sense of attachment, so city identity shall be deemed as an important topic in this regard. However, branding topic in this area is what has been underestimated in former researches. Now the question is how an urban brand can leave an impression on the immigration of experts who are post graduated. Therefore, the current Manuscript presents a creative real model for explanation of the city brand role on reduction of specialists' immigration rate from Mashhad, emphasizing the role of identity as a mediator. The data being required for this research have been collected by questionnaires, through an accessible targeted non-random sampling from specialists from Mashhad who are post graduated. This research is an applied-surveying type in which the structural equations method is used by use of Smart PLS software for data analysis. The results show that the city brand is effective on identification and reduction of rate of immigration from Mashhad. The role of identity as a mediator in impression of city brand on reduction of rate of immigration from Mashhad has been proved in review of indirect effect of this study.
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1- Introduction

Today, urbanization is one of the most important aspects of social life. Urbanization growth has started in the world from the 20th century, particularly the second half; therefore, it is a new phenomenon. Yet, it is a global one and almost all countries have experienced it. This global process has formed spatial distribution of the earth inhabitants across the world and it still does it as an irreversible process.

Human benign has been always moving. Early human changed his residence because of different reasons including improvement of life condition, sense of variety seeking, force and political factors, but these movements are completely different from what we see. Since population growth and as a result human mobility were in very smaller scale in the past, the impact of these immigrations was not so significant on socio-economic and demographic structure of origins and destinations, and even it was counted as natural and partly useful issue. However, since the beginning of the 19th century, immigration to city has been emerged as a social and it was considered by experts, scholars, and sociologists. The emergence of rapid changes in urban society, cities' attraction, welfare, and human's new demands have emerged new form of immigration, and consequently urbanization in the third decades of the 20th century. Urban branding is a valuable tool for cities to manage internal and external opportunities effectively to change them into competitive advantages. Brand is a rich source of cognitive relations and impacts. It allows audience to have a special and memorable image of it. However, branding is one of the

backgrounds that prepare a ground for cities' search and investigation for migration. Special centers, residences, and urban simple places create positive relations in people's mind. Moreover, they create value added symbolically and economically and urban branding is an important tool to achieve this goal (Popescu, 2009). This research aims to realize and recognize the impact of branding on city identity, and to reduce experts' immigration rate with higher education in Holy Mashhad. Moreover, it has been tried to answer how urban brand affect immigration rate of experts with higher education degree. Thus, this paper tries to emphasize on identity quality in city with urban brand concept and to identify effective tools on preference of experts' with higher education degree to live in Holy Mashhad. Finally, according to the presented materials and evaluation of existing theoretical gap, some strategies have been presented for urban managers and designers.

2- Literature Review

The approach of determining especially urban symbol was welcomed from the beginning of the 19th century in the Northern Europe and it was applied as a tool for economic and local growth. By expanding enjoyment of several cities of urban branding, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) started a committee of urban development policy-making to investigate and develop innovative strategies to improve urban management and quality. In this regard, many urban indicators including economic ones, quality of life, living cost, health, apparent attractions, research and academic ones, tourism, socio-political opportunities were evaluated

annually and cities' ranking was announced. However, since 200 up to now, technical meetings, seminars, and scientific conferences were held in different parts of the world in order to explain various aspects of this issue with cooperation of urban research centers. Moreover, many books and articles have been written in this regard. Some of them are as follows:

Ashworth & Voogd (1990) stated urban marketing ideas and process in a book entitled "selling the city: marketing approaches in public sector urban planning."

Paddison (1993) investigated the concept of urban marketing by means of a tool to improve and progress cities' competition in a book entitled "City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration" and presented general and related goals with this concept.

Kavaratzis studied the relationship between urban marketing and cities' brand equity. In 2005, he stated the concept of marketing places and places' brand in an article entitled "places branding: a review on trends and conceptual models" and he stated in 2007 that urban marketing develops and moves toward the fourth ear i.e. concentration on urban branding during three historical and important eras in an article entitled "urban marketing, previous, present, and unanswered consequences. However, he wrote an article in 2009 entitled "cities and their brand: lessons from cooperative branding".

Sevin (2014) investigated the importance of improving quality of life and urban development entitled "urban branding as a social and semantic network."

Rehan (2014) studied urban branding in the city of Port Said entitled "urban branding as an effective sustainability tool in urban development" and concluded that urban branding is a new attitude toward urban communication thereby city image can be improved and it can move toward urban development.

Maharati and Jalali (2012) in an article entitled "urban marketing a ground for sustainable equity of city brand to compete in global arena (case study: city of Mashahd) that people's mental image have vital role to access equity that creates via urban marketing. However, perception, city appearance, beliefs, and people's experience of city affect mental image and urban equity.

Shariati and Akhundi (2011) studied urban marketing aspects and its impact on single urban management. The results indicated that some necessary pre-requisitions to achieve urban marketing in municipalities include application of urban marketing, creating strategic vision of public sector participation with private sector, particularly promotional structure for city, finance for urban marketing, creating city image, creating a promotional package by municipality and exact explanation of measures and alternative scenarios.

3- Theoretical Principles
Urban Marketing
Urban marketing is a tool for improvement and progress of cities' competition. Generally, the process of marketing for cities begins with analysis of external environment. Urban marketing is difficult since most of what the city offers, including excitement, beauty of architecture, and historical perception are intangible. Thus, branding that is regarded, as a part of advertisement process requires much emphasis during marketing (Club, 2011).

City Brand

Brand includes all commitments that organization transfers through different communicative tools to its target markets or it is a concept composing of integrated information and experiences that creates distinction for a product (city) from competitors. Brands have intrinsic and essential value as a part of organization's intangible assets since they benefit psychological state value; they are displaced instead of human face. They tend to take people's identities and communicate with the other side. In this concept, countries' brands are regarded as a value for internal and external audience that affects the priority of many centers and societies. However, countries are ranked based on this index (Sevin, 2014). Generally, brand is something more than a name that is awarded to a product. Brand is a multidimensional structure that mixes managers, products, or services with values ensuring consumers towards them and finally their good feeling. It is obvious that structural borders of a brand are two-way activity. From one hand, they are product owners' joint activities, and on the other hand, they are consumers' understanding toward them (Kavaratzis, 2005). Branding aims to identify name, identity related to the city among citizens, and potential tourists. The process of branding in city is done by investigating in city's capabilities and priorities, audiences' preferences, and external environment conditions. Branding is formed in order to strengthen and improve city's position to create identity based on city's capabilities and its external conditions. It is a process of creating a slogan from a message and creating a model that presents city's image with its features and its values to the potential audiences (Havermans et al., 2008).

Awareness of City's Brand

One of the most important aspects of creating urban brand equity is brand awareness, but awareness is not enough alone. Awareness should be resulted in use frequency of the environment. Awareness represents city image existence in people's mind potentially. Awareness of destination is widely related with real sense of destination and one's related previous experience (Konecnik Ruzzier, 2012).

Perceived Quality of City Brand

Perceived quality is defined as people or tourists' perception in a city of overall quality or superiority of a city than other alternatives since people's overall evaluation is a combination of products, services, and experiences. Thus, quality has a vital role in consumer's behavior (Imani Khoshkhou and Ayoubi Yazdi, 2010).

The Image of City Brand

City brand in a professional community is introduced as a new language that works on urban design and neighborhoods' reconstruction. The concept of urban brand is like a novel and it is defined as a process with its exclusive approaches that is known as allegory of place essence (Helmy, 2008).

Brand is not only limited to promote a positive image of city, rather it expands it in one's experience of city. Urban branding is composed of two main elements:

1- Building place in city or constructing city buildings: this process makes a place particularly attractive and high quality.

2- Building a place and marketing in city: this principle aims to improve place

and obtain profitable and valuable capital for city.

Value Added of City Brand

Brand should create a positive and strong image in audiences' mind that is only achieved by branding and it will be a base for good and logical relations between audiences and city. Pfefferkorn believed that many brands are created based on people's experience of that city. However, if people have good experience of city, they transfer it to others and vice versa (Sassen, 2000). Another resource that has fundamental role in creating brand's value added in people's perception, as a fundamental component in urban branding. Perception represents that people, whether citizens or entrepreneurs and tourists, are not aware of everything during decision-making. Therefore, they use a knowledge that is obtained by personal experiences or the media or report information. With such perception, people build an image of reality for themselves (Hospers, 2003).

Generally, people perceive places or make them in their mind through several processes. First, through planned interventions like urban planning and design. Second, through a style that they or others used them in certain places. Third, through various forms and place shows such as films, novels, drawings, news, and reports (Kavaratzis, 2005). The fourth issue that is considered as the source of creating value added is the dominant role that city has created in minds. For instance, some cities, like California, is known as a city with technology, industry, culture, famous suspension bridges that make distinction from other cities. The last influential role in creating value added is city appearance that has a fundamental role in brand equity. It is of great importance how a city looks like and what physical features it has (Pfefferkorn, 2005). In branding process, advisors' use is helpful. Creating a proper image of city in branding process requires people's participation and many groups such as governmental organizations, tourism agencies, cultural institutes' managers, universities, urban organizations, urban managers, designers, and different groups (Club, 2011).

Identity

City is the largest human civilization symbol that human has created it for his security and comfort. City is not just a residence, yet is a place that community soul is blown in it as its identity. Urban identity is social one that becomes meaningful with objective manifestation in city's physic and content. It is directed toward citizens by their memories and sense of belonging. Although city identity is the cause of citizens' culture, it has affected citizenship creation process and it can result in formulating criteria related with observers and residents' participation and judgment (Varesi, et al., 2010). Mentally, people in every city need their city to enjoy exclusive image, symbols, and indices, cultural and historical, lively and vivacious elements preparing the ground for social events. In this case, life in this city is enjoyable, they feel proud and credit, respect their environment, participate to improve living environment, and they do not tend to abandon their city. Thus, in order that these places make sense, it is necessary for new urban studies to understand exact concept of identity, features, components of urban identity, and to investigate new-founded cities and identity to city and its citizens.

Figure 1 represents the relationship between human, culture, and the environment and their relation with identity.
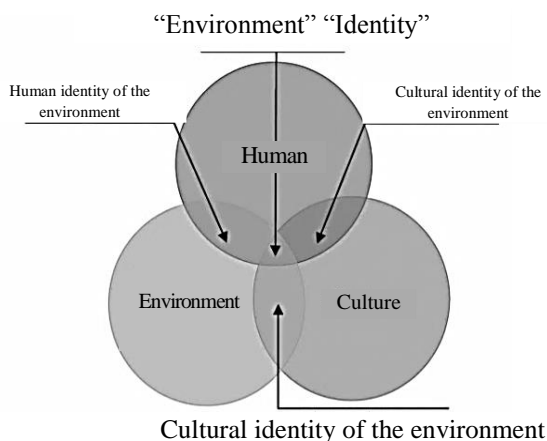
"Environment" "Identity"

Human identity of the environment

Cultural identity of the environment

Human

Environment

Culture

Cultural identity of the environment

Fig1. The relationship between human, culture, and the environment and their relations with identity
Reference: (Taqizadeh, 2007)

In the concept of city identity and its elements, subjects such as time, place, ethnicity, beliefs, customs and traditions, common language, dialects, and local dressing can be noted. Since identity roots in social life history, it has time dimension. However, there is a kind of sense of belonging to the land at the heart of this concept that gives it place dimension (Nofel, et al., 2009).

Identity is a part of every human being's character. What makes individual identity is once that one knows it with himself and introduces to others. In fact, there is a deeper relationship between person and place than just existence or experience of that place (Rezazadeh, 2001).

Physical-Spatial Identity

Physical tissue and spatial structure of cities are one of the most important aspects of cities' identity since forming urban physical tissue is affected by thoughts, beliefs, activities, and culture of the society. Physical structure provides the opportunity to recognize urban identity visually; therefore, it is of great importance among aspects of identity.

Generally, the criteria of evaluating physical identity include:

Firstly, its distinction from others and its similarity with same group, secondly, keeping continuity while development, thirdly, maintaining unity in diversity (Mirmoqtadayi, 2004).

Visual Identity

This type of identity includes aesthetics values in city, spatial quality, the possibility of understanding the position and orientation. If a person enters a city, he describes different parts of the city properly after visiting and city diagram sticks in his mind, the city will represent one with visual identity.

Cognitive Identity

Cognitive identity represents quality and quantity of information of city space, urban symbols, and historical-cultural values. Each of identity element should be clear in day and night in order to maintain city identity in both time (Movaseghi and Ayremloo, 2006)

Explanation of Conceptual Research Model

Since immigration outcomes affect origin and destination, immigration reason should be searched both in origin and in destination. Inhibiting factors in origin and attraction factors in destination make people move and migrate in mutual

relationship with each other. Mostly, different studies and investigations about the reasons of immigration lead to different results since geographical, natural, economic, and cultural differences prevent same result. Identity is one of the important signs and factors in evaluation of human-environment relationship and in creating high quality human environment. This level of environmental meaning represents a kind of one's deep relationship with the environment. At this level, person feels a kind of psychological identification between him and place. Fundamentally, human seeks to find a proper answer for his needs in the environment. If these locational needs are not provided, emotionally positive sense will not be occurred between person and place. This is regarded as one of the most important aspects forming experts' decision with higher education degree in immigration.

In urban branding process, it is necessary to determine ideal place identity and what is expected to be identified. The next step is to locate in order to reduce gap between current place image and ideal identity of place. In this step, it is determined what opportunities are provided by city for target group. In other words, how main advantage of place with identity helps to create urban brand? Here, it is necessary to formulate gap analysis programs.

Research hypothesis are:

- City brand equity is effective on urban identity.

- City brand equity is effective on experts' immigration.

- City identity is effective on experts' immigration.

- City brand equity is effective on experts' immigration via urban identity.
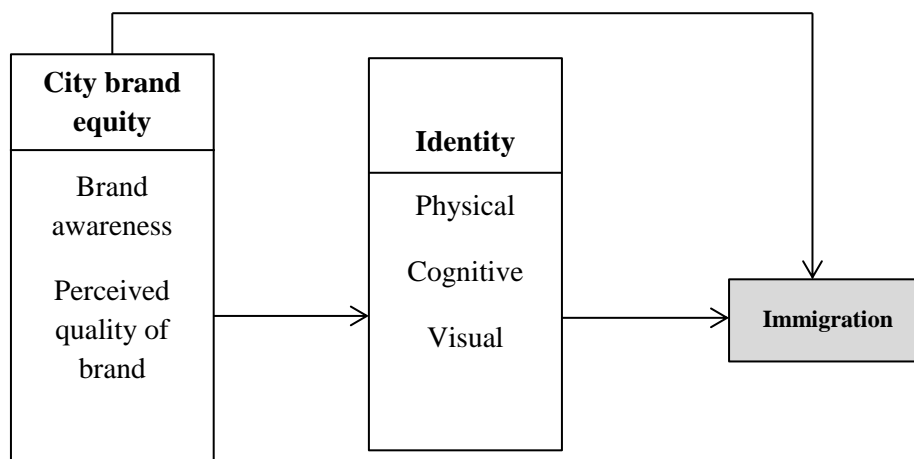
Figure 2 represents conceptual model.

Fig2. Conceptual model
Reference: (Researchers' findings)

4. Research Methodology

This paper aims to identify city brand equity in improving experts' identity and reducing their immigration from Holy Mashhad. It is applied with survey essence. Statistical population includes all citizens with higher education degree in Holy Mashhad. In this research, targeted non-random sampling and convenience methods were used. In order to determine sample, given that population was unclear, Cochran formula was used and 196 people were selected.

In order to improve information accuracy, 242 questionnaires were distributed. Finally, 196 complete and acceptable ones were obtained. This questionnaire was designed based on a combination of Hoppen et al., Merrilees et al (2013) and Ghesemi and Negini (2010) in urban brand part, and Varesi et al., (2010) in identity part. After localization, mentioned questionnaire was prepared and formulated by using experts' opinions by Delphi technique.

In order to measure questionnaire validity, content and convergent validities were considered. Content validity was confirmed by experts. Convergent validity means that each structure indicator should have mean coefficient. Thus, the mean of output variances should be 0.5. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) indicates what percent of variance model has been explained by a single component. PLS output results indicate that all variables have AVE higher than 0.5. Thus, it can be concluded that components can explain variance model adequately. Therefore, research tool has proper validity. In order to calculate reliability and ensure research tool internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used. It represents questionnaire reliability. Table 1 represents the results of validity and reliability.

Table1. Questionnaire validity and reliability

Variables	Cranach's Alpha	AVE
City brand equity	0.88	0.50
Identity	0.71	0.077
Immigration	0.79	0.57

Reference: (Researchers' calculations)

Data analysis method

In this research, Structural Equation Model (SEM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modeling were used. Structural equation modeling analysis is used in researches aiming to test a specific model of relationship between variables. Structural equation is a general and strong technique of multiple regression family, and more precisely, General Linear Model (GLM) that allows the researcher to test a set of regression equations simultaneously. This model has a comprehensive approach to test hypotheses about observed and latent variables relations. In this research, SmartPLS software introduced by Hulland (1999) was used for data analysis (Wu, 2010). PLS and LISREL are two main types of structural equations to investigate latent variables relations. PLS is an attitude based on variance. It needs less conditions rather similar techniques such as LISREL and AMOS (Liljander et al., 2009).

5- Research Findings
Subject Profile
Table 2 represents demographic status of case study.

Table2. Demographic findings

Demographic feature		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	148	75.37
	Female	48	24.63
Age	25-20	32	16.41
	30-25	111	56.53
	40-30	31	16.10
	50-40	16	8.2
	More than 50	6	2.7
Degree	M.Sc.	163	83.273
	Ph.D.	33	16.70
Marital status	Single	49	25.22
	Married	127	64.13
	Other	20	10.63

Reference: (Researchers' calculations)

Model Fitness Indicators

Although different types of tests are generally called as fitness, they always compare, develop, and evolve; there is no consensus about an optimal test. A general criterion has been considered for PLS method called as goodness of fit (GOF). The criterion indicators include from zero to one and they are divided into four indicators including absolute, relative, internal model, and external model (Zhang, 2009). Absolute and relative indicators are descriptive and qualitative ones i.e. there is no deduction based on judge about statistical significance of their values. Studies indicate that GOF depends on internal model more than external one. As it can be seen in model fitness model, model indicators values represent good fitness of model and research model is confirmed (table3).

Table3. Model fitness indicators

Model fitness indicators	Value
Absolute	0.651
Relative	0.843
External model	0.955
Internal model	0.872

Reference: (Researchers' calculations)

Path Analysis

Path analysis is the expansion of regression methods. In fact, the use of multiple regression is associated with clear formulation of a causal models aiming to obtain quantitative estimates of causal relationships between a set of structures. Deductions depend on paths that study plan has specified it. In path analysis, the relationships between variables flow in one direction considered as distinctive paths (Figure3)
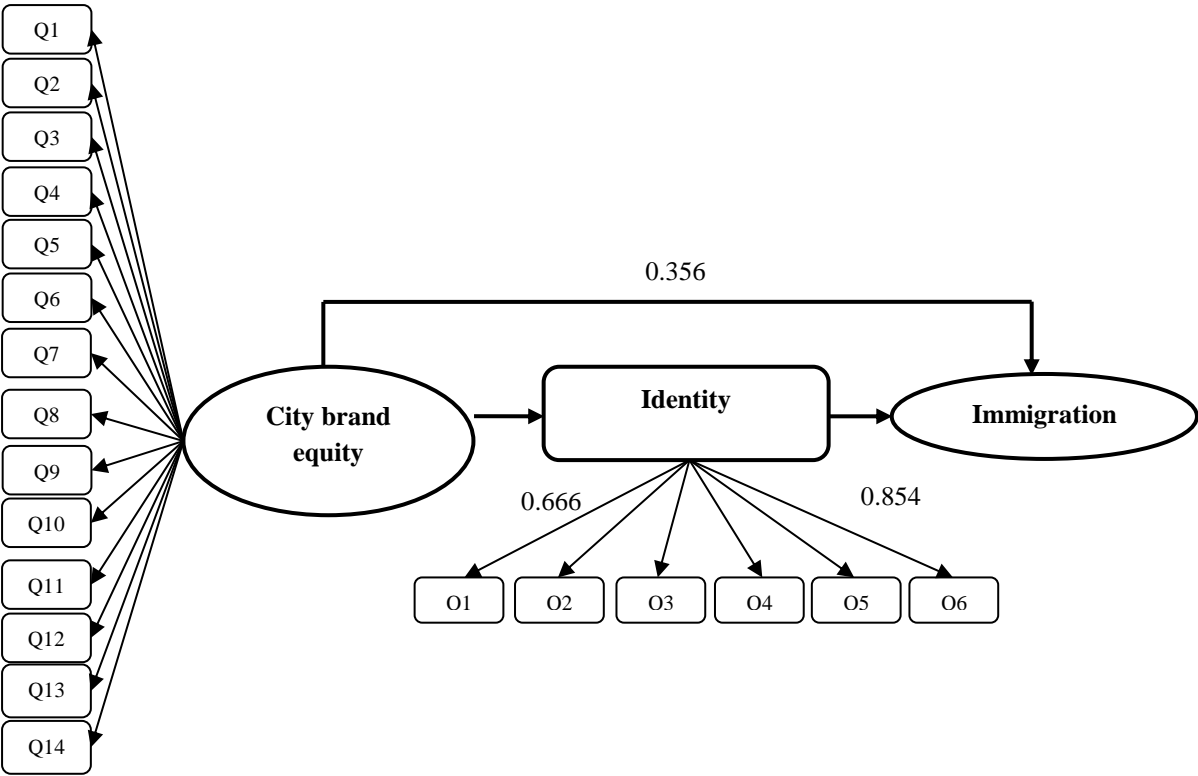
Fig3. Path analysis

Reference: (Researchers' findings)

The study of Research Hypothesis

Table4. Investigation of direct paths

Direct path	Path coefficient	T statistic	Standard error level
City brand equity → identity	0.666	8.805	0.000
City brand equity → immigration	0.356	6.596	0.000
Identity →symbol	0.854	10.001	0.000

Reference: (Researchers' findings)

In the first hypothesis, path coefficient is 0.666. Given that standard error level equals 0.000 and less than 0.05, it can be said that city brand equity affects urban identity with the possibility of 95 percent and the first hypothesis is confirmed. However, direct path of city brand equity and urban identity impacts on experts' immigration are significant with path coefficients of 0.356 and 0.854 respectively at standard error level, and with the possibility of 95 percent, it can be stated that city brand equity and urban identity are effective on experts' immigration.

Table5. Investigation of the main research hypothesis

Indirect path	Via	Path coefficient	RH0
City brand equity→ immigration	Identity	0.568	Confirmed

Reference: (Researchers' findings)

In this research, the impact of brand on immigration via identity has been investigated which is equal to the product of the direct effect of brand identity on identity impact on immigration 0.568=0.854*0.666. Given the results, it can be stated that brand is effective on immigration via identity; therefore, research hypothesis is confirmed.

6. Conclusion

In this research, a researcher-made model was presented to identify the impacts of urban brand on experts' immigration emphasizing on meditating role of identity. Experimental findings widely support theoretical model of this research. They confirm meditating role of identity on urban brand impact on experts' immigration as well as urban brand impact on experts' identity. Today, one of the issues that threaten identity seriously is globalization process and global village phenomenon that remove all traditional limits and borders, and finally leading to a person can belong to everywhere while in such condition, an individual does not belong to anywhere and his place feature and identity will be lost. Thus, a community changes into culturally identity-less, without discrimination, and complex space. In this case, an unknown location turns into the context of social life and the relationship among place, culture, and identity is lost. If place and identity features are created, an individual's sense of belonging to a certain place or community can be created and improved. Lack of an individual's sense of belonging to community is the direct result of not having identity in societies so-called global. The missing link in modern life that has resulted in many social and individual problems is lack of societies' identity. Identity is to create sense of belonging to a certain place. To achieve this goal, the environment desirability roots should be searched in people's culture. For instance, what elements have been considered by community members and if they are strengthened, they create more desirable urban environment. Some points are of great importance in presenting a modern model and theory that is ignored by city management researchers. Always, a list of variables their relationships between them cannot solely indicate a new theory. However, what is of great importance is to explain researcher's reason and reasoning of choosing variables, creating link and relationship among them, and explaining new theoretical added value. Thus, the reason of choosing and relationship among three important and key variables of the model have been addressed in this part.

- One of the most important variables in creating identity is brand. Building a desirable image of city in citizens' mind has great psychological impact, particularly on service sector as far as it creates a kind of mental construction that improves audience's loyalty and leads to reduce immigration. On the other hand, to attract potential audience into a city, urban branding should be done in accordance with existing capabilities and benefits in cities. Branding process should not be linear, rather it should be a process i.e. branding should not begin from one point and ends in another point and it does not have absolute, unchangeable, and inflexible process. However, change and modification should be done in each step and finally, its messages should be changed. One of the most desirable and appropriate strategies to reduce immigration that extremely is combined with luxury culture is to apply strategies of branding in cities and neighborhoods in the country. Citizens who feel their city enjoy privileged position and image in national and international minds have stronger sense of belonging to city. Cities' purposeful branding leads to encourage audience, lasting or experts' reappearance by creating loyalty to brand as well as awareness of capabilities, situations, and city attractions by presenting it coherent messages and consequently, by applying

all experts' capacities to improve country's metropolises' situation. In fact, these are part of advantages and benefits of implementing branding strategies. Given path coefficients, findings of brand effect on identity and citizens' immigration reduction is confirmed. It can be concluded from proposed subjects that a city with brand equity, identity has more important role in it and its residents have stronger sense of belonging. It can be concluded that brand reduces citizens' immigration through creating identity in city. Thus, urban branding can play an important role in improving city identity. From one hand, identity can play a risky role as a catalyst to enhance the power and speed of effectiveness of urban branding on experts' immigration with higher education degree. However, this model can be used as a base in future studies in order to investigate and compare results of findings and researches with its experimental implementation in the country's cities. Thus, following suggestions are recommended:

- Experimental test of this paper model in several metropolises in the country in order to improve internal validity of the model

- Investigating the role of demographic variables in this model

- Investigating the role of culture by comparative studies in this research

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