

# SIGNIFICANT DIMENSIONS IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING THE CITY BRANDING: CASE STUDY OF IRBID CITY, JORDAN

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## **Abstract**

City branding is a new science of an ancient technique to achieve a competitive advantage for cities and increase attraction of investment, and tourism. Recently, due to the growing globalization, most cities worldwide and in Jordan have witnessed a remarkable change in their competitive structures. City planners have perceived need to create branding strategies as a key to differentiation. The study used a brand box model to clarify the level of functionality and representativeness of the brands chosen for the city. This study wanted to define the actual image that best reflects Irbid city's brand and attracts people to it. The study area (Irbid city) is well-known for its exciting social and economic diversity, increased shopping and employment, and the presence of representative organisations from various industries, commerce and agriculture. The study discovered that dimension that affects and embodies the brand of Irbid city and achieved a high level: "the universities." In addition, Irbid provides a safe environment, affordable housing, entertainment options, and other facilities for students to choose to study in its universities. The study suggests raising awareness on the city's brand, conducting various studies, and developing several strategic plans to promote Irbid as an "Educational University City".

**Keywords:** *city branding; higher education; brand box model; Irbid city; city of Arab culture; perception of the city.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Because of the rapid growth, a city's sustainable growth has become a key theme for city planners. However, the present competitive world has introduced town and urban settings to the competition arena, displaying their essence to the entire world (Mohammadi & Marofi 2018).

Anholt describes the branding of places as "the management of place image through strategic innovation and coordinated economic, commercial, social, cultural, and a government policy" (Moilanen & Rainisto

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2009). City brand developers plan to attract tourists, investors, and people in business, locals, and multinationals, and then raise the city's economic growth (Mohamed 2018). City Administrators understand city branding to achieve a competitive advantage to increase inward investment, planning, and tourism, achieve local community identity, and identify the citizens with their city by activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest. Briefly, when the town is accurate and branded, people can travel, stay, work, or learn rather than in other cities with similar qualities.

Moreover, it can create social and emotional quality in people's minds related to the city. City branding helps to raise the economic growth of the city by living and attracting people to it (Mohammadi & Marofi 2018). For example, suppose it has tourist features. In that case, the value of the purchase and the sale volume will increase due to tourists (Moilanen & Rainisto 2009) and commercial or educational features such as universities. The city branding concept is not merely confined to creating a good vision of the region but stretches further to turn itself into an enjoyable urban experience (Helmy 2008). Marketing cities, building their image, and managing their reputation are among the most critical challenges urban centers and cities face in various countries. So how do we market a city, build its image, and manage its reputation?

Most developing countries have now grown into semi-developed regions in some ways. In particular, the countries that fall within Asia and the Gulf states created a sense that today's competitiveness is not limited to Europe alone but more at the international level for Arab cities. Moreover, this, along with the practical existence of globalization, has pushed many cities to put a great deal of effort into creating a "brand" and pursuing strategies that proceed from its core and attract various stakeholders.

Now, all urban cities focus on creating the best image in people's minds worldwide. However, cities must first identify the attractive point and promote it. City branding strategies support the development of the city's reputation (Dinnie 2010). Creating an identity or brand is far from a fast or straightforward operation; it may lead to inaccurate or ineffective results. Thus, the key to the city's brand success is carefully analyzing its components by planners.

With this in mind, the town that seeks to develop its brand must identify potential groups to satisfy its needs. Thus, consistent with Van den Berg, and Braun, there are four (potential groups): residents, companies, visitors, and investors (Berg, van den , & Braun 1999). These groups are foremost involved and effective once we try to develop the City Brand. These groups cover all categories and groups of the city's facilities users, the residents who are most of the time staying in the city. They need to touch on the advantages of their city's branding. Likewise, companies need city branding to attract clients and obtain more opportunities for their business.

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In the researcher's opinion, the investors are the main category that must be convenient when developing a city brand. Visitors must also feel satisfied when they visit the town, consistent with its reputation after developing the town brand. After conducting additional research on city branding in addition to people's opinions, the researcher determined that the following areas require specific approaches in Irbid city: education, shopping, tourism, diverse community, health care, investment, entertainment, job opportunities, agriculture, and infrastructure.

We should also mention that Irbid Governorate owns an industrial city with an area of (1178) dunams, which was established in 1991, and attracted more than (151) industrial companies with an investment size exceeding (274) million dinars. In addition, it provided the projects operating in this industrial city (27317) jobs; 17% of the workers are of Jordanian nationality (Jordan Industrial Cities Company, 2020). The commercial and industrial establishments accounted for approximately 80% of the total establishments in the governorate (International Labour Organization 2016).

On the other hand, Irbid earned an excellent reputation in university education outputs (International Labour Organization, 2016). Moreover, according to the Statistics Department, there are four leading universities in Irbid. In each university many students of different degrees was registered, and faculty member's work in large numbers (Statistical Yearbook of Jordan 2018 2020). Due to the ability of these universities to attract students, workers, and academics, they have become one of the most important institutions that help support the "Irbid City " district.

However, regarding the historical side, and if it is considered an integral part of the district's culture, Irbid city contains many historical and cultural tourist attractions, including historical, therapeutic, recreational, cultural, and religious monuments. The number of visitors is more than a quarter of a million annually (International Labour Organization 2016). The researcher believes this is a positive indication of the city's tourism image in supporting the city in many ways, such as economic, social, and others. Of course, the responsibility of branding specialists starts here, "to what extent does the city stay in people's minds?" Because if a city has no attractive qualities, it will usually be challenging to brand it.

By conducting a thorough analysis of the city's constituents, the study endeavors to identify the "brand value" of Irbid. The study was undertaken by gathering the views of Irbid residents and non-residents. In addition, after learning that a city is a brand, it is necessary to investigate why it is a brand and analyze its performance using De Chernatony's and McWilliam's Brand Box Models.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research Aim

The primary goals of this study are:

- Study the essential dimensions of the city branding process, then determine the most prominent brand of Irbid's, Thus Irbid city's way of life and appeal to visitors will be better understood in the study's process.
- In order to see if an Irbid city's reputation based on facts, the perspective of the research sample from the data will be gathered, which includes: (1) inhabitants of the Irbid city, (2) visitors who stay for a long time and (3) individuals who have never been to Irbid city.
- Examination of how well the selected brand is doing based on the Brand Box Model shows planners how well the functional and representational aspects of the city's brand are functioning. In order to stand out in a developing and increasingly competitive market, the city needs the correct insights and investment expertise.

### 2.2. Research Questions

This research will answer the main research question: What is the dimension that affects and embodies the brand of Irbid city?

After answering the central question of this thesis, i.e., "knowing the current dimension that affects the brand of the Irbid city and embodies it from the point of view of the people," there are two other questions:

- Why did people choose this dimension to be a brand of the city of Irbid?
- Furthermore, what is the Irbid city brand's functional and representative performance level of the dimension?

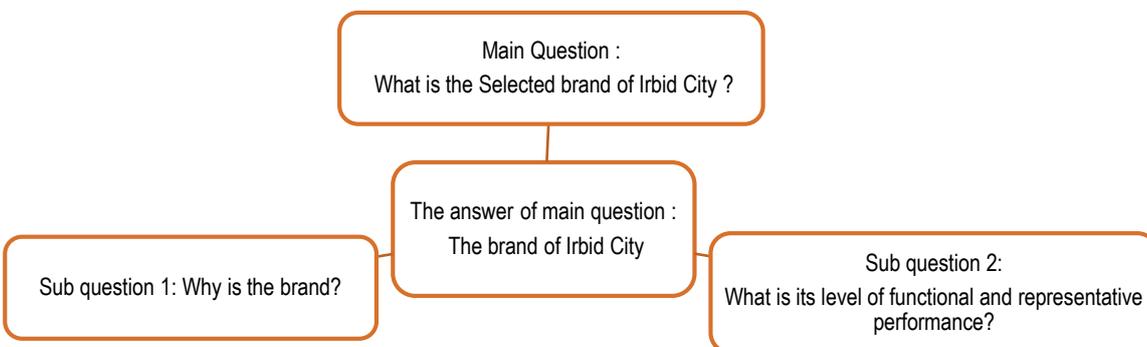


FIGURE 1 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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**2.3. Study Area**

The study area for this research is Irbid City. Irbid governorate location is northwest of the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan. Its area is 1570 square kilometers, and the population of Irbid in 2021 was 1,957,000 people (Department of Statistics 2021).



FIGURE 1 – LOCATION MAP - IRBID GOVERNORATES  
Source: Greater Irbid municipality 2020

It is possible to notice the disparity in the population distribution between the governorate districts, as the population distribution was not uniform or equal among its communities. However, concentration some of them were characterized by concentration (Department of Statistics, 2018). Irbid City with an area of 235.78 km<sup>2</sup> constitutes 42% of the governorate’s population, and the rest is distributed to its districts.

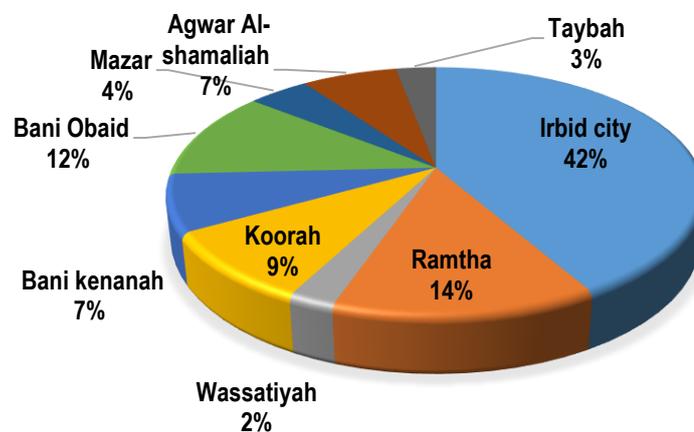


FIGURE 3 – ESTIMATED POPULATION OF THE IRBID GOVERNORATE BY ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS AT THE END OF 2018  
Source: Department of Statistics (2018)

The governorate is famous for its fertile part of the Horan plains. Field crops, grains, and fruit trees are grown, especially the blessed olive tree. (Ministry of Agriculture 2016).

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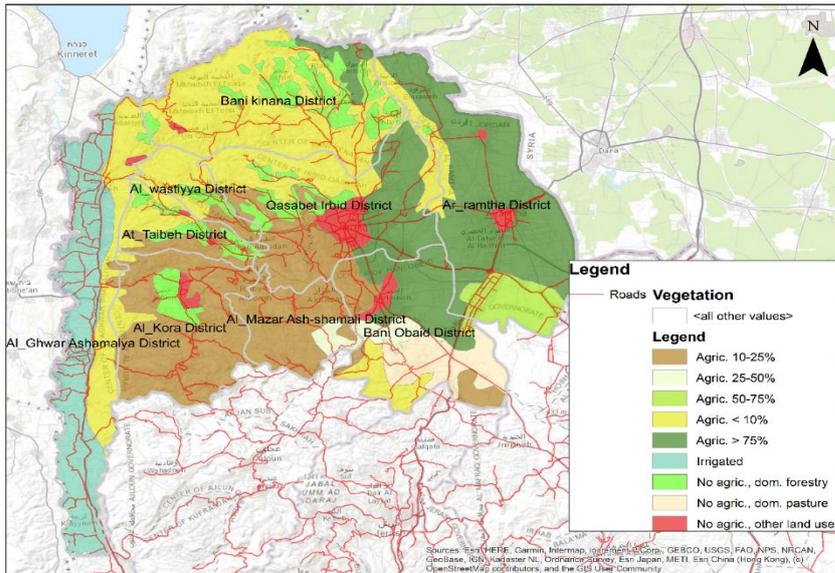


FIGURE 4 – VEGETATION IN AND AROUND THE STUDY AREA  
 Source: Ministry of Agriculture 2016, edited by A Researchers, 2020

The establishment of Yarmouk University in 1976 AD greatly influenced scientific and cultural awareness between the citizens of the governorate and the city of Irbid. A condition of economic, social, and cultural rehabilitation will also be achieved. (Al-Zou'bi & Samha 2009).

Irbid National University, Jadara University, and the University of Science and Technology, on the other side, gave the city additional attention.

Irbid city was chosen because it has more universities than Amman. It has the same sports clubs as Amman, and more than half of the football players are from Irbid. It also has dishes that are only known in Irbid, and Irbid was the site of the second most significant Arab revolution after the Great Arab Revolt (Kora). The Hashemites built Jordan's first school in Irbid, resulting in (Wasfi al-Tal) and (Arar). There are also green plains, spring, natural beauty, and the plains.

It also has the Middle East's most extensive library. It was known as Irbid (Al-Kharzat), Umm Al-Ashaer, and Panorama Al-Sham. It was registered in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest gathering of cafes on One Avenue (University Street). They also inducted it into the Guinness Book of World Records for having the most significant number of villages in the world (507 villages). According to King Hussein, if Irbid were not a border province, it would be the capital. Its people using their knowledge and culture constructed Irbid.

Therefore, the researcher's choice has fallen on some features that apply to the study area, such as economy, higher education, entertainment, shopping, tourism, and culture. Based on the literature and

the initial views of people's perceptions of the city Irbid, these features are the most influential on the city's image and support its economy, living in it, and attracting people.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

City branding is a topic of significant interest for scholars and policymakers as cities compete globally to promote tourists, development and many other goals. However, the concept of city branding is still in an evolving stage. Over the last few years, there has been an increase in scholarly research published on urban and city branding. Part of the challenge of city brands stems from their responsibility to meet the needs of various target groups.

This increase in competition can be expected to continue soon as the rivalry between cities increases for talent attraction, tourist attraction, sporting, and cultural events, innovation attraction, and the many other targets that cities set to meet in their search for urbanism and regeneration. Decision-makers need to specify a concise set of branding characteristics that the city shares and serve as the foundation for fostering favorable perceptions of the city. For example, when questioning the right target groups, "What do you think of this city?" the city brand wants certain qualities invoked.

#### 3.1. *The Definition of City Branding*

City branding is marketing a city or a specific region to encourage events and activities and draw the most important number of people from various sectors, such as investment, tourism, and education. Internal migration, on the other hand, is a result of the availability of services (Mohammadi & Marofi 2018). City branding is a collection of pictures, details, events, or sentiments people associate with that city (Simeon 2006). However, creating uniqueness is one of city branding's objectives (Ashworth, 2009).

Moreover, Anholt created a hexagon diagram to explain the features of city brands, including categories: (1) tourism (2) people (3) culture and heritage (4) export brand (5) investment (6) municipal policy.

It is worth noting that cities are continuously evolving and changing, so the decision-makers and urban planners must update the goals and target groups at every stage of the city's life (Balencourt & Zafra 2012). In some cases, the city may be an agricultural attraction, for agriculture is the main factor for human stability, which needs essential components: Food and drink for the resident population. Stability means human attachment to the place (Al-Zou'bi & Samha 2009). However, with time and globalization, its resources may change to become a tourist, educational or economic attraction.

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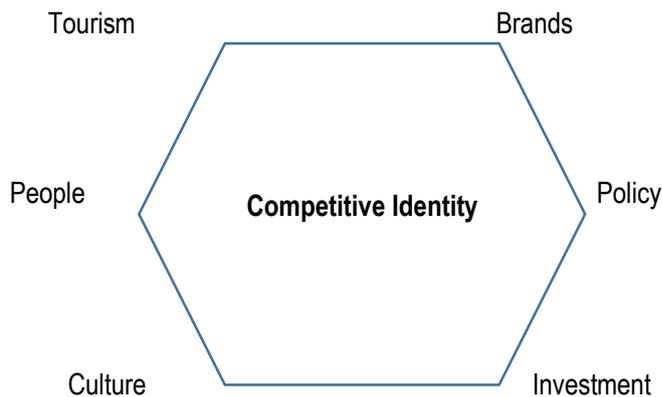


FIGURE 5 – THE HEXAGON OF COMPETITIVE IDENTITY

**3.2. How Do We Manage The Brand?**

To begin with, practical and rational management of the city brand depends on city leaders, people, and policy to provide direction and support concepts. Gathering and coordinating the various relevant stakeholders and developing a clear and comprehensive vision for the city necessitates the management of a network of leaders represented by the municipality, university presidents, and executive directors of major corporations and associations. Furthermore, officials and decision-makers work to ensure effective branding (Dinnie 2011).

On the other hand, a positive image of the city is essential in terms of tourist attractions (Braun et al. 2018). Furthermore, successful management must always strive to understand its city's image in tourists' minds to determine whether to maintain its reputation or change strategies.

To accomplish this and make this decision easier, De Chernatony and McWilliam conducted a relevant study titled Strategic Implications of Clarifying How Marketers Interpret Brands. As a result, they developed a Brand Box Model that can be used to manage city branding and general city reputation. The Brand Box Model is a four-cell matrix that evaluates the brand's functionality and representation.

The first aspect is functionality, which refers to a city brand strategy's ability to perform based on its physical characteristics. On the other hand, the second dimension is representative and tests the emotional essence of the city brand and the values and perceptions combined with it (De Chernatony & McWilliam 1989).

The first scenario to consider when applying this model to city branding concepts is when the city must be defined as being extremely and flawlessly functional. In this case, the city's physical characteristics, like its base, remembrances, and tourist hotspots, must be highlighted.

The second scenario is that a city must focus on life and activities to adequately represent or communicate anything because something solely derived its estimation from its past or culture.

According to Caldwell and Freire, the adaption of a few phrases for city branding may be summed up as indicated in Figure 6.

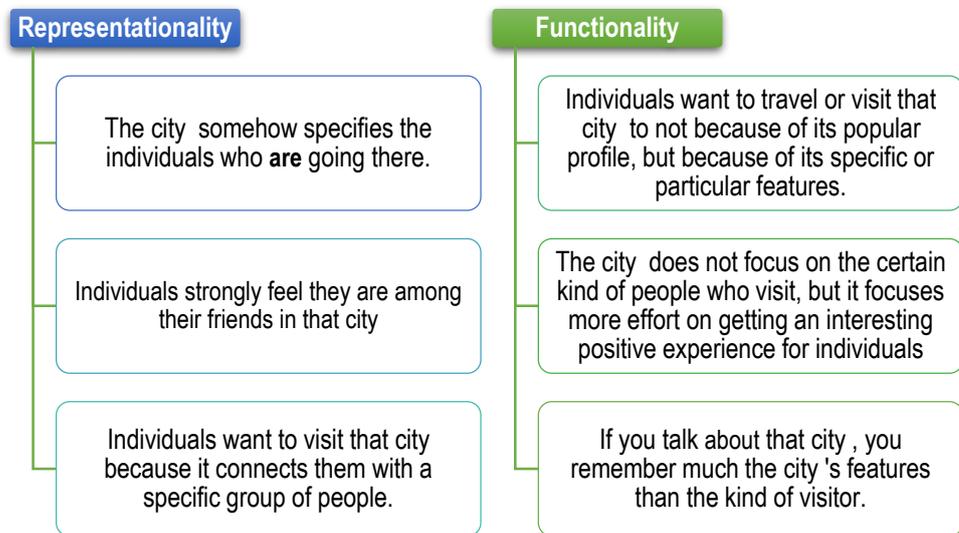


FIGURE 6 – ADAPTATION OF ATTITUDE STATEMENTS FOR DESTINATION BRANDS  
Source: Caldwell & Freire, 2004

### 3.3. Why Should We Care About City Branding?

To demonstrate why cities should brand themselves, Dinnie (2010) and (Karmowska, 2002) listed five crucial justifications and strategic branding objectives:

- To encourage the growth of exports.
- To boost tourism.
- To draw in more inhabitants.
- To entice foreign investment into the city.
- To give the city more local political clout.

### 3.4. Branding Strategies

The city branding strategy aims to make the city a fantastic location to live, work, and visit (Rehan M. R. 2014). Cities also guarantee either their material or intangible aspects. (Dinnie 2011)

According to various public planning aims and visions, several city branding strategies may be developed (Helmy 2008), (Rehan M. R. 2014). The researcher identifies the most critical clarifying city branding dimensions as indicated in the figure below (Table1) based on the literature and this pertinent research reference (Table 2).

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TABLE 1 – DIMENSIONS OF THE CITY BRANDING PROCESS DEPENDING ON HELMY'S STUDY (2008)

| Helmy's study (2008) |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Dimension            | Examples  |
| People               | Quality of life for inhabitants<br>Different cultures<br>Homogeneous social mix               |
| Culture              | <b>Awareness of the significance of culture in contemporary urban economics</b>               |
| Entertainment        | Fan<br>Relaxation   |
| History              | <b>Old center/ places<br/>Urban conservation</b>  |
| Tourism              | Attractive destinations   |
| Events               | Celebrations and festivals: Cultural, Sport, and Religious                                    |
| Shopping             | Attract local and external shoppers   |
| Knowledge            | Quality of education: Universities<br>and Schools<br>Research center                          |
| Business             | Transportation<br>Infrastructure<br>Industry and financial capabilities<br>Technology centers |
| Architecture         | Creativity and innovation   |
| Meetings             | Places people gather and meet /conferences and fairs  |

TABLE 2 – DIMENSIONS OF THE CITY BRANDING PROCESS DEPENDING ON REHAN'S STUDY (2014)

| Rehan's study (2014)    |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Dimension               | Examples  |
| Branding of city life   | City life features: Events and Cultural   |
| Projects                | Urban projects  |
| Historical              | Historical buildings  |
| Architecture            | Landmark<br>Designer  |
| Media-generated imagery | Logos: Graphic mark used to identify a city<br>Slogans: A short phrase that is easy to remember and used to extract a characteristic attitude or a goal to be achieved<br>Websites: High-quality Websites of the city that send the message that the city is developing rapidly |
| City form               | Public spaces<br>Parks<br>Landmarks<br>Libraries<br>Modern streets  |

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3.5. Conceptual Framework

Following additional research on city branding, various city branding strategies may be developed based on specific public planning goals and visions. Considering both (Helmy 2008) and (Rehan M. R. 2014) studies, the researcher has determined that the key fields where Irbid must have specific approaches are Education, Shopping, Tourism, Diverse community, Health care, Investment, Entertainment, Jobs chances, Agriculture, and Infrastructure. All these dimensions may be the brand of Irbid city.

We consider Irbid municipality the center of Irbid Governorate, making it a good location for high education institutes, job centers, and services businesses (Al-Zou'bi & Samha 2009).

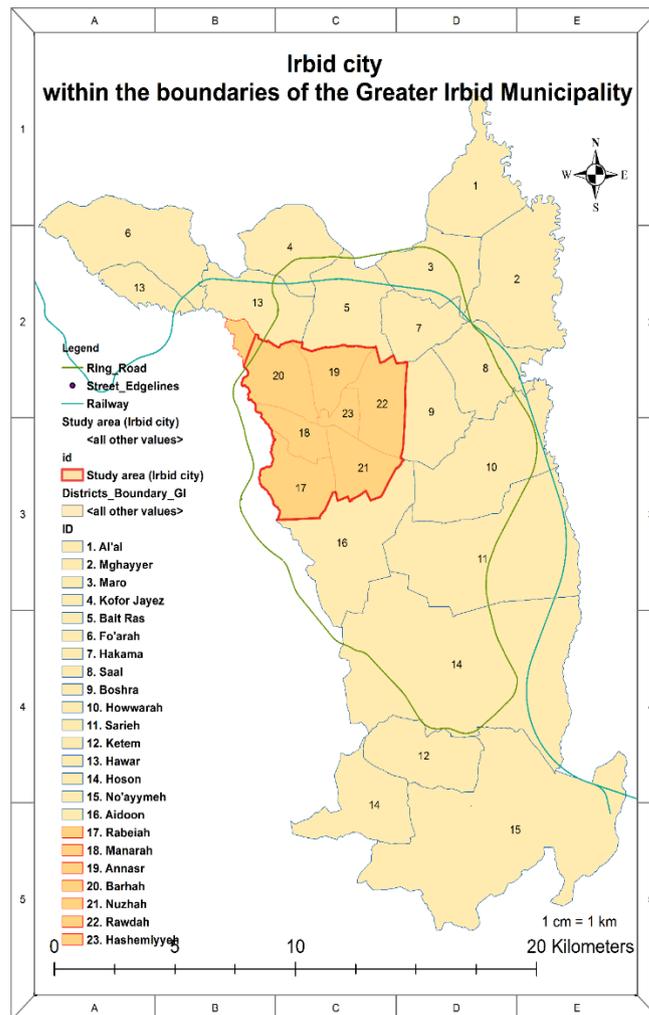


FIGURE 7 – ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES FOR THE STUDY AREA, IRBID CITY  
Source: Ministry of Municipalities, edited by Researchers, 2021

#### 4. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This research used the descriptive-analytical method in addition to the quantitative research methodology, and two questionnaires were used to collect data in two stages:

The first: is the initial questionnaire to reach the strongest brand of the city of Irbid. One thousand eighty-nine people responded.

The second is the analytical questionnaire to analyze why people preferred the chosen brand in the first questionnaire. Five hundred five people responded.

According to the Brand Box Model, the analysis also included discovering the brand's performance level (functionally and representative).

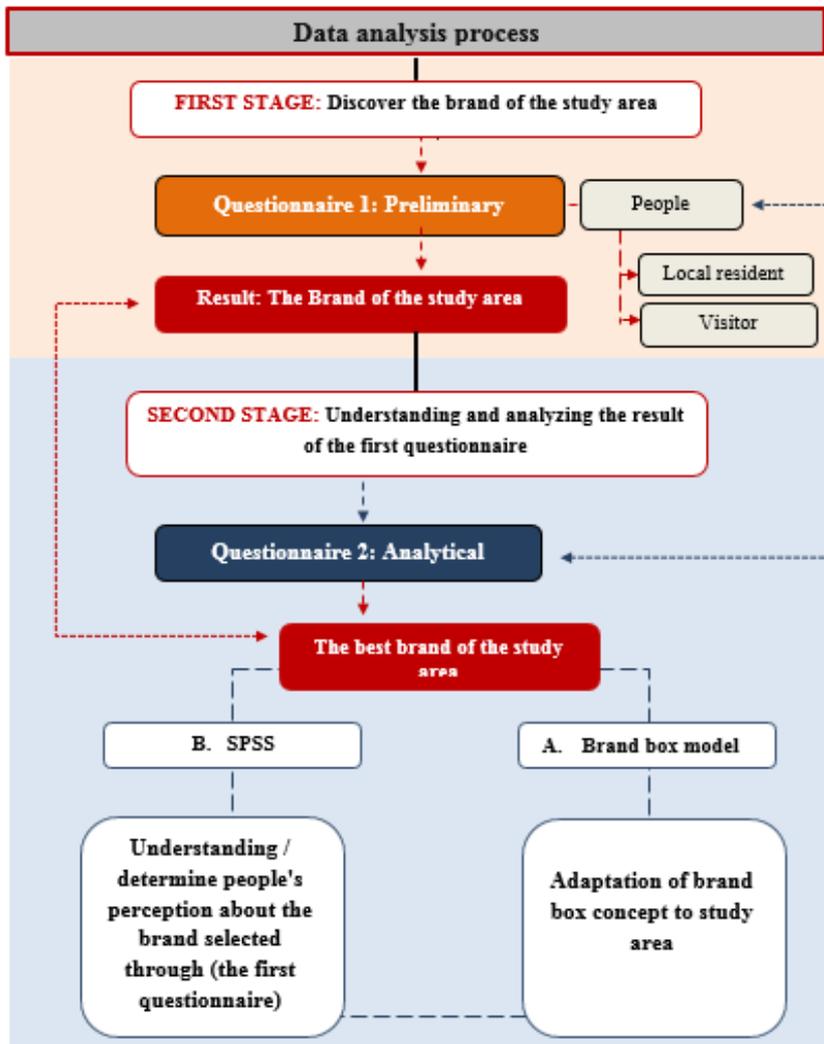


FIGURE 8 – DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS (RESEARCHERS 2021)

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This model was chosen due to, there are a few possibilities, and this is the only one available. Since there was never an application for it before, the researcher was obliged to make adjustments to meet the environment. Because it was developed other than in Jordan, it is not entirely representative.

This quantitative analysis requires SPSS to obtain precise numerical results from the Independent Sample T-test and One-way analysis of (ANOVA).

It is worth noting that the analytical questionnaire has been taken into account that the Likert scale used in the study is graded as follows: I totally agree, I agree, Neutral, I disagree, and Strongly Disagree

Moreover, based on the category length law, two levels of the arithmetic mean were extracted, which will later express in the analysis the level of brand performance in the Brand Box Model as follows:

- 3.1 - and above (High)
- 3 - and below (Low)

The study sample was chosen in a simple random way. The questionnaires were distributed via social media to a sample of people in the study area (Irbid City - Jordan) and from outside. The outside people are residents and non-residents.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. *The first axis of the results: Determining the actual dimension that reflects the best brand of the Irbid City and that will attract people to it.*

In the first part of data collection, an initial questionnaire was used to determine the city's brand in people's minds as a first step. The researcher linked the city with numerous attributes, including entertainment, education, investment, commercial facilities, good infrastructure, social diversity, health care, work base, agricultural potential, and distinguished cultural and architectural history. Thus variables are generally the most respected and significant in anyone's choice of a city to reside or work in. The only thing the respondents have to do is select how much they believe Irbid City corresponds with those attributes. Based on this survey of 1089 respondents, higher education received a score of 63%. Therefore, it formed a positive city image by attracting people and associating its name with this distinctive feature. Therefore, higher education is very likely to be a brand of the city of Irbid.

On the other hand, the dimensions (shopping, tourism, diversified society) with percentages (52%, 46%, 44.5%). Moreover, the factors (health care, investment environment, entertainment, job opportunities) in the following percentages (40.8%, 32.4%, 31.8%, 27%). Also, agriculture appeared with a low percentage

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of 25.9%, which is excluded from being a brand of the city of Irbid. Finally, people highly excluded the infrastructure from Irbid City's brand by 12.8%.

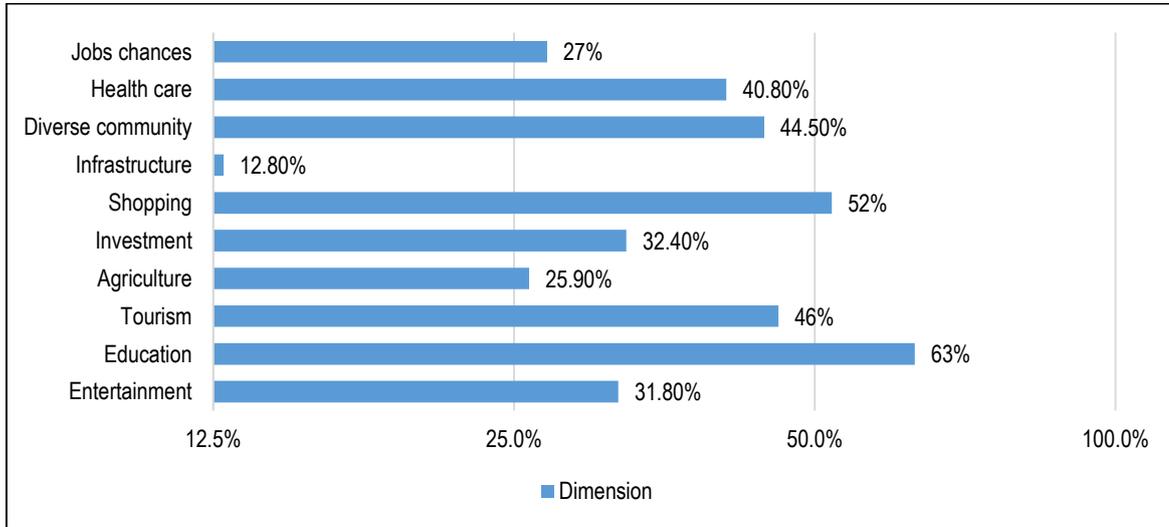


FIGURE 9 – THE PERCEPTION (1089) OF PEOPLE ABOUT THE IRBID CITY (through the analysis of the initial questionnaire 2022)

**5.2. The second axis of the results: Reasons for respondents choosing higher education “universities” as a brand of the Irbid City.**

The researcher extracted the means to identify the factors' effect in selecting universities as a brand for the Irbid City. The following are the answers to the following study questions:

The question: What factors influenced the choice of universities as a distinctive brand for Irbid City from the people's point of view?

Initially, the researcher asked people to rate the universities in Irbid City according to specific criteria that make the universities likely to be a high brand.

Therefore, to determine the responses of the sample members through the values of arithmetic averages and percentages, the researcher adopted the following weighted scale:

- (80%) or more, the degree of effect is very large.
- (from 70%-79.99%) large effect.
- (from 60%-69.99%) an intermediate effect.
- (from 50%-59.99%) Low effect.
- (Less than 50%) Very little effect.

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It is worth noting that the analytical questionnaire has been taken into account that the Likert scale used in the study is graded as follows: I totally agree, I agree, Neutral, I disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The following is a presentation of these results:

TABLE 3 – MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE RESPONSES OF THE STUDY SAMPLE

| Paragraph / factors  | Mean of response | Standard deviation | Response rate (Mean *100) / 5 | Level of effect | rank |
|--|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|------|
| Quality of Education   | 4.60             | 0.64               | 92%                           | very large      | 1    |
| Quality of professors  | 4.09             | 0.66               | 81.8%                         | very large      | 2    |
| The university's reputation among employees  | 3.98             | 0.78               | 79.6%                         | large           | 3    |
| the university's cultural environment attracts international students                    | 3.82             | 0.92               | 76.4%                         | large           | 4    |
| Academic diversity of professors' nationalities  | 3.81             | 0.86               | 76.2%                         | large           | 5    |
| Study costs and appropriate life in Irbid City   | 3.69             | 0.96               | 73.8%                         | large           | 6    |
| Ease of transportation to universities   | 3.64             | 0.97               | 72.8%                         | large           | 7    |
| Providing the appropriate service facilities to study / work / or live in the Irbid City | 3.57             | 0.99               | 71.4%                         | large           | 8    |
| Overall Mean   | 3.9              | 0.86               | 76.00%                        | large           |      |

\*The highest degree of response (5)

The analytical questionnaire obtained 505 respondents. Through it, respondents emphasized the high quality of education in the universities of Irbid City in general with a mean (4.60), response rate (92%), and level of effect (very large). In addition to the professor's quality factor with an arithmetic mean (4.09), response rate (81.8%), and level of effect (very large). Therefore, these two factors formed the mental image that has the most positive impact in choosing people through the initial questionnaire for universities as a brand of Irbid city.

It seems that this factor is in addition to other factors as well, such as the reputation of the university among the employees, the university's cultural environment that attracts international students, the academic diversity of professors' nationalities, and the costs of studying and a suitable life in the city of Irbid.

All of the previous factors had contributed to attracting many people to the city of Irbid. As a result, the universities gradually developed as successful and attractive brand for the city.

**5.3. The third axis of the research results: an attempt to adapt the concept of the brand box concept to the study area (Irbid City)**

A part of the analytical questionnaire was directed in this study to know whether the universities “as a city brand chosen by the sample” achieved functional or representative performance and connected them in Irbid. It is noteworthy to apply this model to the city branding concepts. In the first case, the city needs to be defined as highly and perfectly functional; it must focus on the physical features such as infrastructure, landmarks, and attraction centers.

However, because the city is not just getting its value from its history or culture, the second case is that if the city needs to reflect or express something perfectly, it must focus on the quality of life and activities. As mentioned previously, there is a desire in this research to use the analysis of the Brand Box Model, i.e., an attempt to adapt the concept of the brand box concept to the study area (Irbid City) that must represent a case of the cases shown in the figure.

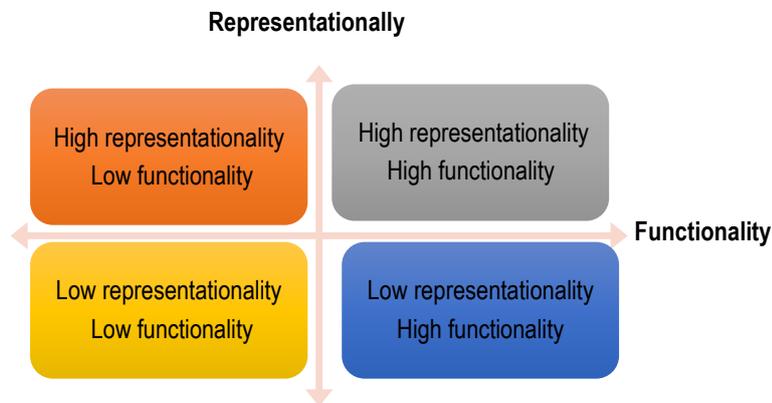


FIGURE 10 – BRAND BOX MODEL CASES

There are only four possibilities:

- High Representationally and Low Functionality
- High Functionality and Low Representationally
- High Representationally and High Functionality
- Low Representationally and Low Functionality

The methodology in the questionnaire was based on the Likert scale in the study and graded into five levels “strongly agree to disagree strongly.” Then calculate the range for each category using the law of the category length (using two categories). Arithmetic mean values obtained by the study were considered as follows: 3.1 and above (High representationally/ functionality), 3 and below (Low representationally / functionality).

**Universities as a functional brand of Irbid City**

Three questions were formulated that reflect universities as a **functional** brand and presented in the analytic questionnaire for research. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the data were relied on, including averages and standard deviations. In addition, the answer was determined by the Likert scale used in the study, graded from (I totally agree to Disagree Strongly).

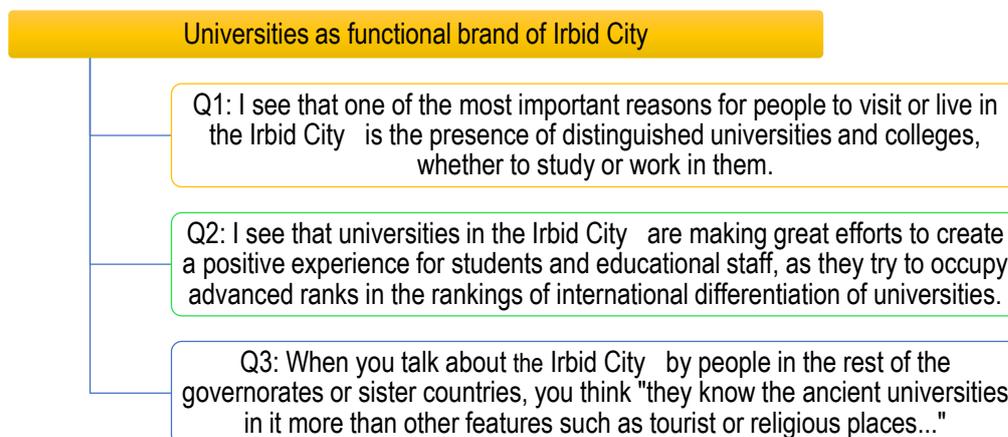


FIGURE 11 – QUESTIONS WERE FORMULATED THAT REFLECT UNIVERSITIES AS A FUNCTIONAL BRAND. Thus, means and standard deviations were extracted to adapt the brand box concept to the study area (Irbid City). Here in this part, the responses to questions related to universities are analyzed as a "functional" brand for the city of Irbid; the following is a presentation of these results:

**The main question:** What is the extent to which universities achieve functional performance as a brand of the Irbid city from the point of view of the study sample?

TABLE 1 – MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS TO THE ADAPTATION OF THE BRAND BOX CONCEPT TO THE STUDY AREA: UNIVERSITIES AS A "FUNCTIONAL" BRAND FOR THE CITY OF IRBID.

| Paragraph / axis   | Mean   | St. deviation | Order | Level |
|--|--------|---------------|-------|-------|
| One of the most important reasons people visit or live in the Irbid City is the presence of distinguished universities and colleges, whether to study or work in them.   | 4.002  | 0.93329       | 1     | High  |
| Universities in Irbid are making great efforts to create a positive experience for students and academic staff. They try to occupy advanced ranks in international universities' international differentiation rankings. | 3.9663 | 0.87108       | 2     | High  |
| When you talk about the Irbid City by people in the rest of the governorates or sister countries, you think "they know the ancient universities in it more than other features such as tourist or religious places.      | 3.8812 | 0.87613       | 3     | High  |
| Overall Mean   | 3.94   | 2.68          |       | High  |

3.1 and above (High functionality), 3 - and below (Low functionality)

It is evident from Table No. (4) That the means of (adaptation of the brand box concept to the study area: universities as a "functional" brand for the Irbid City) ranged between (4.88 and 4.00), as this part of the analytical questionnaire received a total mean of 3.94 (It is of high level).

**Universities as a representational brand of Irbid City**

On the other hand, three questions were formulated that reflect universities as a **representational** brand and presented in the analytic questionnaire for research. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the data were relied on, which include means and standard deviations. In addition, the answer was determined by the Likert scale used in the study, graded from (I totally agree to Disagree Strongly).

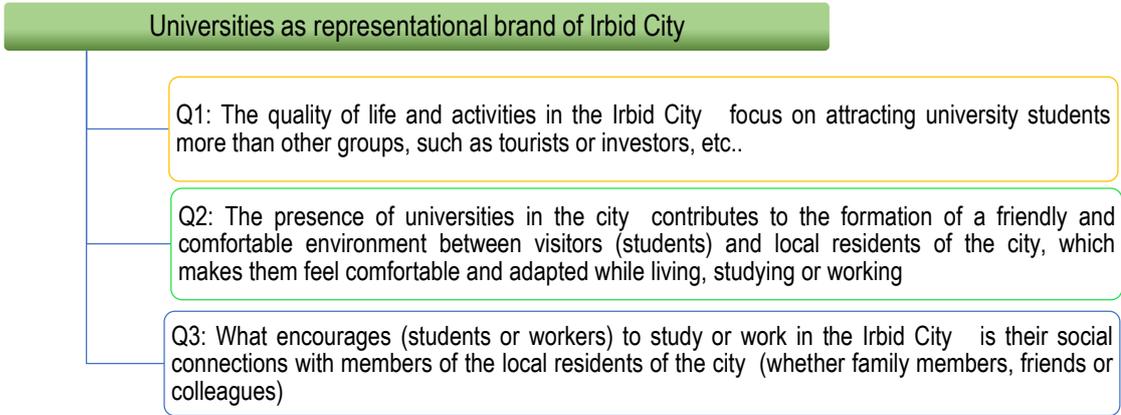


FIGURE 12 – QUESTIONS WERE FORMULATED THAT REFLECT UNIVERSITIES AS A REPRESENTATIONAL BRAND Thus, means and standard deviations were extracted to adapt the brand box concept to the study area (Irbid City). Here in this part, the responses to questions related to universities are analyzed as a “representational” brand for the city of Irbid; the following is a presentation of these results:

**The main question:** What is the extent to which universities achieve the representational performance as a brand of the Irbid city from the point of view of the study sample?

TABLE 2 – MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS TO THE ADAPTATION OF THE BRAND BOX CONCEPT TO THE STUDY AREA: UNIVERSITIES AS A “REPRESENTATIONAL ” BRAND FOR THE CITY OF IRBID.

| Paragraph/ axis  | Mean | S.d  | Order | Level |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| The quality of life and activities in the Irbid City attract university students more than other groups, such as tourists or investors.  | 3.78 | 0.93 | 1     | High  |
| The presence of universities in the city contributes to the formation of a friendly and comfortable environment between visitors (students) and residents of the city, which makes them feel comfortable and adapted while living, studying, or working in | 3.62 | 0.96 | 2     | High  |
| What encourages (students or workers) to study or work in the Irbid City is their social connections with members of the residents of the city (whether family members, friends, or colleagues)  | 3.52 | 0.89 | 3     | High  |
| Overall Mean   | 3.64 | 2.78 |       | High  |

3.1 and above (High representationally), 3 - and below (Low representationally)

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It is evident from Table No. (5) That the means of (adaptation of the brand box concept to the study area: universities as a “representational ” brand for the Irbid City) ranged between (3.52 and 3.78), as this part of the analytical questionnaire received a total mean of 3.64 (It is of high-level).

So it can say the presence of universities in the city contributes to specifying the individuals going or traveling there, for example, the students or the employees of one of the city's universities.

6. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Initial questionnaire

The researcher built a perception factor by analyzing the ten features of the Initial questionnaire, so taking a look at the percentages of the variables in detail, the researcher discovered that dimension that affects and embodies the brand of Irbid city and achieved a higher level, which is “the universities.”

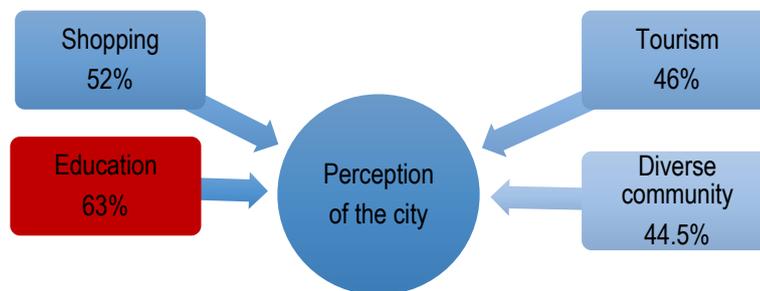


FIGURE 13 – REVISED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The educational field has been touched by globalization as well. Higher education institutions compete internationally to entice the top international students, faculty members, and financial resources. Therefore, administrators of higher education institutions aim to promote the universities and their educational offerings on a global scale. When a person uses the university, whether as a student or member of the faculty, they typically also use the city where the university is located, so the issue that demands more investigation becomes:

How does the "customer" decide between a city and a university? Universities may attract students by offering high-quality instruction and technical innovation, but "consumers" also require a safe urban setting, reasonably priced housing, entertainment options, and other amenities. On the other hand, cities may highlight a high quality of life and a well-developed transportation infrastructure in their branding efforts, yet personal development chances may be lacking.

Nevertheless, when a university employs most urban people, its position as an employer becomes more critical. Many cities with established universities have developed into what is referred to as "university city centers. All urban activities are centered on a large institution that draws students from around the country and abroad. Also, universities provide settings for the development and discussion of novel concepts as well as the promotion of social and policy entrepreneurship. They stimulate economic development by directing financial resources into the city.

Thus, city branding techniques highlight effective educational systems, either directly (the emphasis is on the caliber of the educational institutions and the programs being offered) or inadvertently (via the use of catchphrases) when the focus is on personal development opportunities and quality of life).

### **6.2. Analytical questionnaire**

The researcher asked people to rate the universities in Irbid City according to specific criteria that make the universities likely to be a high brand. The main question: What factors influenced the choice of universities as a brand for the Irbid City from the people's point of view?

Most of the proposed factors obtained high satisfaction from the 505 people, where the overall mean of the eight variables reached 3.9, which is high. It is worth mentioning that the variable of education quality and the quality of professors got the highest mean.

The Jordan University of Science and Technology, located outside the city center, has a substantial impact on attracting people to the city: males 68% and females 32% in 2020. Moreover, it turns out that even if you are not Jordanian, you will attest to the importance of universities in the city of Irbid, in addition to their role in attracting other nationalities to this city. According to the nationality variable, there were no statistically significant differences in the level of influence of factors in choosing universities as a brand for the city of Irbid. In other words, universities have helped establish their importance in the perspective of Jordanians and non-Jordanians, and work to attract them with quality education and quality professors. Naturally, this applies not only to international students but also to the nationalities of the professor, as we have previously noticed the diversity of nationalities in the city's universities.

On the other hand, the place of residence was significant in choosing universities as a brand from the respondents' point of view. It is noted that the differences were in favor of the residents with a higher mean than the non-residents. Where the residents indicated that universities are the brand of the Irbid City in a more significant way than the non-residents.

This is important in the city's branding process because their belief in their city and its brand will be reflected transparently and credibly to others. They are the basis for this and can spread the positive image of the city's brand.

For non-local people, their number was 266; 54.9% of them stated that during their studies or work in a university in the city of Irbid, they resided within the Irbid city for an average of 3-5 years; this, in turn, is very important in branding the city. The students' stay in the city increases its economy first because they need to rent housing, shopping, entertainment, etc.

Second, the residence of people from outside the city or other nationalities plays a role in the diversity of society.

### 6.3. *Brand box concept*

By dropping the overall mean for each of the statuses of the universities brand as a functional and representative of the Irbid City, we find that it is within the category of highly representation and highly functional.

This leads us to the following theoretical results:

Despite the convergence of performance rates of 3.94 (functional performance) compared to 3.64 (representative performance), the functional performance of universities as a brand is more precise and robust.

1. Universities are the most sensitive point that attracts people to the city of Irbid, where the approval of this by the study sample was as follows: (32% strongly agree, 46% agree). Therefore the city focuses on the quality of life and activities in a way that encourages the recruitment of universities students more than other groups, such as tourists or investors, and others, and this is with the approval of a percentage of the study sample amounted to: (18% strongly agree, 56% agree).
2. Universities in the Irbid City are making great efforts to create a positive experience for students and educational staff as they try to occupy advanced ranks in the international differentiation rankings of universities, where the approval of this by the study sample was as follows: (24% strongly agree, 58% agree), which is also supports the functional performance of universities as a brand for the city of Irbid.
3. Despite the high functional performance, there is a somewhat high acceptance of the representative performance, so some say that the efforts of universities and their progress will increase the attraction of

students, especially from neighboring countries and governorates. In most cases, they must reside in the city of Irbid.

4. Consequently, a friendly and comfortable environment will be created between the visiting students and the residents of the city "most of the time" as a result of their stay, making them feel comfortable and adapted while living, studying, or working in it, Where the percentage agreed on that (20% strongly agree, 52% agree), which supports the representative performance of universities as a brand for the city of Irbid.

5. When you talk about the Irbid City by people in the rest of the governorates or other countries, they know the universities in it more than other features such as tourist or religious places, etc.

A total of 22% of the study sample strongly agreed with that, and 55% agreed, which indicates what is going on in people's minds about the Irbid City and linking that mental image in universities and education.

6. Perhaps the decline of agriculture, despite the distinctiveness of Irbid's soil and the urban sprawl on agricultural lands, led to the decline of Irbid's image as an agricultural city on the one hand.

7. Also, some of the study samples see the representational performance of the universities, meaning that what encourages (students or workers) to study or work in the Irbid City is their social connections with members of the residents of the city (whether family members, friends, or colleagues) not the universities themselves. Most likely, international students from other countries may be inclined to say this, and it is mentioned that some of the study samples agreed with this approach, as 18% strongly agreed with it and 51% agreed.

#### **6.4. Irbid city of Culture for the year 2021**

The researcher notes that most people know that UNESCO has chosen Irbid to be the Arab City of Culture for 2021, so this is a good indicator that increases people's awareness of the importance of their cultural city. Also, more than half of the respondents stressed the importance of this event for Irbid city. This is because their city has an attractive brand, which helps improve its reputation and distinguishes it from others. Therefore, it seems that these people are confident in the cultural image that their city reflects.

The city was chosen as the city of culture for the year 2021. Despite the optimism of 79% of the people about this event, people had not considered any substantial attractive activities or promoted the essential cultural stations in the city by the responsible authorities. This weakens many opportunities to develop the city and its brand. In our view, we found shortcomings and a lack of awareness of the importance of having a city brand.

### 6.5. *Limitations*

At first, the researcher encountered some confusion in communicating the idea of presenting the city to respondents based on its brand because people do not realize that the city's name or destination is associated with a private brand. They think that brands are only for products. Therefore, it was necessary to simplify the questionnaire terminology and use the phrase "attraction point to the city of Irbid" instead of "brand of the city of Irbid."

Second, the possibility of applying (De Chernatony's and McWilliam's Brand Box Model). Moreover, the researcher encountered great difficulty searching for a precise, practical application of (De Chernatony's and McWilliam's Brand Box Model) to a city, as Caldwell's and Freire's suggested in 2004.

### 6.6. *Recommendations*

When a university is the largest employer in a city, its role in the community is amplified. These so-called "university city centers" can be found in cities worldwide with well-known and respected universities. Where a significant university serves as the hub of urban activity, attracting students from across the nation as well as abroad. Moreover, city branding strategies emphasize educational systems, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, this research recommends:

- Increasing the internationalization

As part of the Universities' Strategy for the Future, a target of 30% of the permanent staff will be from other nationalities. This is a significant step toward increasing internationalization, thus increasing the value of Irbid's universities as the city's brand.

- Differentiation in education
- It enhances research on crucial societal issues such as energy, health, and intelligent transportation in strategic areas.
- Develop the Irbid to an expertise hub.
- The universities' and Irbid's branding strategies should converge as a place to study and promote its attractiveness as a place to live, its quality of life, and its multicultural diversity.
- Coordinate the efforts to build a coherent branding strategy for the city's colleges and universities, better planning of resources and outputs, and a single coordinating body to discuss social and economic issues (including the city branding strategy).
- Create the most fantastic Institutional Educational Website possible.

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Through the above, universities are being strengthened as a brand for Irbid city better than they are now, and this, in turn, is reflected in the urban planning of the city by focusing on the municipality's tendency to return investments to the old center "University Street" of Yarmouk University with a strong strategy aimed at promoting Irbid's universities and increasing the attraction of students, who in turn use the city at the same time through shopping, housing, and other activities.

On the other hand, Petra Street, which leads to the Jordan University of Science and Technology, has become home to most of the investments, as the university has a strong role in that, so it is necessary to strengthen the economic strength and provide facilities to encourage investment in this area, in addition to focusing on activities that attract students and their requirements.

From this point, the research recommends the establishment of an integrated university city project on Petra Street so that it provides the highest levels of cultural, artistic, sports, medical, social, and recreational care, and also provides a safe and healthy environment with integrated services for the residents and visitors of the University City. Therefore, this research recommends that the future vision of the city of Irbid be the ideal environment for those seeking knowledge in Jordan.

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