

# Does participation predict support for place brands? An analysis of the relationship between stakeholder involvement and brand citizenship behavior

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## Abstract

This article studies in how far participation of stakeholders enhances their active support for place brands, conceptualized in this study as Brand Citizenship Behavior (BCB). Combining insights from governance and branding theory this article uses survey data (N = 162) among stakeholders involved in branding processes of two Dutch regions. The analysis shows that more intense participation in the development of the brand is related to more BCB. Beyond participation, perceived value of the brand for stakeholders and degree of place identity (identification with place) also positively relate to brand citizenship behavior. The findings not only confirm the importance of participation in achieving support for public brands, but also provide insight into the role of affective factors (identification) and interest-based factors (value of the brand for the stakeholder) on BCB.

## Evidence for practice

- Stakeholder participation helps to increase *active* support for place branding (not only passive acceptance of the brand but also active contributions that strengthen the brand).
- Public administrators can mobilize stakeholders' identification with place to foster their engagement in branding and associated policy processes.
- Clearly conveying the value of the brand and creating a strong brand proposition for stakeholders increases motivation of stakeholders to participate in the branding process, which in turn will increase their active support for the brand process and outcome.

## INTRODUCTION

Place branding has recently become an area of interest to public administration (PA) scholars (Zavattaro et al., 2021 in a special issue of PAR on branding). This is because it has become an important empirical phenomenon, as local and regional governments widely engage in public branding activities to strengthen place development. They use branding to boost economic development, attract talent and visitation, and support transitions toward sustainability, among others (Eshuis et al., 2013; Pasquinelli et al., 2023; Rehan, 2014). City and regional authorities engage in branding as a strategy to create

positive associations about a place and distinguish it from others.

Branding is increasingly seen as a governance strategy (Braun et al., 2013; Zavattaro, 2018) to address wide groups of stakeholders, bind them, and, last but not least, create images which fit the mediatized world of today. In modern society, visuals, images, and emotions are recognized to be very important elements of communication (see Hjarvard, 2008) that affect policy and governance processes.

Place branding has gained theoretical interest among PA scholars since it adds to existing governance literatures. As a governance strategy that relies more on visuals

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and associations, and emotion-based communication, branding highlights working governance mechanisms different than those of classic governance strategies such as developing rules and regulations that rely on hierarchies or policy development that relies on rational argumentation (see Eshuis et al., 2013; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Raymond et al., 2010). Thus, combining branding and governance perspectives is both empirically relevant given the rise in the use of place branding by governments, and theoretically interesting because branding adds different perspectives to PA, addressing the emotional and affective aspects of governance processes.

## THE RELEVANCE OF STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PLACE BRANDING

A brand can be defined as “a symbolic construct that consists of a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, created deliberately to identify a phenomenon and differentiate it from similar phenomena by adding particular meaning to it” (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012, 19). Beyond creating a positive image, place branding, as a specific form of branding and object of study here, is applied as a form of governance whereby places develop a brand identity and subsequently develop and implement policies to realize the brand (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). Place branding is then used in the strategic governance (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Karens et al., 2016; Klijn et al., 2022) of cities and regions and coupled to policies that enhance structural changes in the planned direction (Oliveira, 2016; Thomas et al., 2021; Zavattaro et al., 2015).

In practice, branding activities often fail to deliver because they undervalue how brands are continuously co-created in the interactions between place actors (Ripoll González & Lester, 2018). Research shows that misalignments between official brand identities that selectively portray specific (positive) images and stakeholders' perceptions of place are frequent (Insch & Stuart, 2015; Zenker & Braun, 2017). Together with poor implementation of branding strategies by place brand managers, the result of such misalignment can be a blowback by stakeholders in the form of apathy, resistance, and place brand co-destruction (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Vallaster et al., 2018). Given that implementation of place branding strategies, especially communicating the brand as well as performing and realizing the brand identity to make the brand come true, is dependent on the support of local stakeholders, lack thereof and/or active resistance decreases the effectiveness of place branding (Braun et al., 2014) as well as the legitimacy of the brand (Martin & Capelli, 2017). Hence, some scholars have emphasized that branding, beyond communicating a certain image to target groups, should focus strongly on managing the relationships between actors toward particular strategic goals (Thomas et al., 2021, p.1399).

In line with this both branding and network governance literatures indicate that the potential positive effects

of branding on place development depend on the involvement of place stakeholders. Considering the above, scholars have argued for the development of *participatory place branding* frameworks where place stakeholders engage in the development of place brands (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). Participatory branding processes can become governance processes that bind actors together around place development and associated policy goals (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). In addition, based on the literature, we theorize that greater inclusion of stakeholders in brand development processes would increase their engagement in voluntary behaviors to actively support and contribute to the brand. Available empirical studies support this premise, although mostly fail to address the specific question about participation in the brand development process which is tackled in this article. Empirical research has investigated aspects like the effects of participation in effectiveness of branding as perceived by city marketing experts (Braun et al., 2014; Eshuis et al., 2013) and the perceived legitimacy of place branding among companies in an urban district (Klijn et al., 2022). To our knowledge, scarce research, and certainly no survey research, has observed *actual* involvement of stakeholders in the process of brand development and the effect this has on brand citizenship behavior.

### This article: Participation in decision-making and supportive behavior

Thus, this article not only contributes to the public administration field by combining insights from branding literature with literature on network and collaborative governance, but it also draws on quantitative empirical material which so far has been scarce to fill an important gap in the literature: understanding how participation in decision-making about place brands affects stakeholders' willingness to engage in voluntary and discretionary behavior to actively support the brand. The study elaborates on *whether participation in the development of place brands relates to Brand Citizenship Behavior* (BCB). BCB refers here to actors' voluntary and discretionary brand-supportive behavior (Burmans & Zeplin, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Furthermore, place branding literature indicates that support for place brands is not only related to stakeholder participation but also to actors' identification with place or *place identity* (Kemp et al., 2012; Zenker & Rütter, 2014) and actors' perceived value of the brand (Eshuis et al., 2013; Stevens et al., 2021). Hence, our research question is as follows:

To what degree do stakeholders' perceived value of the brand and place identity predict their degree of participation in decision-making about brand development and their brand citizenship behavior?

This question will be addressed through a quantitative online survey study ( $N = 162$ ) among stakeholders engaged in two branding processes in the Netherlands (Zeeland and Drechtsteden regions). The theoretical framework is elaborated next. Then we present our methodology and survey items, followed by the testing of our scales and questions of validity. We then present our main empirical findings, followed by a discussion of the results. Finally, we present our conclusions.

## PARTICIPATION IN BRAND DEVELOPMENT AND BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

As stated above, place branding can be seen as a governance strategy. Indeed, it shows almost all the characteristics of collaborative and network governance processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Klijn et al., 2022):

- *Difference in views on the brand:* There are many actors involved, and they oftentimes have different perceptions on the brand (Zenker & Braun, 2017);
- *Actors autonomously choose their strategy:* They may on occasion even oppose the “formal” or “official” brand and engage in counter branding (Maiello & Pasquinelli, 2015);
- *Necessary collaboration:* Given the interdependency of actors, the outcomes of the branding process are the result of the interactions between actors (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012);
- *Complexity and dynamism of the decision-making process:* The many actors, different perceptions, and individual strategies add to the unpredictability of branding and enhance the necessity for collaboration despite actors’ differences in perceptions and interests (Blichfeldt, 2005).

Branding as governance strategy is thus dependent on multiple stakeholders to succeed. For instance, regional governments depend on other (local) governments, businesses, the local community, and other actors for the implementation of the brand project. If the brand is solely communicated one-way by the government, its reach will be limited. Additionally, if stakeholders do not embrace the brand, they are not likely to communicate it (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Similarly, if stakeholders do not act upon the brand ideas, the brand will not correspond with reality and become a false promise (Therkelsen et al., 2010). Hence, stakeholder support for the brand is key in place branding processes.

### Active support for the brand: The dependent variable

Support for brands has been measured in the branding literature mostly at an individual (citizen) level and scarcely

at the organizational level, using a mix of concepts including satisfaction with the brand (Zenker & Rütter, 2014), brand commitment (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005), brand loyalty (Kemp et al., 2012), brand love (Aro et al., 2018), and brand support (Taecharungroj, 2016). For instance, empirical research in place branding has measured citizens’ willingness to engage in talking positively about the place to others to support the brand (which is referred in the literature as *word of mouth*, see Braun et al., 2014; or *ambassadorship* behavior, see Taecharungroj, 2016).

“Brand citizenship behavior,” the concept used in this article, generally refers to commitment and loyalty toward the brand through voluntary actions to support the brand (see Piehler, 2018). It has been applied in branding literature to measure active support for the brand. Burmann and Zeplin (2005), following Podsakoff et al.’s, (2000) provided a three-dimensional model for measuring BCB including: willingness to help, brand enthusiasm, and willingness to develop oneself. Since this article focuses on active stakeholder engagement, BCB is hereby defined as “all cooperative and contributing behaviours by actors in place branding processes that assist the development, delivery and overall aims of a branding project.” The cooperative and contributing behaviors in BCB involve (a) *acceptance* of the brand, degree to which stakeholders accept the brand and its main ideas (see Klijn et al., 2022); (b) *brand investment*, whether stakeholders invest expertise, time, and money in the brand since, after all, success of implementation often depends on shared resources and contributions by all actors (see de San Eugenio-Vela et al., 2020; Zenker & Martin, 2011); (c) *communication* of the brand, degree to which stakeholders are willing to communicate the brand to others and use the brand in their own communication. This is referred in the literature as *word of mouth* and considered as an important indicator of the impact/effectiveness of a brand (Chen et al., 2018; Strandberg et al., 2020) and; (d) *advocacy*, whether stakeholders also provide political support or advocacy for the brand in their network (Kemp et al., 2012).

In sum, the aim of this study is to understand which factors affect BCB. Applying the logic of literature on collaborative and network management, this article argues that participation in decision-making about the brand leads to increased levels of BCB. The next section elaborates on this logic.

### The impact of participation on brand citizenship behavior

Collaborative and network governance literature emphasize the importance of participation of stakeholders in decision-making (see Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Participation is thought to enhance support of policy proposals because:

1. Stakeholders have received the possibilities to influence the policy proposal and thus are less likely to incline to resist or oppose the proposal (see Ansell & Gash, 2008). This could be termed as the veto argument.
2. Involving stakeholders will improve the problem definition at the start because it includes more different societal values and problems (it is a “richer” problem definition: see Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). This is especially important in the case of place branding because stakeholders are more aware of the specific problems they face in a place (Zenker et al, 2017).
3. Involving stakeholders will generate better solutions for available problems because more information from various actors becomes available (see Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Empirical research shows that stakeholder engagement in decision-making in governance processes indeed enhanced support for policies (see Klijn & Edelenbos, 2013). Given the governance character of branding, this insight from collaborative and network governance is applicable to place branding.

The branding literature also provides (limited) evidence of the abovementioned effect. Klijn et al. (2022) argue the importance of stakeholder alignment with and communication of the city or regional brand (*word of mouth*) to support investment attraction, and empirically show that companies and organizations are more likely to do so if they have been engaged in the brand development process. Other authors also emphasize that participation of stakeholders in branding processes is important to generate support, although they do not commonly empirically investigate active BCB (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Thomas et al., 2021; see for empirical evidence Zenker & Braun, 2017). Not involving stakeholders in place branding indeed may lead to increased risk of counter branding (active opposition to the brand), which occurs when stakeholders have quite different views of the place that do not match the official brand ideas (which connects with the veto argument found in governance literature stated above, see Vallaster et al., 2018). More participation stimulates a sense of common purpose or identity (Aitken & Campelo, 2011) and the building of brand communities that share and embrace the brand, and thus engage in communicating it to others (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, Braun et al., 2013). Branding scholars also argue that including stakeholders can (1) increase the relevance of the brand and (2) attune it better to the place (Casais & Monteiro, 2019; Merrilees et al., 2012). Most empirical data in support of this argument to date, however, are of qualitative nature and mostly based on single case studies (see Vuignier, 2017 for a similar conclusion). Hence, we contribute to the literature not only by quantitatively testing the relationships found in our exploration of the literature, but also by studying *active* support (BCB), which has not been researched.

From the above, we expect that stronger participation of stakeholders in decision-making in regional branding processes will correlate with a higher level of BCB. This leads to the first hypothesis:

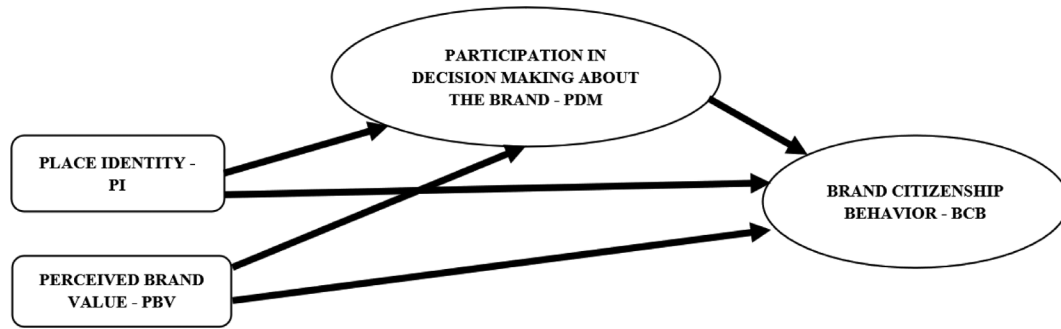
**Hypothesis 1.** The more stakeholders participate in decision-making about the brand, the more likely they will engage in supportive behavior toward the brand (brand citizenship behavior).

Next, beyond studying whether participation predicts BCB, we want to contribute to a better understanding of factors that may predict levels of participation. We therefore now turn to two antecedents of participation not studied often in public administration but more commonly found in the (place) branding literature, namely place identity and perceived value of the brand.

### Influence of place identity on participation in decision-making about the brand and brand citizenship behavior

Attitudes toward place are key in understanding how actors engage in collaborative behaviors related to the place (Insch & Stuart, 2015). First, we turn to place identity, an attitudinal concept rooted in psychology used to describe the bond between actor and place (Hernández et al., 2020; Lewicka, 2008; Raymond et al., 2010). In branding literature, place identity (also often referred as “identification with place,” see, for instance, Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2018) is used to study whether the bond actor-place predicts the importance (and value) actors give to the place brand (Klijn et al., 2022). Place identity has been conceptualized as “the emotional connection that people create with specific place, where they feel safe and comfortable” (Florek, 2011). Few empirical studies have observed the relationship between place identity and supportive behaviors. Empirical research has studied the effect of place identity on peoples’ willingness to engage in ambassadorship behaviors (see Chen, et al., 2018) or citizenship behaviors (Burmans & Zeplin, 2005; Taucharungroj, 2016), mostly at the individual (resident) level. Building on one of the scarce studies of place branding and place identity at an organizational level (Klijn et al., 2022), this article theorizes that the strength of organizations’ bond with place can motivate organizations to participate in decision-making and engage in supporting behaviors toward the brand (BCB). Thus, we expect a positive relationship between place identity and stakeholder participation in decision-making in the branding process (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Klijn et al., 2022), which leads us to the second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** Actors with a higher degree of place identity will be more likely to participate in decision-making in the branding process.



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual framework.

In addition to enhancing participation in decision-making, place identity can also have a direct positive effect on BCB. Empirical research has shown that identification with place can motivate actors to both participate in place processes (Anton & Lawrence, 2014) and support place brands (Zenker & Rütter, 2014). If actors are characterized by a high degree of place identity, their interest with the brand increases and they are willing, all things equal, to engage in BCB. Zenker and Braun (2017), for instance, highlighted the link between identification with place as a place attitude and supporting behaviors, such as *word of mouth* (talking positively about the place to others, see also Chen et al., 2018). We thus theorize that place identity is an important condition to supporting the brand (and its goals) or communicating the brand message to others (Zenker & Rütter, 2014). An expected positive relation between place identity and BCB is described in the third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Actors with a higher degree of place identity will be more likely to display intention to engage in positive brand citizenship behavior.*

### Influence of perceived value of the brand on participation and brand citizenship behavior

Another key factor influencing BCB is stakeholders' perceived value of the brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). The corporate branding literature emphasizes the importance of ensuring the value or benefit a brand delivers for consumers and shareholders (Jones, 2005). This is also considered important in the literature about public brands and place branding. Several authors emphasize that when actors perceive more value of the brand, they are more likely to be actively engaged (see, for instance, Florek & Kavaratzis, 2014). Creating value for actors with a brand is generally considered as an important element in public branding (see Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Zavattaro et al., 2021). Since this study focuses on participation in branding processes in support of sustainable regional development aims expressed by the regions under study,

perceived value of the brand is conceptualized as the (perceived) potential benefits the brand brings to the organizations under study in terms of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In this way, the study observes a range of perceived benefits of the brand that may motivate actors' participation and BCB leading to the fourth hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Actors reporting a higher perceived value of the brand for their organization, will participate more in decision-making in the (re)branding process.*

We also hypothesize that the perceived value of the brand will enhance the possibility of stakeholders' decisions to contribute time and resources to support a place brand (Casais & Monteiro, 2019). The more value a brand has for an actor the more likely an actor is to invest in the brand in terms of communicating the brand and otherwise explicitly support the brand. This leads us the fifth and final hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Actors reporting a higher perceived value of the brand for their organization will show more positive brand citizenship behavior.*

Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical model and relationships that will be tested.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The data of this study have been collected in two online surveys in two place branding processes in the regions of Drechtsteden and Zeeland, the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> These cases suit this studies' research purpose because:

1. They both concern branding processes of the regions under study involving a significant number of stakeholders;
2. This enables surveying stakeholders who actually participated in the branding process which enhances the value of the data as stakeholders are knowledgeable of

the process and show (varying levels) of actual participation;

3. Since the branding process was ongoing the expectation is that respondents would be motivated to fill in the survey;

4. The research team was able to connect to multiple stakeholders for a pre-study;

5. Doing the research in two different cases enables the testing of the hypotheses in two situations. This enhances validity of the outcomes.

The conversations with some key stakeholders and the policy documents they provided helped us to understand the ongoing branding and governance processes and include relevant concepts and questions in the survey.

The survey was developed in consultation with the organizations leading the branding efforts in both cases. All items, partly from existing scales and partly developed by the research team, were presented to a group of stakeholders to test whether the scales worked and were understandable for the respondents prior to distribution. We then made several adaptations to the wording which contributed to the reasonably good fit of the scales (see Table 1).

## Data collection and sampling

The survey data were collected in 2022<sup>1</sup>. Respondents were stakeholders (18+) in the network of actors around the development of a regional brand in the regions of Zeeland and Drechtsteden in the Netherlands (Ethical Committee of BLINDED, approval n. 21-013).<sup>2</sup> These are public and private actors who have at least been informed about the brand developments, and in that sense were involved with the brand to at least the marginal level of being informed. It was important to have respondents who know the brand because they can give valid answers to survey questions about the brand.<sup>3</sup>

Respondents were invited to participate in this studies' online survey via a link distributed among the email databases of the organizations leading the branding processes in both regions. Each of the regions had email subscriber lists containing between 200 and 250 contacts of organizations that were part of the network of actors around the region brand. The sample contains a total of 181 surveys (89 from Zeeland and 92 from Drechtsteden regions). This results in a response rate of roughly over 30%. A more precise number is not available as it is impossible to check with full certainty whether all e-respondents received emails. In addition, the survey was completely anonymous (which was an absolute demand of both regions for participating in the research). None of the questions are compulsory and the respondents could decide to answer a question or not. Due to highly incomplete answers by 19 respondents, the study included a final total number of 162 surveys (83 for

Drechtsteden and 79 for Zeeland). We asked questions on gender, education, birth year, experience, type of organizations, and the size of the organization where they work. On average 80% of the final sample answered these questions (see Appendix A for respondent characteristics). The surveys present a balanced mix of public, private, and civil society stakeholders who know the brand and have been involved to varying degrees in the branding processes. They include political decision makers, public administrators, businesses of varied sizes and sectors, as well as educational institutions and cultural organizations. A large percentage of the respondents work in public organizations, is male, and older than 50. This reflects the composition of actors generally working in networks around place brands in the Netherlands (see Appendix A for more details on the sample).

We selected respondents from the network of actors around the brand that were informed about the brand and participated in the development of the brand. Although this was necessary because we required respondents who knew the brand, it creates a risk of selection bias toward actors who participate relatively intensively in the development of the brand. The risk was that intensively participating actors show far higher levels of filling out the survey than actors with low levels of participation. This would result in a non-representative survey, and also the risk of common source bias if actors with high participation in the development of the brand also actively support the implementation of the brand.

Our check on the participation levels however shows a healthy variation in respondents' levels of participation and a limited average level of participation. We note standard deviation values (SD)s of 2.6; 2.9; 2.9 and mean scores of 5.2; 5.3; 5.9 on a 1–10 scale (see Appendix B for more details (Tables B1 and B2)). Additionally, 15–30% of the respondents participate very little (scores of 1 or 2 on the 1–10 scale, see also Appendix B). Additional analyses show no common source bias in our data (see Appendix C for more details).

## Reconstructing the branding process: Zeeland and Drechtsteden

Zeeland is a mostly rural area with about 380,000 inhabitants located in the Southwestern Delta of the Netherlands and characterized by a combination of land and sea. There are 13 municipalities in the province with a long history of cooperation on many areas, as many municipalities are too small to sustain all important public services. Agriculture is the most important land use and coastal tourism an important source of income. Zeeland has an aging population, and many public and private organizations face difficulties in retaining and attracting employees.

Following a wish to reposition the Zeeland brand, a participatory branding process started in 2021. This was led by the provincial authority of Zeeland, which hired a

**TABLE 1** Overview of concepts and measurement items used in this survey study.

| VARIABLE   | Statements: 10-point Likert scale from 1 “completely disagree” to 10 “completely agree.”   | LABEL |
|--|--|-------|
| Degree of place identity                         | The [XXX] region is very special to our organization   | PI_1  |
|  | The [XXX] region means a lot to our organization   | PI_2  |
|  | Our organization feels strongly connected to the [XXX] region  | PI_3  |
|  | Our organization identifies very strongly with the [XXX] region  | PI_4  |
|  | The [XXX] region is part of our organizational identity  | PI_5  |
| Perceived value of the brand                     | This brand helps my organization realize economic goals  | PBV_1 |
|  | This brand helps my organization realize social goals  | PBV_2 |
|  | This brand helps my organization realize environmental goals   | PBV_3 |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand | My organization has hardly been involved in the decision-making process about the (XXX) brand over the past 2 years/My organization has been intensively involved in the decision-making process about the (XXX) brand over the past 2 years | PDM_1 |
|  | My organization has very little interaction with other parties involved in the development of the (XXX) brand/My organization has a very high interaction with other parties involved in the development of the (XXX) brand                  | PDM_2 |
|  | My organization has few contacts with the (XXX) marketing team/My organization has a lot of contacts with the (XXX) marketing team (this is the team that currently coordinates the decision-making regarding the XXX brand)                 | PDM_3 |
| Brand citizenship behavior                       | My organization does not invest time in developing and/or propagating the (XXX) brand/My organization does invest a lot of time in developing and/or propagating the (XXX) brand   | BCB_1 |
|  | My organization does not embrace the (XXX) brand / My organization does embrace the (XXX) brand strongly   | BCB_2 |
|  | Does not give any political support to the (XXX) brand in administrative networks/Does give political support to the (XXX) brand in administrative networks  | BCB_3 |
|  | Does not provide any expertise for the development or propagation of the (XXX) brand/Does provide expertise intensely for the development or propagation of the (XXX) brand  | BCB_4 |
|  | Has no directors/executives who often publicly support the (XXX) brand/Has directors/executives who often publicly support the (XXX) brand   | BCB_5 |
|  | Has not invested any money in the development and/or propagation of the (XXX) brand/Has invested a lot of money in the development and/or propagation of the (XXX) brand   | BCB_6 |
|  | Does not propagate the (XXX) brand at all/Does propagate the (XXX) brand frequently  | BCB_7 |

branding expert who organized five interactive sessions of 3–4 hours with key stakeholders and local experts. The aim was to collaborate in developing a brand identity that would be supported by crucial stakeholders. Our data were collected in the period that this interactive process took place.

Drechtsteden, in comparison, is a mostly urbanized region with circa 270,000 inhabitants located in the west of the Netherlands. It consists of seven smaller municipalities and the larger municipality of Dordrecht and is characterized by a strong maritime industry along the multiple rivers and delta in the area.

Following changes in the administrative structure of the regional governance and a wish to develop a stronger brand at the regional level, a brand development process started in 2020 in Drechtsteden. A marketing agency held a series of interactive sessions and presented an advice in the form of the brand “Smart Delta Drechtsteden” (SDD). SDD functions both as an integrated (multisectoral) policy program for the development of the area, and as a brand. The brand development work was carried by the municipalities of Drechtsteden, together with about 20–30 triple

helix partners (i.e., including businesses, public health, and educational institutions).

Because both regions are in the Netherlands, differences observed would not be caused by different national contexts but rather by developments in the region itself. Furthermore, the regions are comparable in several important respects. Both have long-standing collaborations between municipalities, and both regions experience tensions between the need for collaboration and the municipalities’ desire for autonomy. Although Zeeland suffers more from brain drain, both regions face the need to attract skilled workforce and attract young people to the region. In both cases the process of repositioning of the brand has a fairly strong public character: a public organization leads it and the municipalities play an important role in the process. In both cases other partners, especially business and educational organizations, are contacted to get involved in the branding process. There are also differences. As mentioned above, Zeeland relies more on tourism while Drechtsteden has a strong maritime industry cluster and is more urbanized. Zeeland has the desire to build the new brand less on tourism and use the brand more for other

purposes. Drechtsteden wants to use the brand also in public affairs and in her communications to the national government to position itself more strongly as a region.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE VARIABLES

With lack of an existing scale to measure the degree of participation in decision-making about the brand that fits our cases, we constructed a scale with three items based on literature about network and collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Klijn et al., 2022; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Item 1 refers to the general involvement in the decision-making process. Item 2 refers to the connection of the respondents' organization with other organizations involved in the branding process. Item 3 measures the strength of connection with the organization that coordinated the branding process and is thus very specific for the two cases—both had a clear organization managing the branding process.

- *Place identity*: This study employs the scale developed by Raymond et al. (2010) that measures the level of identification of actors with the regions under study. The scale was adapted to the cases.
- *Perceived value of the brand*: There are many ways and a lack of consensus on how to best measure brand value in the branding literature (see for the staggering variety of scales: Zarantonello & Pauwels-Delassus, 2015, 227–258). Used scales and items range from brand awareness, to whether people would buy the brand, or to whether it relates to good quality. The study tries to capture the value of the brand for the organizations involved in the branding process by using three items asking participants whether the brand helps their organization realize (1) economic goals; (2) social goals; and (3) environmental goals (on a scale of 1–10, 1 being “completely disagree,” 10 being “completely agree”). This directly measures the value of the brand for an organization.
- *Brand citizenship behavior*: In line with the theoretical section about BCB the study developed a range of items to measure aspects of supporting behavior, like acceptance, investment, and communication of the brand, based on insights from collaborative and network governance (items about resource intensive commitment and political support) as well as branding theory (for instance willingness to engage in word of mouth as a form of positive communication of the brand to others). Each item was measured from low to high on 10-point scale (see Table 1).

## RESULTS

Before performing the main analysis (the structural equation modeling) several analyses were performed to test the scales. Those are extensively reported in Appendix C.

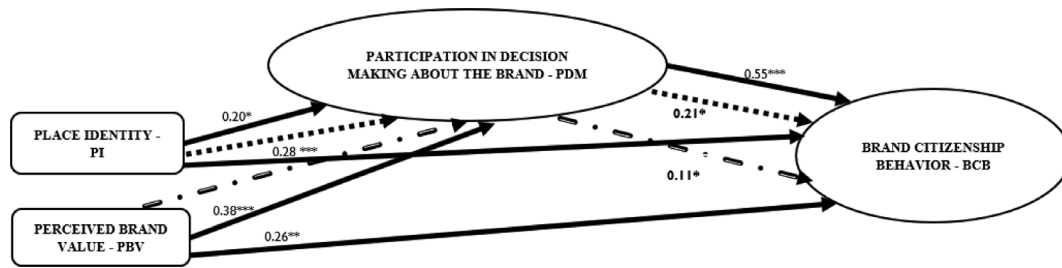
**TABLE 2** Structural equation modeling for all respondents in the two cases ( $N = 162$ ).

| Effects of   | On:  |                            |
|--|--|----------------------------|
|  | Participation in decision-making about the brand | Brand citizenship behavior |
| Degree of place identity   | 0.20*<br>(0.08)                                  | 0.28 ***<br>(0.08)         |
| Perceived brand value  | 0.38***<br>(0.09)                                | 0.26**<br>(0.07)           |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand   |  | 0.55***<br>(0.07)          |
| <b>Mediation relationships</b>   |  |                            |
| Degree of place identity—participation in decision-making about the brand—brand citizenship behavior |  | 0.21***<br>(0.06)          |
| Perceived brand value—participation in decision-making about the brand—brand citizenship behavior    |  | 0.11*<br>(0.05)            |

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported and come with their standard errors in parentheses; Model fit:  $\chi^2 = 170.48$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p = .00$ ; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.07; 90%CI = [0.05–0.08]; PCLOSE = 0.02;  $R^2 = 0.75$ . \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

We tested the four scales with an explorative factor analysis (EFA) with all items of the factors using the psych package (Revelle, 2020) in R. The assessment of the factors revealed that two items from the factor Brand Citizenship Behavior did not behave well. The item BCB\_6 had a low loading and a cross-loading higher than 0.4 with another construct. The item BCB\_5 weakened the factor structure for the construct. The remaining five items shared the most variance of BCB. The parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) identified the four factors using the remaining 16 items. The EFA corroborated the four factors had eigenvalues larger than one, and that all items loaded neatly on their own factor and cross-loadings were below 0.4. Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 2102.72$ ;  $df = 120$ ;  $p = .00$ ) validated the factorability as well as the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.89). We have also deployed a more rigorous procedure: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012). For the goodness-of-fit of the CFA, we use the thresholds of Bagozzi and Yi (2012): CFI  $\geq 0.93$  and TLI  $\geq 0.92$ ; SRMR  $\leq 0.07$ ; RMSEA  $\leq 0.07$ . The CFA confirmed the factorability for the four constructs (see Appendix C) with standardized loading above 0.7, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and CR are higher than the threshold 0.7, and AVE is greater than 0.5, establishing convergent validity. Likewise, discriminant validity is also verified (see Appendix C) following Fornell and Larcker (1981). Finally, we validated that the dataset





**FIGURE 2** Structural equation modeling analysis results.

of the study is not prone to common method bias. We loaded all items on one common factor in a CFA model (Podsakoff et al., 2000). This model has a bad fit, thus common method bias is unlikely to be an issue in the dataset ( $\chi^2 = 668.93$ ;  $df = 104$ ;  $p = .00$ ;  $CFI = 0.549$ ;  $TLI = 0.480$ ;  $SRMR = 0.125$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.183$ ;  $90\% CI = [0.172-0.194]$ ;  $PCLOSE = 0.00$ ).

### Estimating the conceptual framework

We use structural equation modeling (SEM) to estimate the conceptual framework in Figure 1. Again, we use the thresholds of Bagozzi and Yi (2012) for the goodness-of-fit. We use the 162 respondents that answer the questions for our constructs. We studied two branding projects in Zeeland and Drechtsteden. Both projects are similar—developing a brand—and the respondents in both cases are professionals involved with the branding process. To be sure, we tested statistically whether the respondents from the projects are similar. First, we estimated the SEM model with two groups (Drechtsteden and Zeeland separate) and a SEM model with one group (Drechtsteden and Zeeland together). Testing reveals that the respondents are similar and belong to one group ( $\chi^2 = 113.44$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p = .14$ ). Moreover, the other goodness-of-fit statistics for the one group model ( $\chi^2 = 170.48$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p = .00$ ;  $CFI = 0.94$ ;  $TLI = 0.93$ ;  $SRMR = 0.05$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.07$ ;  $90\%CI = [0.05-0.08]$ ;  $PCLOSE = 0.02$ ) are better than the two group model ( $\chi^2 = 286.33$ ,  $df = 196$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ ;  $TLI = 0.91$ ;  $SRMR = 0.06$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.08$ ;  $90\%CI = [0.06-0.09]$ ;  $PCLOSE = 0.01$ ). In addition, respondents from the Drechtsteden and Zeeland interpret the constructs in the same way ( $\chi^2 = 17.93$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = .12$ ).

Next, we estimated the SEM model (see Table 2) and all relationships in the model are significant. The goodness-of-fit statistics is satisfactory (see Note in Table 2). Subsequently we use the estimated model to assess the hypotheses. The *first hypothesis* is supported as more stakeholders participate in decision-making about the brand, the more likely it is that they will engage in BCB (0.55\*\*\*). The *second hypothesis* is also verified as the estimate (0.20\*) shows a positive relationship between high place identity and high levels of participation in

decision-making about the brand. The *third hypothesis* is also corroborated with a positive effect (0.28\*\*\*) between high levels place identity and engaging in positive BCB. Likewise, the *fourth hypothesis* is supported because a higher perceived brand value has a positive effect on respondents' participation in decision-making about the branding process (0.38\*\*). Finally, actors with a higher perceived value of the brand for their organization are more likely to engage in positive BCB (0.26\*\*) (see

Table 2 for more details). Overall, all formulated hypotheses are confirmed. However, we see the strongest effect between participation in decision-making about the brand and BCB (see Figure 2).

### CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The public administration literature has showed increased interest in place branding, as a form of public branding, and as a governance tool to strengthen policy making (Zavattaro et al., 2021). Both branding and public administration literatures on network and collaborative governance have signaled the importance of stakeholder participation in governance.

### Findings and their practical relevance

This study combines insights from branding and public administration literature to empirically observe *actual* participation of stakeholders in decision-making in a branding process. Employing survey research, we empirically test and provide new insight on the relationship between stakeholder participation in the branding process and active support for the brand. From a SEM analysis on survey data of 162 stakeholders of two regional place branding processes, we conclude that participation strongly predicts active support in the form of BCB. This confirms the importance of stakeholder participation in place branding (see also Klijn et al., 2022), adding to the existing literature that stakeholder participation is important not only for passive acceptance of the brand but for active supportive contributions to the brand. In addition, this study shows that both the degree to which the brand is seen as valuable (perceived brand value), and the level

of identification with the region (place identity) predict stakeholders' inclination to participate in the place branding process. Furthermore, we conclude that identification with place and perceived brand value predict supportive BCB. Thus, active support for the place brand (BCB) is also partly explained by the perceived brand value, and stakeholder relationship with place (place identity). This highlights the importance of including other variables to explain participation and stakeholder support, in this case more affective factors related to place, than usually done in public administration. Highlighting this shows the value of combining governance literature with branding literature.

These conclusions have practical relevance and theoretical value. In practice many brand managers struggle not so much to gain (passive) acceptance of the brand, but especially to increase active supportive contributions from stakeholders that are so important to realize a strong brand. This article shows that involving stakeholders in the development of the brand helps to increase active stakeholder support and thus strengthen the brand.

The general conclusion that stakeholder involvement predicts support, also aligns with earlier empirical research and theorizing in collaborative and network governance (Klijn & Edelenbos, 2013). In addition, this article shows that although participation is a strong predictor for BCB, even when stakeholders are less involved in the decision-making about the brand, they are still likely to contribute to the brand if they find the brand valuable for their organization (perceived brand value) and if they feel strongly attached to the region (place identity). This is a valuable insight for brand managers since it offers different routes to achieving stakeholder involvement and support for the brand.

## Limitation of the study

Of course, there are some limitations to this study. First, two regions in the Netherlands were studied. Although the advantage of selecting these two regions is that they were both engaged in a branding process and thus answers of respondents about participation and BCB behavior are likely to be more accurate, this data is only from two regions in one country. It is unsure in how far these findings are applicable to other regions in the world or to participatory place branding at other administrative levels, such as the local level. A second limitation is that the survey covered two networks of institutional/organizational stakeholders in regional branding that did not include residents. The conclusions of this study are not necessarily valid for residents' participation and support for place brands among citizens. Another limitation is that although this study did include respondents with low levels of participation, it does not include stakeholders who did not participate at all. It is therefore unsure whether the findings

are valid for actors who have no relationship with the branding process at all.

Nevertheless, this study makes an important empirical contribution, as there are only very few studies with larger-scale data about actual participation of stakeholders and its effects in the branding process. The article thus contributes to ongoing debates about participatory place branding (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Martin & Capelli, 2017), and the value of participation of stakeholders in governance processes (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Klijn & Edelenbos, 2013). The study broadens the literatures on (collaborative and network) governance with other factors that influence participation, such as identification with place and brand value. The study also contributes to the emerging body of literature that highlights branding as a governance strategy that works through the affective dimension of policy making (through identification with place) (Eshuis et al., 2014). Accordingly, the study strengthens knowledge on the connection between (1) affective perceptions of belonging (identification with place, see Raymond et al., 2010) and (2) perceived interest in the decision-making process (in this case the value of a brand for the stakeholder; Zavattaro et al., 2015), and stakeholder participation as studied in the governance literature (Anton & Lawrence, 2014).

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This project was preregistered with the Open Science Framework (OSF).
- <sup>2</sup> For an overview of the place branding projects see: <https://www.zeeland.com/nl-nl> (Zeeland) and <https://www.smartdeltadrechtsteden.nl/> (Drechtsteden).
- <sup>3</sup> Since the brands in both cases are relatively young, only actors who were actively informed know it. Only a very small percentage of the wider population knows the brands and would be able to answer the survey questions. This was the reason to survey the network around the brand rather than the entire regional population.

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## APPENDIX 1: Sample characteristics.

| Characteristics or respondents (sample 162: Zeeland = 83 and Drechtsteden = 79) |                     |                                      |                     |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Gender  | Answered            | Education                            | Answered            |
|   | 81%                 |                                      | 81%                 |
| Male  | 55%                 | Research Universities                | 41%                 |
| Female  | 23%                 | University of Applied Sciences       | 33%                 |
| Other   | 0,6%                | Vocational Training                  | 5%                  |
| Did not want to say   | 2,5%                | Secondary education                  | 1,2%                |
|   | <i>Not Answered</i> |                                      | <i>Not Answered</i> |
|   | 19%                 |                                      | 19%                 |
| Birth year  | Answered            | Number of employees of organizations | Answered            |
|   | 81%                 |                                      | 78%                 |
| 1991–2000   |                     |                                      |                     |
| 1981–1990   | 3%                  | 1–300                                | 54%                 |
| 1971–1980   | 9%                  | 301–600                              | 14%                 |
| 1961–1970   | 15%                 | 601–900                              | 4%                  |
| 1951–1960   | 32%                 | 901–1200                             | 0,6%                |
| 1941–1950   | 18%                 | 1201–1500                            | 2,5%                |
|   | 3%                  | 1501–1800                            | 4%                  |
|   | <i>Not Answered</i> |                                      | <i>Not Answered</i> |
|   | 19%                 |                                      | 22%                 |
| Years of experience of respondents  | Answered            | Type of organizations                | Answered            |
|   | 81%                 |                                      | 81%                 |
| 1–10  | 6%                  | Municipalities                       | 36%                 |
| 11–20   | 13%                 | Regional Organizations               | 11%                 |
| 21–30   | 23%                 | Businesses                           | 27%                 |
| 31–40   | 24%                 | Education and Culture                | 7%                  |
| 41–50   | 12%                 |                                      |                     |
| 51–60   | 3%                  |                                      |                     |
|   | <i>Not Answered</i> |                                      | <i>Not Answered</i> |
|   | 19%                 |                                      | 19%                 |

## APPENDIX 2: Descriptive statistics.

**TABLE B1** Descriptive statistics.

| Constructs items                                       | Mean | SD  | Min | Max | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--|------|-----|-----|-----|----------|----------|
| Place brand value PBV_1                                | 6.0  | 2.4 | 1   | 10  | -0.65    | -0.27    |
| Place brand value PBV_2                                | 5.7  | 2.2 | 1   | 10  | -0.57    | 0.02     |
| Place brand value PBV_3                                | 5.7  | 2.4 | 1   | 10  | -0.60    | -0.19    |
| Place identity PI_1                                    | 7.5  | 2.3 | 1   | 10  | -0.90    | 0.32     |
| Place identity PI_2                                    | 7.6  | 2.2 | 1   | 10  | -1.05    | 0.88     |
| Place identity PI_3                                    | 7    | 2.2 | 1   | 10  | -1.16    | 0.97     |
| Place identity PI_4                                    | 7.3  | 2.4 | 1   | 10  | -0.87    | 0.37     |
| Place identity PI_5                                    | 7.1  | 2.6 | 1   | 10  | -0.70    | -0.34    |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand PDM_1 | 5.2  | 2.9 | 1   | 10  | -0.11    | -1.23    |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand PDM_2 | 5.9  | 2.6 | 1   | 10  | -0.34    | -0.69    |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand PDM_3 | 5.3  | 2.9 | 1   | 10  | -0.02    | -1.08    |
| Brand Citizenship Behavior BCB_1                       | 6.4  | 2.5 | 1   | 10  | -0.65    | -0.16    |
| Brand Citizenship Behavior BCB_2                       | 7.0  | 2.3 | 1   | 10  | -1.03    | 1.08     |
| Brand Citizenship Behavior BCB_3                       | 6.5  | 2.4 | 1   | 10  | -0.87    | 0.36     |
| Brand Citizenship Behavior BCB_4                       | 6.4  | 2.5 | 1   | 10  | -0.70    | 0.02     |
| Brand Citizenship Behavior BCB_7                       | 6.7  | 2.4 | 1   | 10  | -0.82    | 0.33     |

Note: SD=Standard Deviation,  $N = 162$ .

**TABLE B2** Overview of variation for the participation variable.

|       | 1      | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9     | 10     |
|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| PDM_1 | 21,37% | 8,40% | 7,63% | 6,11% | 2,29% | 16,03% | 11,45% | 12,98% | 6,11% | 7,63%  |
| PDM_2 | 10,69% | 5,34% | 8,40% | 6,87% | 3,82% | 16,03% | 19,85% | 10,69% | 7,63% | 10,69% |
| PDM_3 | 19,85% | 7,63% | 8,40% | 6,11% | 5,34% | 16,79% | 14,50% | 3,05%  | 7,63% | 10,69% |

## APPENDIX 3: Testing the reliability of scales (extended analysis notes with tables)

The first step is to assess the four constructs (see Table C1) using the psych package (Revelle, 2020) in R. All items are included in an explorative factor analysis (EFA) showing four factors. The assessment of the factors revealed that two items from the factor Brand Citizenship Behavior did not behave well. The item BCB\_6 had a low loading and a cross-loading higher than 0.4 with another construct. The item BCB\_5 weakened the factor structure for the construct. Moreover, the remaining five items of Brand Citizenship Behavior shared the most variance. Next, the parallel analysis identified the four factors using the remaining 16 items, followed by an EFA. The EFA corroborated the four factors had eigenvalues larger than one, and that all items loaded neatly on their own factor and cross-loadings were below 0.4. Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 2102.72$ ;  $df = 120$ ;  $p = .00$ ) validated the factorability as well as the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.89). Descriptive statistics are reported for the 16 items in Table C1, together with the

skewness and kurtosis values. According to Finney and DiStefano (2006), the data can be categorized as moderately non-normal, given the values of skewness and kurtosis.

Next, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed the factorability with good loadings. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA are fine, see Note in Table C2. For the four constructs, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and CR are higher than the threshold 0.7 and AVE is above 0.5, establishing convergent validity (see Table C2). Subsequently, a test for discriminant validity was carried out (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table C2 compares the AVEs for the four constructs with the squared correlation between the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This is a more rigorous procedure, and it indicates that the construct explains more of the variance in its items, than it shares with the other constructs (Hair et al., 2014).

We continued our analysis of the data from surveys in Zeeland and Drechtsteden through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012). The MLM-estimator is used for the CFA and the SEM models for the

**TABLE C1** Factor loadings, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE).

| Construct  | Item label | B    | SE   | $\beta$ | SE   | $\alpha$ | CR   | AVE  |
|--|------------|------|------|---------|------|----------|------|------|
| Degree of place identity                         | PL_1       | 2.01 | 0.16 | 0.91    | 0.03 | 0.94     | 0.94 | 0.75 |
|  | PL_2       | 2.13 | 0.15 | 0.96    | 0.01 |          |      |      |
|  | PL_3       | 1.96 | 0.17 | 0.87    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
|  | PL_4       | 1.95 | 0.16 | 0.83    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
|  | PL_5       | 2.03 | 0.16 | 0.79    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
| Perceived brand value                            | PBV_1      | 1.65 | 0.19 | 0.85    | 0.06 | 0.90     | 0.90 | 0.75 |
|  | PBV_2      | 1.23 | 0.15 | 0.87    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
|  | PBV_3      | 1.28 | 0.16 | 0.88    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand | PDM_1      | 2.41 | 0.17 | 0.83    | 0.05 | 0.86     | 0.86 | 0.68 |
|  | PDM_2      | 1.96 | 0.18 | 0.76    | 0.05 |          |      |      |
|  | PDM_3      | 2.52 | 0.15 | 0.87    | 0.03 |          |      |      |
| Brand citizenship behavior                       | BCB_1      | 2.20 | 0.15 | 0.88    | 0.03 | 0.90     | 0.89 | 0.63 |
|  | BCB_2      | 1.61 | 0.19 | 0.71    | 0.06 |          |      |      |
|  | BCB_3      | 1.72 | 0.21 | 0.71    | 0.06 |          |      |      |
|  | BCB_4      | 2.10 | 0.17 | 0.86    | 0.04 |          |      |      |
|  | BCB_7      | 1.86 | 0.20 | 0.77    | 0.06 |          |      |      |

Note: The reported  $\beta$ s are both the latent and observed variables standardized and the Bs, only the latent variables are standardized. All the factor loadings, alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) originated from the CFA model. SE = Standard Errors. Model fit:  $\chi^2 = 170.48$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p = .00$ ; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.07; 90% CI = [0.05–0.08]; PCLOSE = 0.02;  $R^2 = 0.75$ .

**TABLE C2** Discriminant validity and the Fornell and Larcker criterion.

|  | Degree of place identity | Perceived value of the brand | Participation in decision-making about the brand | Brand citizenship behavior |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Place identity                                   | <b>0.75</b>              | 0.21                         | 0.14   | 0.36                       |
| Perceived brand value                            | 0.46                     | <b>0.75</b>                  | 0.22   | 0.41                       |
| Participation in decision-making about the brand | 0.37                     | 0.47                         | <b>0.68</b>                                      | 0.60                       |
| Brand citizenship behavior                       | 0.60                     | 0.64                         | 0.77   | <b>0.63</b>                |

Note: In bold, on the diagonal are the Average Variance Extracted for the four constructs. The CFA model produced the correlations between the constructs depicted below the diagonal. These correlations are significant at  $p < .001$ . On the diagonal, the estimates of AVE for the constructs. The squared correlations (SC) are above diagonal in italics.

Satorra–Bentler corrections (Satorra & Bentler, 1994) in all models reported in this analysis. The Satorra–Bentler corrections produce robust standard errors. Also, we reported the scaled Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$ , the degrees of freedom (df) combined with the  $p$ -value, the CFI, TLI, SRMR, RMSEA, the 90% confidence interval (CI) for RMSEA

and PCLOSE. This study follows the thresholds of Bagozzi and Yi (2012): CFI  $\geq 0.93$  and TLI  $\geq 0.92$ ; SRMR  $\leq 0.07$ ; RMSEA  $\leq 0.07$ .

#### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We then proceed with a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (see Table C2):