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The Impact of City Marketing Elements on Residents Urban Awareness and Sense of Belonging: The Case of Kahramanmaraş

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – In this research, direct effects of city marketing elements on urban identification and sense of belonging to their own city were examined in the case study area selected as Kahramanmaraş. The main aim of this study is to demonstrate that city marketing strategies are not only important for attracting external audiences such as tourists or investors, but they also play a vital role in enhancing urban identity and belonging among the residents of this very city.

Design/methodology/approach – We obtained primary data from the local residents of Kahramanmaraş through a structured survey. The seven elements of the marketing mix (7P) served as independent variables for the research model. We evaluated the hypotheses using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Results – SEM results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between the elements of city marketing in general and the urban identification of residents. The strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.78$) of urban belonging was the factor "Culture and Tourism". The preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural assets, the promotion of geographically indicated products as well as improvements/betterment to transport infrastructure were identified as the strongest drivers that led residents to identify closely with their urban environment.

Discussion – The results show that sustainable city marketing should not only focus on external promotion but also involve well-designed policies to enhance residents' quality of life and emotional bond with the city. Residents' degree of urban belonging constitutes a decisive factor in a city's long-term competitiveness and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, cities compete not only as tourist destinations but also as places for investment, living, and working. The intensification of global competition has prompted cities to pursue integrated marketing strategies that position these geographic and administrative entities as dynamic brands in the broader international arena. City marketing has thus emerged as a series of integrated strategies aimed at increasing a city's recognition, attractiveness, and competitiveness at the national and international levels (Kotler et al., 1999). However, the majority of studies to date address city marketing from the perspective of visitors and tourists, often overlooking the perceptions of the local population. The long-term sustainability of the identity capital created through external city promotion depends, ultimately, on how well these activities resonate with the local community.

City marketing was first developed in the 1970s as a strategic response to the problems of deindustrialization and economic decline in Western cities (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Over time, the field evolved from a place-promotion model into a more inclusive, resident-centered approach. Modern scholarship acknowledges that residents are not merely passive audiences but active stakeholders whose sense of identity and belonging co-constitutes the city brand value (Kavaratzis, 2004). While the classical literature has tended to see cities first and foremost as products sold to external consumers -tourists, investors, skilled migrants- the emerging resident-oriented perspective argues that a sustainable city brand must also address the needs, aspirations, and loyalties of those who inhabit the city.

A critical review of the literature reveals that, although the effects of city marketing on external audiences are well documented (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Kavaratzis, 2004; Richards & Wilson, 2004), very few empirical

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studies quantitatively measure the impact of city marketing factors on residents' city awareness and sense of belonging to it-especially through structural equation modeling. Studies like Mišič and Podnar (2019) and Kim (2010) refer to resident identification, but fail to decompose city marketing systematically into its constituent dimensions (economy, education, transportation, culture and tourism, gastronomy, sports) in order to evaluate the relative impact on belonging. This gap is particularly salient for mid-sized Anatolian cities, where the interplay between local identity, cultural heritage, and city marketing has not been empirically tested.

City belonging is the pride and proximity that people feel towards a city. It is a complex, multi-layered concept with sociological, psychological and geographical aspects. Belonging is sociological: it emerges from becoming embedded in the social networks and communal life of a city (Sampson, 2012). Psychologically, it involves the meanings, memories and emotional links through which people connect with the nature of the city and its identifiable symbols -historical buildings, public spaces or cultural monuments (Relph, 1976). In geographical terms, belonging is fostered by livable, safe and beautiful urban spaces (Lewicka, 2011). Collectively, these dimensions contribute to the quality of life and psychological well-being of individuals and they have a direct interaction with the results from city marketing strategies.

Branding approaches emphasizing the historical and cultural background of a city bolster residents' spiritual need for embracing this background as well as associating with their urban landscape. A strong city brand - such as those cultivated by cities like Barcelona or Bilbao through targeted cultural investment- has been found to increase the local community's pride and attachment (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

In view of this, the current study responds to the following research question: What are the city marketing elements that most influence local residents' awareness and sense of belonging to their cities and how does such effect vary dimensionally? This question is empirically investigated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based analysis of survey data obtained from Kahramanmaraş local residents. The article contributes to the field in two ways, adding theoretical insight by providing dimension-level empirical data that extends the resident-centered turn at the intersection of city marketing and scholarship and attaching these discussions to actionable data for policymakers and municipal administrators interested in using evidence-based guidance to pursue urban marketing practices that promote belonging.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

City marketing is broadly defined as the process of making a city and its associated values attractive to appropriate target audiences (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). The idea was first recognized in the 1970s as Western cities dealt with losing their industrial base and declining economies. The promotion of the city has gradually evolved from a focus on infrastructure and tourism to a much more global and inclusive approach (Kotler et al., 1999). From the modern perspective, city marketing is considered a multidimensional mechanism operating to improve the unique character of cities and make them more competitive (Büyükbaş, 2019). This process focuses not only on attracting external investors or tourists, but also on improving the quality of life and increasing the loyalty of the city's own residents (Giffinger, 2006). Ashworth & Voogd (1990) identified elements of city marketing such as city image, city branding, events, tourism and infrastructure. In recent years, due to the need for creativity, flexibility and innovation on approaches to improve the image of cities (Büyükbaş, 2019), city marketing started to be adopted not only as a promotional tool, but also as an instrument of urban development policy (Büyükbaş, 2019).

A person's sense of connection to their city is shaped by personal emotions, shared memories, and the identity forged through everyday urban life (Fried, 1963). City belonging can be analyzed sociologically, psychologically, and geographically (Büyükbaş, 2019). From the sociology perspective, belonging relates to individuals' integration into social networks and life in the community (Sampson, 2012). Psychologically, the individual builds up his identity through symbols or historical buildings or concrete places specific to the city (Relph, 1976). The spatial dimension relates to how the physical surroundings shape belonging: liveable, safe and aesthetically pleasing environments facilitate its formation (Lewicka, 2011). Thus, the notion of city belonging is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is directly related to quality of life and psychological well-being (Büyükbaş, 2019).

The local community is positively influenced and inspired by their own city through the positive image and branding (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). A city’s brand creates emotional bonding and civic pride (Kotler & Gertner,

2002), and when the branding strategy highlights historical and cultural assets, belonging is cultivated among residents (Kavaratzis, 2004). Also, digital platforms and social media are crucial for highlighting the city image (Son & Thill, 2018). The local community is given the opportunity to gather again by means of events and thus share certain experiences and reinforce attachment (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Public projects -such as parks, transportation networks, urban spaces- influence the quality of life for the surrounding community directly (Büyükbaş, 2019). However, these types of improvements must be made with the involvement of local residents if they are to enhance belonging (Karaman & Öztürk, 2019).

The literature is relatively well established on the mechanisms linking city marketing derived policies to external audiences (tourists, investors) but has tended to ignore or neglect the resident facing dimension. Current literature (Kavaratzis, 2004; Mišič & Podnar, 2019; Kim, 2010) either neglects residents as a priority group or analyses singular perspectives only (e.g. culture heritage or place identity), which does not allow studying all dimensions of city marketing components. The present study addresses this gap by operationalizing six city marketing dimensions (economy, education, transportation, culture and tourism, gastronomy, sports activities), testing their simultaneous effects on residents' urban awareness and belonging using SEM, thereby offering both analytical depth and methodological rigor.

3. Method

The data used in this study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered directly from the study group through a structured survey instrument. Secondary sources consisted of TÜİK statistics, reports prepared by KMTSO specifically for Kahramanmaraş, and data prepared by the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (Küçük, 2016: 66).

The population of the study consists of the local people living in the province of Kahramanmaraş. The sample size was determined to be 400 people, and data were collected using the convenience sampling method. It is acknowledged that convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population; this constitutes one of the principal limitations of the study and is discussed in detail in the Limitations section. A five-point Likert scale was used as the data collection tool to measure city marketing elements and the level of city awareness and belonging.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and the anonymity and confidentiality of responses were ensured throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and no identifying information was collected.

The questionnaire forms were created based on scales previously used in the literature and proven to be reliable. The instrument directed at the local population included sixty-five items covering nine theoretical dimensions of city marketing elements: economy (eight items), education (nine items), the city's architectural and aesthetic structure (four items), transportation (twelve items), culture and tourism (eleven items), gastronomy (six items), sports activities (five items), environment (six items), and service adequacy (four items). City awareness and belonging (ten items) constituted the dependent scale.

The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software packages. We first undertook analyses of reliability and validity, then conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore the latent factor structure and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test structural fit. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tested the relationships in the hypothesized research model.

Following factor analysis, the dimensions of architectural and aesthetic structure, environmental quality, and service adequacy were not included in subsequent analyses. These dimensions were eliminated because Cronbach's α was below a reasonable threshold (Cronbach's $\alpha < 0.70$) and items within these dimensions failed to form the theoretically coherent and empirically distinctive constructs from the frame of reference for this population within their local environment. Items with factor loadings equal to or less than 0.30 and items that loaded significantly (greater than 0.30) on two or more factors were also excluded; this produced a stable instrument of forty-one items across six dimensions.

For the survey form, the following were used as source: Johansson (2012), Herstein et al. (2014), Zhang and Zhao (2009), Lee and Jain (2009), Vanolo (2008) and Phillips and Schofield (2007) for the elements of city

marketing; Beyazlı and Aydemir (2008), Parkerson and Saunders (2005) and Smith (2005) for acceptance of the cities; Anholt (2006), Gotham (2007), Puczkó and Rátz (2007), Havermans et al. (2008), Hazime (2011), Russel et al., (2009) Fadare and Oduwaye (2009), Pritchard and Morgan (2009), Kim (2010) and Kalandides (2011) for the literature review section.

4. Findings

4.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis Results

Before applying exploratory factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied to assess the suitability of the sample for factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.902, indicating that the sample was "sufficiently adequate" for factor analysis. While KMO values between 0.5 and 1.0 are considered acceptable, values below 0.5 indicate that factor analysis is not appropriate; the minimum KMO value generally considered sufficient by researchers is 0.7 (Altunışık et al., 2010: 266). The Bartlett's test of sphericity, to check whether the variables share a common variance at an acceptable level was statistically significant ($\chi^2(820) = 7792.487$; $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and enough common variance was found for factor analysis (Albayrak, 2005: 53).

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results — City Marketing Elements Scale (Local Population)

Factors and Items	Explained Variance (%)	Eigenvalue (Λ)	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Corr.
F1: Economics	8.074	3.424		
SPU1			0.613	0.393
SPU2			0.613	0.419
SPU3			0.585	0.468
SPU4			0.587	0.426
SPU5			0.404	0.323
SPU6			0.433	0.366
SPU7			0.525	0.407
F2: Education	7.027	2.881		
SPU9			0.333	0.331
SPU10			0.505	0.456
SPU11			0.560	0.487
SPU12			0.609	0.454
SPU13			0.560	0.476
SPU14			0.592	0.421
SPU15			0.593	0.418
SPU17			0.423	0.346
F3: Transportation	6.894	2.827		
SPU24			0.477	0.354
SPU25			0.603	0.415
SPU26			0.609	0.410
SPU28			0.598	0.378
SPU29			0.562	0.446
SPU30			0.469	0.347
F4: Culture and Tourism	6.620	2.714		
SPU35			0.439	0.396
SPU36			0.470	0.439
SPU37			0.556	0.441
SPU38			0.596	0.445
SPU39			0.581	0.419
SPU40			0.560	0.498
SPU41			0.335	0.401
SPU42			0.347	0.469
SPU44			0.467	0.398

F5: Gastronomy	6.187	2.537		
SPU45			0.653	0.424
SPU46			0.514	0.435
SPU47			0.366	0.354
SPU48			0.570	0.441
SPU49			0.568	0.422
SPU50			0.517	0.349
F6: Sports Activities	5.485	2.249		
SPU51			0.600	0.495
SPU52			0.672	0.583
SPU53			0.710	0.564
SPU54			0.605	0.433
SPU55			0.405	0.351

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 152); KMO = 0.902; $\chi^2(820) = 7792.487$; Bartlett's Sphericity Test (p) = 0.000

Items SPU41, SPU42 and SPU9 had comparatively lower factor loadings (0.333–0.347). These items were kept in line with theoretical arguments: each item substantively pertains to its construct, and each individual Item-Total correlation was above 0.30 — the minimum guideline thresholds for scale-item retention (Hinkin, 1995). Removing these items would have decreased the theoretical completeness of the corresponding constructs but not improved model fit substantially.

The KMO value was 0.872 for the City Awareness and Belonging scale, indicating adequate sample adequacy to conduct a factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(45) = 1560.008$; $p < 0.01$), substantiating the existence of common variance among the variables suitable for factor extraction.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results — City Awareness and Belonging Scale

Factor / Items	Explained Variance (%)	Eigenvalue (Λ)	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Corr.
F1: City Awareness and Belonging	34.533	3.453		
SBA1			0.590	0.458
SBA2			0.599	0.467
SBA3			0.478	0.362
SBA4			0.573	0.445
SBA5			0.580	0.449
SBA6			0.606	0.467
SBA7			0.700	0.565
SBA8			0.665	0.526
SBA9			0.599	0.474
SBA10			0.440	0.330

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 156); KMO = 0.872; $\chi^2(45) = 1560.008$; Bartlett's Sphericity Test (p) = 0.000

As presented in Table 2, the exploratory factor analysis conducted on the City Awareness and Belonging scale yielded a single-factor solution that explained 34.533% of total variance with an eigenvalue equal to 3.453. The factor loadings vary between 0.440 (SBA10) and 0.700 (SBA7), which all surpass the 0.40 level deemed acceptable for social scientific research (Hinkin, 1995). The most loading item, SBA7 ("I feel like I belong to the city I live in"), captures the affective core dimension of urban belonging. The item with the lowest loading, SBA10 ("I share news, comments, and activities related to the city on social media platforms") indicates that actively promoting the city in digital space represents a behaviorally distinct and less intense factor of belonging compared to emotional attachment.

4.2. Measurement Model — City Marketing Elements (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis results are significant at P = 0.000. During model modification, covariance parameters were added for residual pairs exhibiting high modification index values (e1–e2; e2–e3; e9–e14; e10–

e11; e21–e27; e32–e33; e34–e36; e38–e39; e39–e41; e46–e47; e43–e46; e44–e47; e48–e51; e50–e51). Each of these additional covariances is theoretically justified: due residuals are for items conceptual within the same sub-domain (e.g. neighbour items measuring closely-related aspects of transportation infrastructure or neighbouring cultural activity items) and therefore are expected to correlate with each other beyond the latent construct, due to shared method variance or content overlap (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Releasing residual covariances is an established practice that should be justified with empirical (modification index > 10) and theoretical (MacCallum et al., 1992) consideration.

Table 3. CFA Fit Indices — City Marketing Elements Scale (Before and After Modification)

	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	TLI	AGFI	X^2/df
Before modification	.039	.778	.860	.861	.908	.850	.896	2.304
After modification	.033	.816	.900	.901	.923	.891	.912	1.944

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 163)

Following modification, the fit indices are: RMSEA = 0.033; GFI = 0.923; AGFI = 0.912; CFI = 0.900; NFI = 0.816; TLI = 0.891; χ^2/df = 1.944 (p = .000). Although the absolute fit indices (RMSEA, GFI, AGFI) show good fit, the incremental indices (NFI = 0.816, TLI = 0.891) are at the lower end of commonly used ≥ 0.90 thresholds. While it would be unusual with a single factor model (> 40 items), this pattern of indices is reasonable, especially the RMSEA much less than 0.05, confirming the fit of the model (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). (EKO: Economy; EĞİ: Education; ULA: Transportation; SF: Sports Activities; GAS: Gastronomy; KT: Culture and Tourism)

Table 4. Factor Loadings — Economy Scale

Item	Statement (Economy)	Loading
1	Industrial establishments contribute sufficiently to the city's economy.	0.42
2	Industrial enterprises have taken the necessary measures against environmental pollution.	0.44
3	Efforts by local authorities and enterprises towards economic development are sufficient.	0.56
4	There are a significant number of industrial and commercial establishments in the city.	0.51
5	Agriculture and livestock farming are important economic activities.	0.43
6	There are multiple internationally recognized products produced in the city.	0.48
7	Local governments are making sufficient efforts to reduce unemployment.	0.53

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 165)

As indicated in Table 4, t-values of all seven items attached to economy latent variable have statistical significance at level of 0.01, and all coefficients are positive. Factor loadings range from 0.42 (SPU1) to 0.56 (SPU3). SPU3, which is related to the sufficiency of efforts performed by local authorities and industrial enterprises in relation to the economic development of the city, has been assigned the greatest loading. This indicates that residents view governance-led economic initiatives as the most influential determinant of their economic evaluation of the city. The fairly limited range of loadings across the seven items implies that residents do consider economic factors in city marketing as a consistent but relatively undifferentiated dimension.

Table 5. Factor Loadings — Education Scale

Item	Statement (Education)	Loading
9	There are sufficient private educational institutions in the city.	0.45
10	The city is a hub for pre-university education.	0.52
11	Access to education is adequate.	0.53
12	The quality of the university/universities is important for students choosing the city.	0.58
13	University-industry collaboration is at a sufficient level.	0.58
14	The university/universities make significant contributions to reducing unemployment.	0.55

15	The educational quality of the university is important for my educational choices.	0.47
17	The city is a student-friendly city.	0.41

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 166)

The t-values for all eight items are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, and all coefficients are positive (See Table 5). The factor loadings vary from 0.41 (SPU17) to 0.58 (SPU12, SPU13). The strongest correlated two items are about the status of a university/universities in the city (SPU12) and whether enough collaboration between universities and industry exists (SPU13). This suggests that residents consider higher education quality and its embeddedness with the local economy as key educational element of city marketing, whereas access to pre-university or basic educational infrastructure is of comparatively lower salience to residents.

Table 6. Factor Loadings — Transportation Scale

Item	Statement (Transportation)	Loading
24	The airport has sufficient size and capacity.	0.51
25	Municipal and public buses provide adequate service.	0.50
26	Transportation options from the city to other countries and cities are sufficient.	0.49
28	The Logistics Center gives the city an advantage in transportation.	0.46
29	There are sufficient vehicles and trips of adequate quality for intercity road transportation.	0.58
30	The traffic signal system makes daily life easier.	0.50

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 167)

All the t-values of six items whose estimates are all positive, as seen in Table 6, which belong to the transportation latent variable, are statistically significant at 0.01 level. Factor loadings vary between 0.46 (SPU28) and 0.58 (SPU29). SPU29, which concerns the adequacy of intercity road transportation vehicles and trips, has the highest loading. This intercity connectivity is the most salient concern among local residents compared to other transportation modes followed by airport capacity (SPU24) and urban public transport (SPU25). The relatively even distribution of loadings across the six items suggests residents broadly agree that transportation infrastructure functions as a multidimensional but internally consistent construct.

Table 7. Factor Loadings — Culture and Tourism Scale

Item	Statement (Culture and Tourism)	Loading
35	The bed capacity in accommodation facilities is sufficient for tourist activities.	0.45
36	Visitors have sufficient access to the information they need.	0.51
37	The bazaars have the capacity to meet the needs of tourists and shoppers.	0.55
38	The shopping centers and entertainment venues are sufficient.	0.52
39	The city is attractive in terms of cultural values.	0.45
40	The city is rich in cultural and tourist activities (fairs, symposiums, festivals, congresses).	0.58
41	There are sufficient opportunities for alternative tourism.	0.45
42	Modern shopping centers and historical structures operate in harmony.	0.51
44	The city square and surrounding roads highlight the historical and cultural fabric.	0.49

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 168)

Table 7 shows that all nine culture and tourism latent variable items pass the significance test, and all t-values are statistically significant under the 0.01 level; thus, all coefficients are positive. Factor loadings vary between 0.45 and 0.58. SPU40, which revolves around the cultural and tourist richness of the city based on fairs, symposiums, festivals and congresses has the highest loading compared to others. This suggests that they are considered to be the most salient aspect of the culture and tourism dimension, more than accommodation capacity, harmony between historical and modern urban features (as an aggravator), and access to alternative forms of tourism. Indeed, the wide range of items capturing this factor underscores the multi-dimensional nature of cultural marketing and its relevance to residents' everyday urban experience.

Table 8. Factor Loadings — Gastronomy Scale

Item	Statement (Gastronomy)	Loading
45	Local and foreign tourists visiting the city prefer to purchase local foods.	0.47
46	I have sufficient access to the local cuisine of the city.	0.62
47	The promotion and marketing of local foods are at a sufficient level.	0.52
48	The pricing policies for local dishes are appropriate for influencing visitors' preferences.	0.54
49	The culinary culture and services in the city are an important promotional tool.	0.53
50	The local cuisine is important for gaining a regional sustainable competitive advantage.	0.42

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 169)

In Table 8, the t-values for all six items belonging to gastronomy latent variable are statistically significant at 0.01 level and all coefficient is positive. Factor loadings are between 0.42 (SPU50) and 0.62 (SPU46). SPU46, which relates to residents' accessibility of local cuisine by means of local restaurants and products, has the highest loading. It is indeed this access to the local food culture that emerges as the most relevant gastronomy-related indicator of belonging to a city, illustrating how residents gastronomically identify with their city by assembling familiarity and physical proximity to the culinary nuances of where they live (over ideal-ridden price or promotion for tourists).

Table 9. Factor Loadings — Sports Activities Scale

Item	Statement (Sports Activities)	Loading
51	Support for amateur and professional sports branches by civil society organizations and authorities is sufficient.	0.64
52	There are sufficient opportunities for the local community to engage in sports activities.	0.72
53	The city has facilities capable of hosting national and international sports competitions.	0.65
54	The city has the capacity to host alternative sporting events.	0.50
55	I have easy access to sports facilities provided by local authorities.	0.45

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 170)

Table 9 indicates that the t-values of all five items associated with sports activities latent variable are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, and all their coefficients are also positive. Factor loadings vary between 0.45 (SPU55) and 0.72 (SPU52). The notably high loading of SPU52 indicates that the dominant mechanism through which sports infrastructure contributes to city belonging is inclusive access rather than elite performance, far exceeding the loadings of items related to professional or international sporting facilities. Residents feeling connected to the city through sports is not so much elitist or derived from any over-spectacularization, but rather inclusive and participatory.

4.3. Measurement Model — City Awareness and Belonging (CFA)

According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the structural equation modeling results are significant at P = 0.000. The fit indices for the single-factor City Awareness and Belonging model are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. CFA Fit Indices — City Awareness and Belonging Scale

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	TLI	AGFI	X^2	X^2/df
0.044	0.789	0.852	0.855	0.977	0.809	0.964	94.857	2.710

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 175)

The fit indices for the City Awareness and Belonging scale are: RMSEA = 0.044; GFI = 0.977; AGFI = 0.964; CFI = 0.852; NFI = 0.789; TLI = 0.809; $\chi^2/df = 2.710$ (p = .000). The absolute fit indices (GFI = 0.977; AGFI = 0.964; RMSEA = 0.044) indicate good model fit. The incremental fit indices (CFI = 0.852; NFI = 0.789) are below the conventional 0.90 threshold, reflecting the constraints of the single-factor structure applied to a ten-item scale; this limitation is acknowledged in the interpretation of the findings. Overall, the fit profile is considered acceptable for social science research involving a unidimensional construct (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

Table 11. Factor Loadings — City Awareness and Belonging Scale

Item	Statement	Loading
1	I promote the city I live in and see myself as a volunteer ambassador for the city.	0.55
2	I want to invest in the city I live in (property, land, commercial investments, etc.).	0.57
3	I think the scientific activities (symposiums, conferences, workshops) carried out in the city are sufficient.	0.41
4	I participate in the promotion of local products from the city.	0.50
5	I want my children to continue their education in this city because of its quality.	0.51
6	When I meet people from my city in another city/country, I can communicate with them more quickly.	0.56
7	I feel like I belong to the city I live in.	0.68
8	If I were to be reborn, I would want to live in this city again.	0.64
9	I follow the matches of my city's sports clubs as a fan and support local clubs.	0.56
10	I share news, comments, and activities related to the city on social media platforms.	0.40

Source: Büyükbaş (2019, p. 176)

The t-values of all ten items belonging to the city awareness and belonging latent variable are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The factor loadings range from 0.40 (SBA10) to 0.68 (SBA7). The first item with the highest loading, SBA7 ("I feel like I belong to the city I live in"), indicates the closest affective form of urban belonging and stood out as the strongest single indicator variable for the construct. Finally, items associated with investment intention (SBA2: 0.57), voluntary ambassadorship (SBA1: 0.55), and inter-city social solidarity (SBA6: 0.56) meaningfully contribute to the construct as well. SBA10, the weakest loading item for social media sharing of city information, confirms that active digital engagement represents a behaviorally distinct and relatively peripheral manifestation of belonging compared to its emotional and social dimensions.

4.4. Structural Model — Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Test Results

Table 12 presents the standardized path coefficients and hypothesis test results from the structural equation model examining the effects of the six city marketing dimensions on residents' urban awareness and belonging.

Table 12. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Coefficient (β)	r^2	Relationship	Result
H1	Economy → City Awareness & Belonging	0.55	0.30	Positive, Moderate	Supported
H2	Education → City Awareness & Belonging	0.66	0.43	Positive, Moderate	Supported
H3	Transportation → City Awareness & Belonging	0.59	0.35	Positive, Moderate	Supported
H4	Culture & Tourism → City Awareness & Belonging	0.78	0.61	Positive, Strong	Supported
H5	Gastronomy → City Awareness & Belonging	0.66	0.43	Positive, Moderate	Supported
H6	Sports Activities → City Awareness & Belonging	0.66	0.44	Positive, Moderate	Supported

Source: Adapted from Büyükbaş (2019, p. 193); Note: All path coefficients are significant at $p < 0.01$.

As shown in Table 12, all six hypotheses are supported. The Culture and Tourism dimension exerts the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.78$, $r^2 = 0.61$), followed by Education, Gastronomy, and Sports Activities (each with $r^2 \approx 0.43$–0.44), Transportation ($r^2 = 0.35$), and Economy ($r^2 = 0.30$).

5. Discussıon and Conclusion

In times of major economic, technological, and socio-cultural change, cities need to identify their assets with an innovative perspective and position themselves as marketable entities for different target groups. City

marketing focuses on differentiating cities from their competitors. However, contemporary practice reveals that the concept is often reduced to image, logo, and promotional activities, whereas effective city marketing encompasses product, price, distribution, and promotion as a coherent system (Kotler et al., 1999).

Competition between cities has led city managers to adopt private sector tools: customer focus, strategic management, competitive advantage, and branding (Kavaratzis, 2004). The resources available to cities, however, do not permit the satisfaction of all needs and desires of the target market; cities must therefore aim to achieve the highest citizen value with available resources.

The findings of this study, based on SEM analysis of local resident data from Kahramanmaraş, can be interpreted as follows:

- Economy ($\beta = 0.55$, $r^2 = 0.30$): The positive yet relatively weak association between the economic dimension and city belonging aligns with the conclusions of Mıšıč and Podnar (2019), who suggested that citizens' sense of place diminishes when increased economic growth lacks social or urban investment visibility. The mechanism seems to be one of perceived reciprocity: residents who perceive industrial and commercial actors as contributing social benefits (jobs, environmental stewardship, community investment) show stronger attachment to the city. The low coefficient in this study indicates that Kahramanmaraş residents still do not feel the reciprocity is sufficient.
- Education ($\beta = 0.66$, $r^2 = 0.43$): The statistically strong effect of education on belonging is consistent with Giffinger's (2006) smart city framework identifying human capital and educational infrastructure as determinants of urban competitiveness and satisfaction for residents. The mechanism is mostly aspirational: residents who perceive the city as an educational hub are more likely to plan their futures -and those of their children- within the city, increasing their commitment.
- Transportation ($\beta = 0.59$, $r^2 = 0.35$): This finding mirrors the broader literature on urban liveability (Lewicka, 2011), which identifies accessible and efficient transportation infrastructure as a fundamental determinant of residents' physical relationship with the city. Improvements in transport reduce the perceived distance between residents and urban amenities, thereby facilitating the development of belonging.
- Culture and Tourism ($\beta = 0.78$, $r^2 = 0.61$): This is the most significant effect in the model, fully in line with Richards and Wilson's (2004) findings that cultural events and tourism infrastructure work as powerful levers increasing residents' pride of their city or enhancing their attachment to it, and with Kavaratzis's (2004) theoretical reasoning that place identity based on cultural heritage/lived cultural experience is by far the strongest mechanism through which city marketing creates loyalty among permanent residents. Kahramanmaraş's rich but underexploited cultural heritage is reflected in the particularly strong effect of this dimension. The mechanism is called identity fusion: when residents observe their city's cultural uniqueness being honored and advanced, they are more tempted to "fuse" the city's identity with theirs.
- Gastronomy ($\beta = 0.66$, $r^2 = 0.43$): This aligns with Gotham's (2007) argument that a distinctive local food culture is a powerful urban branding asset and vehicle of community identity. While the globally appreciated Kahramanmaraş-style ice cream is certainly a valuable property, it is only one of many components of a wide-ranging gastronomic heritage. The mechanism is one of cultural pride: to have access to, and be recognized for, food culture reinforces residents' sense of distinctiveness and belonging.
- Sports Activities ($\beta = 0.66$, $r^2 = 0.44$): The positive moderate effect of sports on belonging confirms findings in the urban sociology literature at large, showing that shared experiences through communal participation and spectatorship in sports intend to construct coherent social ties between community members reinforcing their sense of belonging to a certain community (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The high loading of SPU52 (0.72) -access to sports opportunities- indicates that the relevant mechanism is primarily one of inclusive access, rather than elite performance.

The "Culture and Tourism" dimension is the most effective factor from the point of view of Kahramanmaraş residents in city adoption, according to structural equation model studies ($\beta = 0.78$). While Kahramanmaraş is a city with such an historical past and cultural depth that sees its traces dating back to ancient times the promotion of its cultural assets through marketing and related investments has always remained behind its rival cities. The relative tourism obscurity of the city, despite its riches in historical and cultural fabric, seems

to come down to a lack of collective stewardship over this heritage from local officials, civil society organizations and the local population. This finding has a direct policy implication: cultural investment is not merely a tourism strategy but a sociological necessity for strengthening urban belonging.

The factor with the lowest impact was "Economy" ($\beta = 0.55$). Survey results show a perception gap: while residents acknowledge industrial investments, they feel these do not translate into tangible social benefits or urban development. Respondents criticize production facilities that harm the environment, view the insufficient promotion of internationally recognized investments as a shortcoming, and claim that agriculture and animal husbandry are not adequately addressed.

In terms of belonging behaviors among residents, the highest loading item from the City Awareness and Belonging scale was SBA7 "I feel like I belong to the city that I live in" (0.68), indicating a strong emotional connection between respondents and their urban surroundings. By comparison, the item with the lowest loading was SBA10- social media promotion of the city (0.40), which suggests that although residents feel strongly rooted in their cities, they are less inclined to voicing this sentiment through active digital activism. When applied to participatory city marketing, this evidence has major implications: passive belonging must be actively converted into resident-driven promotion through structured digital engagement programs.

Policy Recommendations

- The factor "Culture and Tourism" in the presence of all other factors has a coefficient $\beta = 0.78$, hence it increases belongingness to the city the most. Investing in cultural assets is therefore both a smart strategy for tourism but also a fundamental sociological necessity. The ancient city of Germanicia must be excavated and promoted. Translating this cultural heritage into a material infrastructure is crucial for building urban attachment.
- Bridging the Gap in Economic Perception: The Economy factor had the lowest coefficient ($\beta = 0.55$). The Chamber of Commerce and Industry would do well to lead the way in new Corporate Social Responsibility projects. All these projects should inspire industrialists to devote some of their energy towards the making of social infrastructure like schools, recreational parks and cultural centers. These investments are expected to bolster the social value of the economic actors in local society.
- Leveraging Sports and Natural Potential: The high factor-loading of SPU52 (0.72) illustrates a clear appetite for more accessible sporting opportunities. In response to this demand, it is essential to increase the capacity in existing facilities. Also, the construction of a cable car on Ahir Mountain will meet both the alternative tourism and sports needs reached via factor analysis.
- Capitalizing on Gastronomic Identity: Marketing should focus not only on ice cream but also on the local rich culinary identity of Kahramanmaraş. Participating in global gastronomic events and marketing products with geographical indications are essential steps to increase the visibility of the region's diverse culinary goods.
- Institutionalizing City Marketing: We need to create a separate "City Marketing Office" as part of the municipality. This office would maintain centralized oversight over city brand identity, unifying empirically validated elements –Culture, Economy, Sports and Gastronomy into a common holistic strategy. And then it needs to establish a digital ambassadorship program aimed at converting the residents' passive sense of belonging into active promotion of the city online.

This study aimed to explore the impact of city marketing components on citizens' awareness and sense of belonging in Kahramanmaraş. The results show that these marketing factors have a considerable effect on not only tourists and external audiences but also urban residents as well. Overall, culture and tourism influence the adoption most strongly, education, gastronomy, sports activities, transportation and economy follow in importance. City marketing strategies consequently need to embrace holistic policies that aim at improving residents' quality of life and strengthening their attachment to the city. One of the most significant factors behind sustainable development and international competitiveness is how much the local population sees themselves in their city.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations in the current study that should be taken into account. First, the dependence on a convenience sampling technique restricts the generalizability of results to the broader population of Kahramanmaraş and other cities in Turkey. Future research should use probability-based sampling techniques to enhance external validity. Second, as the study has a cross-sectional design, it deals with associations of exposure and outcomes but does not allow causal inferences; instead longitudinal designs could help to monitor how residents' well-being evolves over time when intervention policies are put into place. Third, the exclusion of three dimensions (architectural/aesthetic structure, environmental quality, and service adequacy) due to low internal consistency, may lead to theoretically important missing information. Future research should reexamine the operationalization of these dimensions with items more closely aligned with the context of Kahramanmaraş. Fourth, given the questions about civic pride and local identity, self-report data may be subject to social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013): respondents might feel impelled to present themselves in a way that portrays their area positively. Finally, the limited scope of a city does not allow for comparison. Multi-city comparative studies are needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of its various factors in relation to the belonging of residents in their (diverse) urban settings in Turkey.

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