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Urban Lived experience of Contemporary Iconic Architecture in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract:

Architecture, of all art forms, is bound to influence people's daily lives. The 20th century witnessed brisk urban developments. SKYSCRAPERS have become a new dialect of urbanism, tied to the ideologies of tall buildings, generating a so-called 'ICON' that stands tall and twisted several times, backed with design principles. This study documents the procedure of conducting a pilot research for a questionnaire-based investigation and fieldwork observation, examining the perception and sensory experience of the people living among the extraordinary superstructure, 'THE BAHRAIN WORLD TRADE CENTER' and the factors that leave an impression on their minds and impact their bodily experience, addressing the grandeur, the scale, the place where its located, and the technology or materials that have been used.

Keywords: Sky scraper, Skyline, Sensory Experience, Urban Icon, Perception, World Trade Bahrain Center

1. Introduction

Skyscrapers have evolved from simple tall buildings to complex architectural marvels, with each new design pushing the limits of engineering and technology. Their trademark effect is their ability to dominate the skyline, creating a sense of awe and wonder in those who behold them.. (Seth, 2013). Bahrain an Archipelago of 33 islands known as the 'ISLAND OF MILLION PLAM TREES', past two decades has seen a transformation in its built environment, the language of and traditional architectural pattern to transitional one and now a style of revivalism, influence of the western world. In the present context the iconic buildings of Bahrain have given a new dialect, standing there tall and demanding attention, giving a sense festivity image creating a brand of its own. The traditional buildings with their unique features have been replaced by modern structures that incorporate elements of both traditional and contemporary designs, reflecting the changing times and the country's aspirations for modernization (Zahir & Alor, 2011). These architectures have become iconic symbols of cities worldwide, representing their economic power and modernity. They also serve as a visual identity for the city, with each building contributing to its unique skyline and creating a sense of place for its inhabitants and visitors (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021). Bahrain's urban transitional phase was fast, creating a niche for itself as one of the countries to map the Architectural marvels, not only creating an impression on the people's mind also improving the quality of life and the city itself. Bahrain world trade center is one such icon's of Bahrain, is its 50 story office building with twin towers, located in Manama, most prominent feature of the architectural landscape and pride in the world view context. This paper aims to examine the perception and sensory experience of Bahrain's image of 'The World trade Centre' imbibed on the people-centric built datum and understand how architecture, urban design, and public spaces have shaped, how people interact and perceive Bahrain.

2. Aims and objectives

Urban designers in today's world face, two sided dilemma, in creating an identity of a place, due to the mere image expression of the client mostly traditional, on the contrary are the fans of developing icons. Bahrain has been actively progressing towards developing architectural marvels and has caught international attention with the mix of traditional and contemporary dialects of high-rise buildings.

This enables an objective of this study that is to investigate the outcome and impact of the iconic image that 'World trade Centre' among skyline of Manama in Bahrain have generated, via its emblem boasting an all-inclusive user-oriented man-made stratum, which enables us to progress towards the aim of this study, that converse the 'iconic' emotion and its interrelationship with the dilemma of belonging and iconography, influencing the city in both concrete and invisible ways.

3. Material & Methods

3.1. Literature Review

The literature review section intends to provide an extensive overview of the existing literature and knowledge related to the research topic. It helps to identify gaps in the current understanding and inform the research questions and hypotheses.

3.1.1. Urban Development of Iconic Architecture: Skyscrapers

Urban development of iconic architecture, particularly skyscrapers, has positively impacted cities worldwide (Ahlfeldt & Barr, 2020). Skyscrapers have become symbols of modernity and innovation forming a skyline, attracting tourists and investors to the cities they are located in. They also serve as landmarks that help people navigate and identify different city areas. Furthermore, these towering structures provide much-needed office space in densely populated urban areas where land is scarce and expensive (Hassan et al., 2017). The vertical design of skyscrapers allows for more efficient use of space. In

addition, the use of modern technology and materials in their construction has made skyscrapers safer and more environmentally friendly than ever before. These advancements have also created innovative designs that have become iconic landmarks in many cities around the world (Al-Kodmany, 2018). Therefore, skyscrapers have become a symbol of progress and development in many cities and their skyline, attracting people who seek to establish their presence in these towering structures.

3.1.2. Significance of Iconic Architecture in Bahrain

The evolution of superstructures, which has become a symbol of the country's progress and development. The Bahrain World Trade Center, for example, is one of the most recognizable landmarks in the region and has won numerous awards for its innovative design and sustainable features (Saeed, 2017). These buildings not only serve as tourist attractions but also contribute to the skyline of Bahrain, reflecting the country's economic and cultural development over the years (Seth, 2013). Additionally, these iconic structures not only serve as a symbol of the country's progress but also contribute significantly to its economic development. These buildings attract foreign investments, boost tourism, and create employment opportunities for locals, ultimately leading to an increase in the country's GDP. Additionally, the construction and maintenance of these structures require a skilled workforce, which leads to the development of human capital and expertise in various fields such as architecture, engineering, and hospitality (Alraouf & Clarke, 2017). The presence of these iconic structures also enhances Bahrain's global image. Therefore, skyscrapers have been of greater significance to Bahrain, prompting growth and development as well as country's reputation.

3.1.3. Sensory Experience of Iconic Structures: Skyscrapers

Iconic structures, such as skyscrapers, have a significant impact on the sensory experience of individuals. The towering height of these structures creates a sense of awe and wonder, while their unique designs and architectural features stimulate the senses in various ways. From the sound of elevators whizzing up and down to the seeing panoramic views from observation decks, skyscrapers offer a many sensory experiences (Salman, 2016). One of the most striking sensory experiences associated with skyscrapers is their visual impact. These towering structures' sheer size and height can be awe-inspiring, especially when viewed from a distance or from the top of the building itself. Additionally, the use of glass and reflective surfaces in modern skyscraper design can create a mesmerizing play of light and shadow that further enhances their visual appeal. For instance, in Bahrain, the sensory experience of skyscrapers is truly remarkable (Saeed, 2017). (Ganna, 2019) Similarly, the World Trade Center Bahrain boasts an impressive height of 240 meters, making it one of the tallest buildings in Bahrain and a prominent landmark in the city's skyline, which enables these urban icons impart an unparalleled sensory experience.

3.1.4. The World Trade Centre, Bahrain

The 'Attitude' of an iconic building that explains the approach to People's feelings about it emerging as a sign of emotional dimension, their beliefs about shape, the cognitive dimension and its function is a symbol of the behavioral approach, likewise the physical feature of its sail shaped plan design form, to keep alive the Bahraini culture of Fishing boats and the vertical shaped inspired by the traditional Arabian 'wind tower' of Bahrain world trade center. First being the perspective of an 'iconism', of the world trade centre the ideologies of sensory experiences, precipitate into human consciousness, with the vocabulary of architecture has taken an leap with the freedom of design and structure, in spite of an approach of keeping the zest of the cultural aspect reflecting, yet its contemporary style creates a non committal experience to the culture hence, borrows the viewers mind to root in the experiences it soughts. The Bahrain World Trade Center (BWTC) in Manama, Bahrain, is a twin tower complex that is the world's first commercial skyscraper to include large-scale wind turbines into its design to collect wind power. Three large wind turbines measuring 29m (95 ft.) in diameter are supported by bridges connecting the two towers of the mixed-use complex (hotel, retail, and business). When they turn, they will generate 15% of the power required by the building. Each tower is curved, which serves to direct the existing on-shore Mediterranean wind directly onto conspicuous wind turbines, which create power. The tapering of each tower from bottom to top minimizes wind resistance from greater velocity winds at higher elevations, allowing all three turbines to spin at more uniform rates (Irwin, 2013). The structure was finished in 2009 and is the second-highest in Bahrain (Al-Kodmany, 2014).

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this study is that the landmark skyline of Bahrain, least influences the people in terms of personal or regional distinctions, giving mere scope to user iconic perceptions or creating lasting impressions.

3.2.2. Research Approach

According to Allsopp (1974), it is the designer's vital role to mediate between diverse viewpoints and experiences in order to create an environment that is significant for the people who live in it, hence this study will be culmination of theoretical concepts along with practical fieldwork in order to examine the intangible aspects of the user perspective of an spatial experience in terms of the iconism. In order to facilitate this pilot study, 'The world trade Centre', Bahrain has been chosen for the field work that includes, cross-disciplinary data mapping, employing qualitative social science methodologies such as interview formats that are semi-structured and observation.

3.2.3. Qualitative Research

The research study of this paper is based on empirical study, conducting primary research by means of qualitative method, where the user qualities, or aspects of user experience of living among an landmark, on a daily life is identified. "Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions into the social world, including the texture and weave of

everyday life, the understandings, experiences, and imaginings of our research participants, the way that social process, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate.” (Mason, 2002: 1).

3.2.4. Phenomenology

The study imbibes the phenomena of determining the events or experiences in our surroundings, that we are least aware of, due to lack of understating the existence of phenomena.

“Phenomenological inquiry is arguably the most well-known and established strand of the qualitative research utilized in architectural research. It derives from both the phenomenological tradition of German philosophers (e.g. Husserl and Heidegger, among others) and more recent versions of influential phenomenologists in the social sciences. Among these, the sociologist Alfred Schutz, who attempted to develop a ‘phenomenological sociology’ that would serve as a bridge between traditional sociology and Edmund Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology.” (Groat and Wang, 2013: 227)

3.2.5. Primary Research

It is crucial to clarify the very aim of this study, to interpret people perception or experience life among the iconic built forms, does it or not add value to the quality of life, to begin with the primary research of pilot study which involves semi structured interviews , observation, case study as a part of the field work in the context of Bahrain ‘The World Trade center’, one of the globalized landmarks, targeting the immediate population experiencing this icon closely like the staffs working , visitors and the onlookers with varied education and age group , the interview lasted for 10 to 20 minutes each.

3.2.6. Data Analysis

The collected data in terms of semi structured interview, observation and case study of the world trade center, through a generic pilot study that took place in the datum of the world trade center, was transcribed in a methodical pattern assigning themes , hence this opened an new arena as BTWC an established icon depicting the physical appeal of the visual grandeur.

4. Results

The transcribed and themed data was further analyzed using Microsoft Excel to arrive at the findings mentioned below.

Demographic questions:

The participants for the interview consisted of varied age groups (Figure.1).

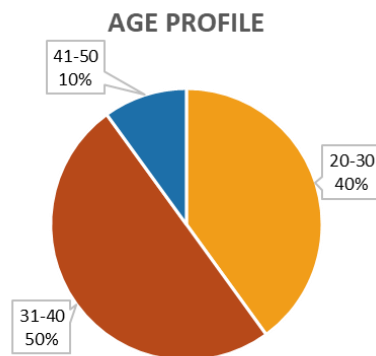


Figure.1: Age of participants

On the whole,50% of the total interviewees were between 31-40 years of age whereas 40 % were above between 20 -30 years while 10 % were 41-50 years of age. About 60% of the interviewees were females while 40 % were males (Figure.2)

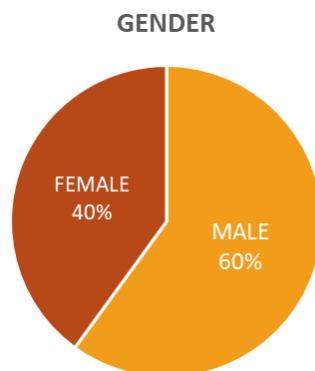


Figure.2: Gender of participants

On an average the nationality of the interview participants, ranged from 34% being Asians, 11% Expat Arabs while 22%w being Bharani’s and 11% westerner(figure.3).

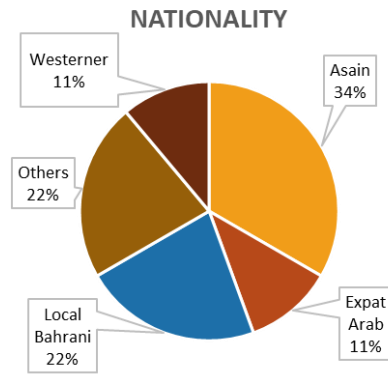


Figure.3 Nationality of the participants

The successive parameter of the Demographic questions were the living status of the interviewees in Bahrain, 11% were nationals while the 78% had the residence permit with 11% were tourist visiting the venue.

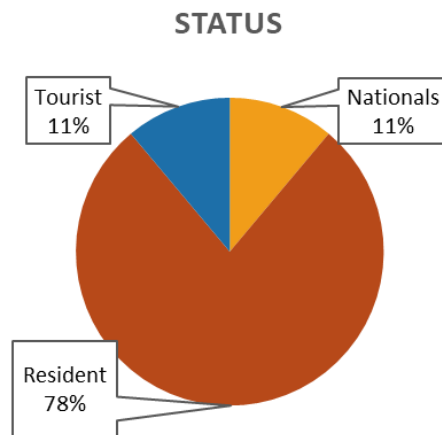


Figure.4 Status of residence in Bahrain

Most of the interviewees have median years of living in the city ranging from 1 to 20 years, (Figure.5) as a reasonable amount of experience, living and working in the city, along with tourists.

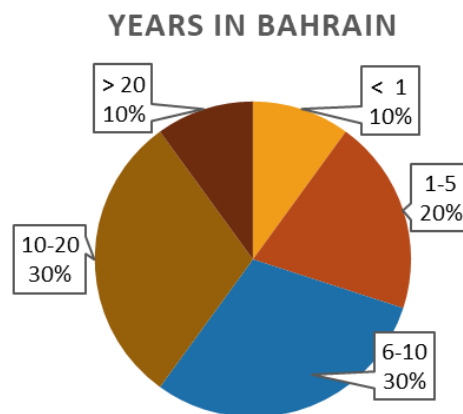


Figure.5 Time span of participants residency in Bahrain

The Education level of the participants ranging between high school and postgraduate level, where 50% of the participants were diploma graduates, with equal percentage of high school diploma and post graduates.

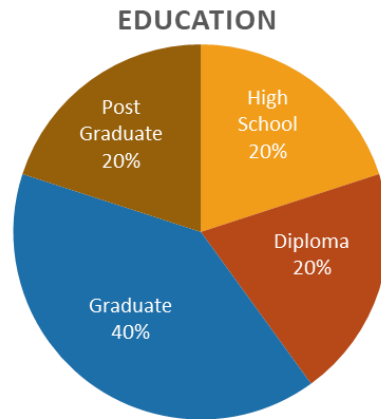


Figure.6 Education level of the participants

The percentage of interviewees, ranged from 30 % employed in BWTC (Bahrain World Trade Centre), while the rest not employed in the premises with few not preferred to mention (Figure.7).

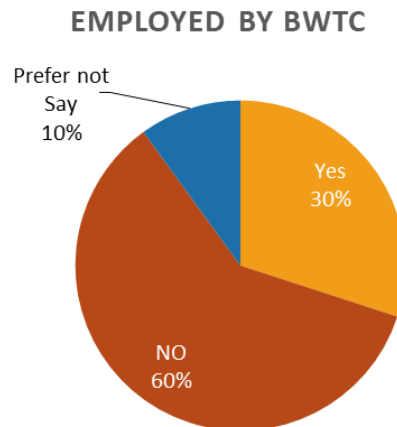


Figure 7 Employed in BWTC

The persisting responses from the participants were further analyzed on the succeeding questions, on the view or their perspective of Bahrain World Trade Centre, as an iconic image, its experience, hence secondary themes were generated from the questions as mentioned below.

The Bahrain World Trade Centre (BWTC) as an iconic image:

When asked about the BWTC as an iconic image, from each one's individual experience, actively being an employee in the premises or passively as a visitor, the view points opened a new phenomenological perspective of how one experiences the place and lives among it. Most of the interviewees opted that the superstructure was 'recognizable' and 'memorable', along with few opting for it as a 'Mass Appeal' contributing to the iconic image of the skyline of Manama, while few mentioned it to be, 'Entertaining, moving and challenging', as mentioned in the word cloud of figure 8 below.

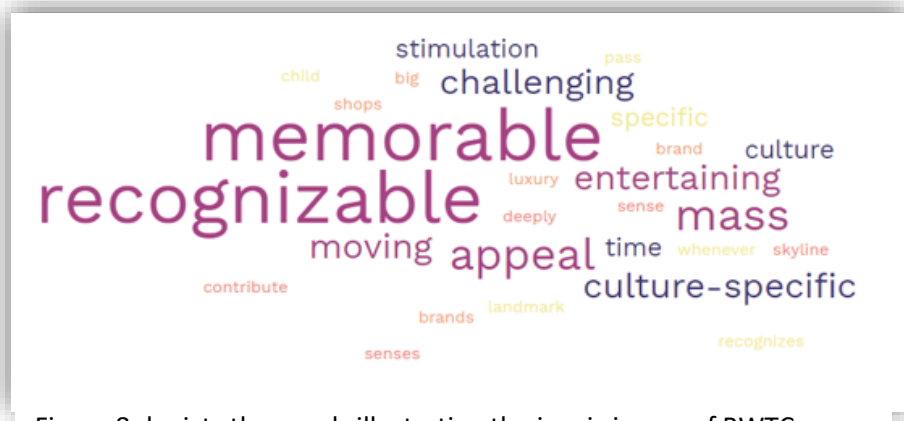


Figure 8 depicts the words illustrating the iconic image of BWTC

The feature of Bahrain world trade Centre (BWTC) that exemplifies iconism:

The second succeeding question hosted was, the most important feature/ features of the BWTC, according to the participant that illustrates a strong sense of iconism, this was again opted for different verbal expressions like the 'wind turbine', 'the building itself', 'location' and 'external design' features followed by few interviewee's opting for 'Mall area' (figure 9).



Figure 9, depicts the phrase about features of iconism

Qualities of the Bahrain world trade center that evokes personal reaction and association with place:

The question posed about the qualities of the BTWC that elicit an emotional reaction and identification with the place, was responded with the highest number of option being its 'Shape' 'Visual presence', followed by 'identifiable' elevates an sense of association, while few respondents, mentioned the building itself 'demanded attention'(figure 10).

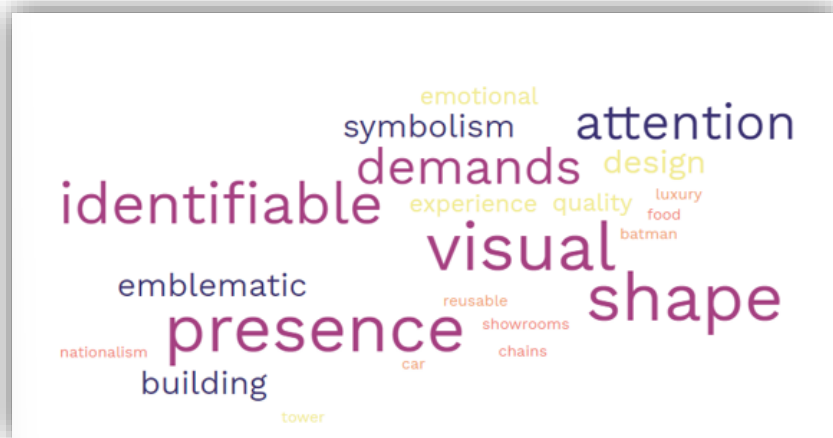


Figure 10 illustrates the phrases, respondents chose to mention the qualities of BWTC

Opinion about following statements :

The figure 11 below depicts the preceding questions, which was asked on a Likert scale of 1 to 3, to which the responses were unique and unexpected, when asked whether the BTWC engages the senses creating a memorable experience, for which about 90% agreed and 10% had a neutral opinion about the same. The BTWC does not create a feeling of sense of identity or belongingness, to which about 40% respondents agree while the 50% disagree, while 10% being neutral opinionated. The BTWC is an true icon and creates a sense of pride, agreed by 80% of the interviewee’s while the 20% had a neutral opinion on the same. The BTWC is an visual icon of Bahrain, to which around 80% agreed, while the 20% said to be having a neutral opinion. The BTWC is an experiential icon of Bahrain, the opinions split between 50% agreed to have experienced it while 20% were neutral with 30% strongly disagreed.

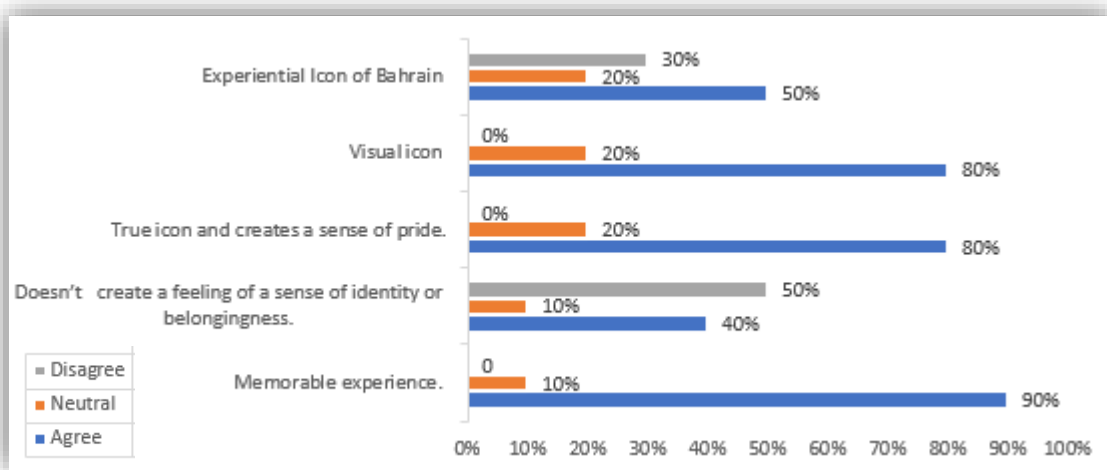


Figure 11 depicts the range of response about the various statements

The characteristics of the BTWC as an visual icon

On asking the characteristics of the BTWC, one feels in terms of it being seen as a visual icon was being responded with various phrases mentioning this emotion with being more 'Recognizable', 'Design' with few others mentioning the term 'experience', 'symbolism', followed by 'technology, glamour and size' contributing to the characteristics (figure 12).



Figure 12 depicts the word cloud to explain the phenomena of visual iconism of BTWC

The characteristics of the BTWC as an experiential icon

The succeeding question about the characteristics of the BTWC, an experience by itself illustrating the experiential icon, most of the participants mentioned the term 'Glamour' to explain this phenomena, while others mentioned it in terms of 'design, size', few also termed it as an 'experience' by itself, followed by others mentioned the 'technology', 'identity' and so on (figure 13).



Figure 13 illustrates the word cloud to explain the phenomena of experiential iconism of BTWC

The statement on the symbols and their purpose in the landmark project BTWC

The participants were asked in the final conversation about their perspective based on their experience of the BTWC, how would they want to define various qualities of symbolism and their purpose in contributing to the skyline of Bahrain, on an Likert scale of 1 to 3, as used to access the participant's answers (Figure 14).

The BTWC is a symbol of business hub, to which about 90% agreed, while only 10% were neutral about their answer which represents that this super structure, strongly imbibed a senses of business hub rather than a place for casual socializing.

The BTWC is an symbol that is relevant to culture of Bahrain, about 40% strongly agreed while remaining 40% were neutral with their opinion, mention it could partly be aligning with the culture, other 20% of the participants strongly disagreed its relevancy to the rich culture of the place.

The BTWC is enhances the urban fabric of Manama, and makes it more recognizable, to which about 80% agreed mentioning a sense of identity to this superstructure, while about 20 % had an neutral opinion, according to their experience of the place where they lived for sensible among of years and being a part of the progressive city.

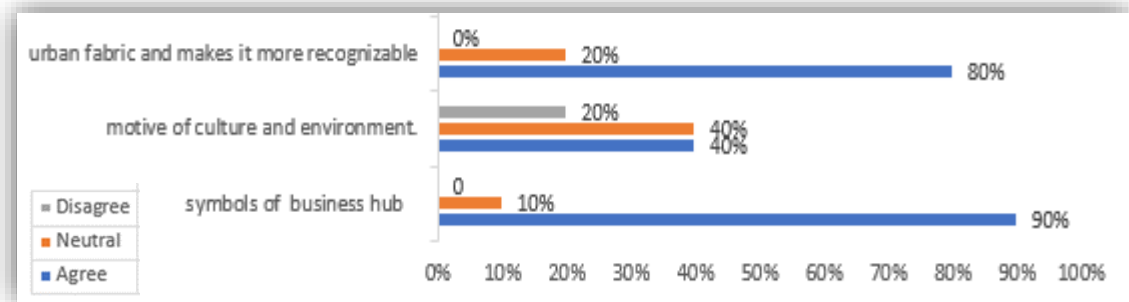


Figure 14 depicts the qualities of the symbolism of the superstructure

5. Discussions:

Since time immemorial, superstructures or towers have been constructed and built in practically every civilization. Man has always sought height, and it was once associated with spirituality. Power, status, riches, and dominance are factors that have led Mankind to build towers (Heinle & Leonhardt, 1989). The desire to project authority and grandeur led to the construction of several towers on town halls, religious structures, and palaces, however Moughtin(1999) mentions that these vertical skylines could imbibe a positive aura created as a three-dimensional mass, the 'figure' in the composition, while the area in which they stand is the 'ground'. The alternative is for space to be the "figure" and the structures or towers to be the "ground". The phenomenological experience of these icons from the people perspective entrails through an culturally, socially and in terms of the local context itself. The results of the interview were astonishing, how the people viewed and experienced living or working , and even experiencing the transition of Manama skyline into an rich urban fabric due to the iconic structure like World Trade Center. Below are few of the mentions by various participants during the interview, about their viewpoint of this iconic emblem.

- “Fun, Studying here, I am from Kuwait, I visit regularly as it is quiet place , good ambience”.
- “Good Experience, working in World Trade Center, and this give me a stratification working in iconic place”.
- “I work here, this is not my type of a mall as it expensive , Holiday’s it is crowded”.
- “I was born brought up here, was in Manama, then moved to isa town, Happy to see the change in Manama skyline, embrace the development but is very important to carry forward the culture and tradition while walking towards modernity”.
- “ My visit to Germany, people connected asking you belong to Bahrain, where they recognize the World Trade Center (wind turbine) and Bahrain International Circuit”.
- “My ancestor home still in center of Manama, we visit during special occasion, we love seeing the growth of Manama and Bahrain” .
- “As an on looker or a passerby in Manama, the World Trade Center demonstrates an strong sense of authority”.
- “Parking is an issue here during working days , specially afternoons”.
- “The two towers give out a strong sense of power”.
- “In my opinion, the management has to allow , visitors to the top of the building to actually experience it”.
- “The extended mall of the BTWC, has amazing shopping experience with international brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Aston Martin”.
- “Whenever we pass by the world trade center in Manama, my 5 year old daughter points out the resemblance of the building to Batman’s ears”.
- “It is an recognizable building in Manama Skyline, the wind turbine is the most attractive part of the building”.

6. Conclusions

Despite the fact that paper focuses on the Bahrain world trade center as an icon of the Manama skyline, and its perspective of people living among and their experience of the 'iconic' feeling and its correlation with the challenge of belonging and iconography, the above results from the interviews and observation reveals that this symbolic landmark impacts the city in tangible way, well demonstrated by its stature, but also in an intangible way, varied for different people based on his/her time span living among them or as a visitor or even as an onlooker, this iconic symbol, reviving the skyline of Manama, even though it has been fragmented rich traditional Manama on one hand and an contemporary urban façade on the other, yet there is an culmination of different viewpoint of this phenomena, from welcoming the

transition of its contribution in terms of urban scenario, while the notion of the intangible influence on people's mind transitioning them into an realm of nature of their surroundings and its lasting impression on one's mind, creating a sense of realm and identity living among them or getting in close proximity on a daily basis, affecting the quality of life to an extent, however there is an mere scope for delving deep into this aspect to create awareness among the population to have connectedness to the surroundings, also to the urban planners to imbibe piousness in their approach to create a peaceful blend of icons, with local context and culture, along with creating an inherent bridge reflecting the immaterialist harmony to the dwellers, organically integrate with the others, resulting in a peaceful and harmonious coexistence where one benefits from the other.

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