

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT: The trend of tourist visits in Indonesia after Covid-19 has increased more than the period before Covid-19, despite being under intense competitive pressure. This competitive pressure drives the trend of city branding integrating with digital-based marketing communications to increase city attractiveness. This study is to explore how social media promotion and electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) play a mediating role in city branding on tourists' decisions to visit and city image. This investigation was carried out with a quantitative methodology. Data was gathered via an online survey intended for Solo visitors. Purposive sampling was used to select 100 respondents to participate in this study. Data were analyzed using Smart PLS 4.0. The results showed that city branding directly affects city image and visiting decisions, but city image has an insignificant influence on visiting decisions. Visitor decisions and city branding can be influenced indirectly by social media promotion and e-wom. E-wom's indirect effect can mediate the impact of a city's image on visit decisions. The research findings that city branding - social media promotion - city image - e-wom - visiting decisions are in one indirect effect path.

KEYWORDS: City branding, city image, visit decision, social media marketing communication

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the tourism industry in Indonesia is steadily growing in tandem with the downward trend of COVID-19 transmission. The fact that domestic tourist travel increased by 19.82% over the previous year is evidence of this. The number of tourist journeys to Nusantara was 734.86 million in 2022. Travel to Nusantara increased by 1.76 percent in 2019 compared to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic period. In general, the flow of tourists to Java continues to dominate Indonesia's domestic tourism industry. 76.54 percent of domestic tourist journeys start in Java, which is evidence of this. Similarly, Java is the most popular tourist destination, accounting for up to 75.49 percent of all tourist excursions to the archipelago. When compared to the pre-COVID-19 era, the number of domestic tourist trips has positively increased nationwide. Solo City, Central Java, Indonesia, is one of the few areas in Indonesia where domestic tourism has begun to rebound. The number of tourists after COVID-19 has increased significantly as presented in the graph in Figure 1 below.

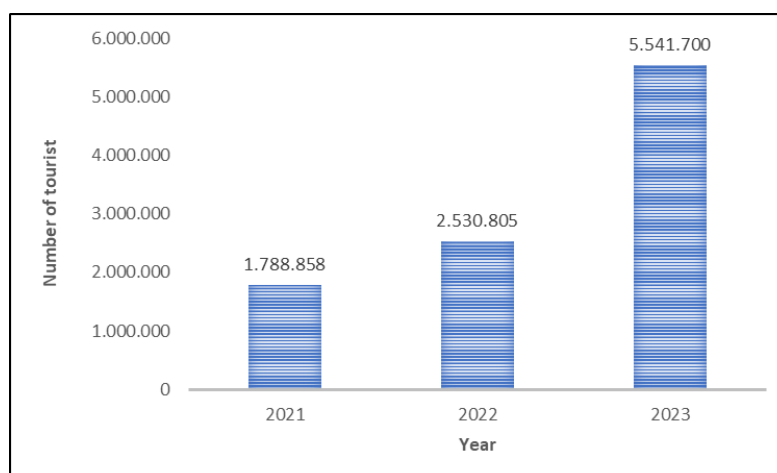


Figure 1. Growth in the number of Solo city tourists post Covid-19 in 2021-2023

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

The tourist visit in Surakarta City in 2023 increased 118 percent compared to 2022. In 2023, domestic tourists dominate compared to foreign tourists by 99.6 percent (source: Surakarta City Tourism Office data in 2023). The phenomenon of increasing tourist visits after Covid-19 in Surakarta is closely related to the city branding of Surakarta. City branding is built based on the potential of the region. With the tagline "Solo the Spirit of Java" and the mascot "Rajamala," Surakarta City is among the cities that already have a well-established city brand. The branding formed by Surakarta City Government will be a strategic aspect of Surakarta City in attracting tourists, entrepreneurs, and investors.

The process of branding involves attempting to shape consumers' perceptions of a brand and helping them form their own opinions about it ((Chandler & Owen, 2002), (Mihalīs Kavaratīs & Ashworth, 2005)). City branding as a means of attaining competitive advantage to boost tourism and investment, foster community growth, and fortify local identity and community affiliation with the city. Similar to how a product or service is positioned in its target market, city branding is a method used by a nation or city to have a strong online presence and become internationally recognized (Gustiawan, 2011). (Gómez et al., 2018) used a measurement approach to correlate brand equity with its causes and effects as they examined the use of city branding in five capital cities across Europe. Based on the findings, city management organizations and industry businesses can assess each city's competitive standing in relation to its rivals and develop strategies tailored to each European capital. In other words, city branding can help a city obtain a competitive edge.

According to (Kotler et al., 2014), brand image is the evaluation that consumers give to brands within a market. Consistent communication strategies can yield a variety of subjective outcomes, which can make measuring brand image difficult because it is dependent on consumer perceptions (Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020). The foundation for measuring can come from one's own experiences, media, or other sources. A person's thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and impressions regarding the amenities and activities available in a location are collectively referred to as their "city image" (Kamble & Bouchon, 2014). A city image conveys all of the factual objectives, numerical priorities, fantasies, and emotional feelings that a person or group has for a certain city. To create a perception of a city, one can assess or comprehend its features (Shabnam et al., 2016). The slogan 'Solo the Spirit of Java' is a component of the city branding. It conveys to tourists the idea that Solo is the heart of Java and is a culturally rich city with a wealth of tourism, culture, tradition, historical sites, culinary circles, and the friendliness of its people.

Various empirical studies have been conducted regarding the correlation between city branding, city image, and visit decisions; nevertheless, the findings of these studies vary. The empirical research gaps on city branding and its influence on city image and visit decisions can be presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Research Gaps

Empirical research	Authors	Result
City Branding → Visit decision	(Fatmawati & Maharani, 2023); (Alvianna et al., 2022); (Jannah, 2014); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017); (Sudarmiatin et al., 2019)	Visitor decisions are positively impacted by city branding.
	(Amrullah et al., 2022); (Putra et al., 2019)	Visitation decisions are not significantly impacted by city branding.
City Image → Visit decision	(Putra et al., 2019); (Qu et al., 2011)	Visitor decisions are positively impacted by a city's image.
	(Alvianna et al., 2022); (Amrullah et al., 2022); (Jannah, 2014); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017)	Visitor decisions are not much influenced by a city's image.
City Branding → City Image	(Putra et al., 2019); (Jannah, 2014); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017)	City image is positively impacted by city branding.
	(Fatmawati & Maharani, 2023)	City Branding has an insignificant effect on city image

The Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory (S-O-R) explains the gap in empirical data about the relationship between city branding, city image, and visiting decisions. The principle of this theory is a response which is a back reaction from individuals when receiving stimuli from the media. This theory is a basic development of the Stimulus - Response (S-R) model with the basic assumption that mass media has a directed, immediate and direct effect on communicators. This model shows that communication is a process of action and reaction.

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

The creation of awareness regarding all interactions with the city occurs through perception and image. Planning and marketing are necessary to establish the city's image (Vermeulen, 2002). City branding revolves around this relationship between the "external" and "internal" of the city, as stated by (Graham, 2002). Every aspect of a city, including its physical features and actions, conveys information about the city's reputation. The key distinction between marketing actions and branding decisions is that every intervention or action area in the framework, when applied to city branding, has both symbolic and functional meaning. Primary, secondary, and tertiary communication are the three channels through which images are conveyed (Kavaratzis, 2004). Primary communication relates to the potential influence of a city's actions but has an unintended communication effect. Secondary communication is formal, planned communication through various media, while tertiary communication is the uncontrolled exchange of messages such as media reports and word of mouth.

In tourism, social media plays a role in establishing a city's tourism brand by promoting the city as a tourist destination ((Sheng-yu & Jung-ping, 2013), (Zhou & Wang, 2014)). Social media plays a role in creating destination image and visiting decisions. (Singh, 2010) stated that social media does contain material that is mutually created and consumed by people. Social media is good for building potential relationships, growing communities, serving audiences, helping people find businesses and many other things. Relationships between people on social media create an impression or image of a place. If the image is good, it will have an impact on the decision to visit.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence of the role of communication marketing through social media promotion and electronic of mouth in mediating city branding, city image and tourist visit decisions.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 City Branding

A brand, logo, identity, or symbol associated with a city is known as city branding. By making these products, a city or region can establish a strong brand. An approach or plan used by a city to present, advertise, or market itself to the outside world is known as "city branding." Utilizing city branding can help communities thrive by giving businesses a competitive edge and attracting more tourism-related investment. According to (Anholt, 2006), city branding is an effort by the city government to create or create its own identity for its territory, where the identity owned by a city is used to promote the city to the public or the general public.

In general, city branding focuses on image management—that is, on the specifics of how and what the image will be generated, as well as the communication factors involved in the process. According to Anholt, city branding involves strategically innovating and coordinating economic, commercial, socio-cultural, and governmental rules to control the image of a place. Simon Anholt developed the City Branding Hexagon idea (Anholt, 2006) with the intention of gauging the success of city branding. The following six factors are used to gauge a city's level of effectiveness: presence, potential, place, pulse, people, and prerequisite. City Branding Hexagon can provide innovative results that make it easier for the government to know the perception of the city image.

The goal of a city branding strategy is to convey a city's symbolic and all-encompassing image both domestically and globally (Acuti et al., 2018). Every city branding plan aims to restore the city's reputation. According to earlier studies, city branding has a major impact on brand image ((Putra et al., 2019); (Jannah, 2014)). It's common to refer to destination branding as a place's brand. Marketing initiatives aimed at presenting a favorable picture of a tourist site to persuade consumers to visit it are known as regional brands (Blain et al., 2005). City branding has a positive effect on visit decisions ((Fatmawati & Maharani, 2023), (Jannah, 2014), (Alvianna et al., 2022), (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017), (Sudarmiatin et al., 2019)). The following is a possible formulation of the hypothesis:

H1: City Branding has a positive effect on visit decisions;

H2: City Branding has a positive effect on city image.

2.2 City Image

City Image is the mental image of a city as seen by its people (Zahnd, 1999: 156). City image gives a distinctive physical impression to a city. In the development of a city, city image acts as a shaper of the city's identity, and as an enhancer of the city's attractiveness. Therefore, a clear and strong city image will strengthen the identity and face of the city, making the city attractive and appealing. The image and identity of the area seems to have become a benchmark for the quality of a neighborhood, especially regarding how people perceive the value of the neighborhood. The theory of city image proposed by (Lynch) in his book "The Image of The City" is based on the mental image of city dwellers. Mental image is considered an important thing to provide clarity of identity so as to provide easy and precise orientation to a place with a feeling of comfort. According to Lynch, the image or image of the environment is a two-way process between the observer and the object being observed, or also known as the impression or perception between the observer and the environment. The observer's impression of his environment depends on the observer's adaptability in selecting, organizing so that the environment he observes will

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

provide differences and connections. Perception can be interpreted as an observation made directly associated with a meaning. Everyone's perception is different, this is influenced by the level of education, experience, angle of observation, and others.

The way a city is seen by its citizens affects its policies, practices, and decision-making procedures (Wäckerlin et al., 2020). Prior studies (Kusumawati et al., 2022) demonstrate that brand perception influences travel decisions favorably. Studies by (Putra et al., 2019) and (Qu et al., 2011) also discovered comparable findings on the impact of a city's image on visit decision. Consequently, the following is the third hypothesis that can be put forth:

H3: City Image has a positive effect on visit decisions.

2.3 Visit Decision

Interest in visiting arises from within a person in the form of feelings that encourage a person to visit a location that is felt to affect attention. A person's visiting interest is based on what is stated (Kotler et al., 2014) in Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism which says that visiting interest is reflected through tourist behavior, when making a decision to visit a tourist attraction. Tourist interest arises from stimulant messages that the public sees in the media.

2.4 Marketing Communications

Kavaratzis (2004) asserts that city branding is a suitable term for describing and executing city marketing. Since perception and image play a major role in city recognition, building, communicating, and maintaining the city's image is crucial to the execution of city marketing. Consequently, the goal of city marketing is to enhance the city's image, which serves as the foundation for creating a city brand.

According to (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009), there are three main concepts related to city brands: identity, communication, and image. Marketing communication strategy is an important concept to bridge image formation and tourist visit decisions. According to (Kavaratzis, 2004), the framework describes the communication strategy of a city. Communication consists of primary, secondary and tertiary communication. Primary communication relates to the potential influence of a city's actions but has unintended communication effects. Secondary communication is formalized and conducted in a planned manner through various media. An effective medium in terms of message delivery at the moment is social media. Tertiary communication is an uncontrolled exchange of messages such as media reports and word of mouth.

Digital marketing has unique steps in marketing products. The company's efforts to do digital marketing need to pay attention to the marketing strategy framework as a foundation for formulating actions. The AIDA model is one of the pillars of digital marketing (attention, interest, desire, action). Businesses can utilize the AIDA model to develop marketing strategies depending on how customers respond to these strategies. According to (Kotler & Keller, 2016), there are four basic approaches to digital marketing. *First*, online marketing, in which businesses use paid or unpaid online media to spread the information they wish to spread. Websites, electronic messaging, search and display ads, and display adverts can all be used for online marketing. *Second*, social media, where businesses may participate in customer interactions and use that platform to express their public voice. Three broad categories can be used to group social media: blogs, social networks, and online communities and forums. *Third*, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), in which customer contacts are either spontaneous or started by the business. Using this approach necessitates that businesses manage customer interactions. Fourth, mobile marketing, which makes use of smart gadgets that regular consumers carry around and can access.

Social media is an appropriate tactic to promote cities due to the participatory, interactive, open and transparent nature of social media (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Empirical research shows that social media promotion affects visitation decisions ((Tarigan & Tinambunan, 2022), (Fitriana et al., 2023)).

WOM quality measures how well-informed comments are able to persuade readers. Stated differently, e-WOM quality comprises telling friends nice things and suggesting activities to others. The amount of comments uploaded is known as the quantity of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Referrals are what customers need to bolster their confidence, and the volume of internet reviews indicates how well-liked the product is. On the other hand, sender competence refers to the sender's capacity to provide product reviews whose content is embraced by other customers. Put another way, offering wise counsel to others is a part of sender expertise. (Themba & Mulala, 2013) and (Chen et al., 2014) demonstrate how e-WOM is impacted by place branding. According to (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017), e-WOM is significantly improved by destination branding. Prior studies (Sudarmiatin et al., 2019) demonstrate that: (1) e-WOM is significantly positively impacted by rural tourism site branding; and (2) e-WOM significantly influences travel decisions. Theory and empirical study support the following hypothesis, which can be put forth:

H4: City Branding affects social media promotion;

H5: City Branding affects e-WOM;

H6: Social media promotion influences city image;

H7: Social media promotion has an effect on e-WOM;

H8: Social media promotion affects visit decisions;

H9: City Image influences e-WOM;

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

H10: E-WOM has an effect on visit decisions.

2.5 Conceptual framework

The S-O-R theory (Stimulus, Organism, Response) explains marketing communication fulfills the gap between city branding to city image and city image to tourist visit decisions. The S-O-R theory is a specific reaction to a specific stimulus so that people can expect and predict the suitability between communication messages and reactions. Behavior change depends on the process that occurs in the individual itself. The stimulus or message conveyed to the communicant may be accepted or rejected. Communication will take place if there is attention from the communicant. And the next process is that the communicant processes and accepts it. Changes that occur in individuals, are very dependent on the processes that occur in the individual himself. The stimulus or message conveyed to the communicant may be accepted or rejected. There are three individual changes including cognitive changes, affective changes, behavioral changes. Digital marketing communication used as a mediator of the research gap between city branding and city image is social media promotion. Meanwhile, digital marketing communication used as a mediator of the research gap between city image and visiting decisions is electronic word of mouth (E-WOM). The conceptual relationship can be depicted in Figure 2 below.

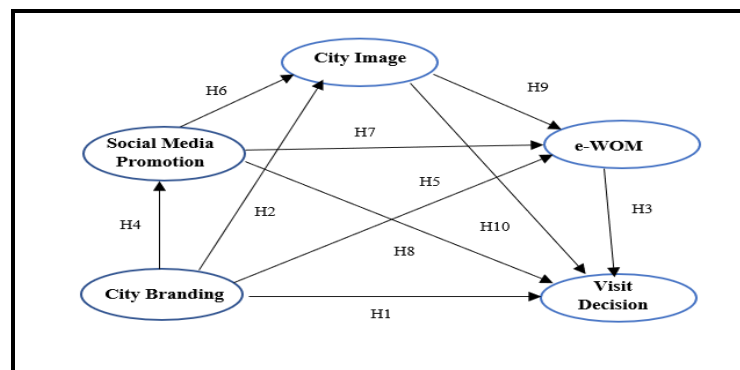


Figure 2. Empirical research model

3.0 METHODS

An explanatory research design in conjunction with a quantitative approach was used to perform this study. Visitors visiting Solo, Indonesia's Central Java were given online surveys to fill in. Purposive sampling was the technique utilized for sampling, and the population of this study consisted of all tourists who had visited Solo. Participants in this research must be tourists who will visit Solo in 2023, be at least 18 years old, and be aware of the city's branding. Visitors who met at key tourist locations in the Solo area were given connections to Google, which was used to collect data. One hundred participants in all responded to the study and answered the given questions. The questionnaire was created based on several previous research findings. The measurement of city branding adopts the city branding hexagon (Anholt, 2006) with indicators of presence, potential, place, pulse, people, and prerequisite. City image, visiting decisions, social media promotion and e-wom are adapted from (Chen et al., 2014); (Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017); and (Shabnam et al., 2016). Before the final data analysis in this study, an instrument test was performed to ensure the validity, reliability, and normality of the data. Using Smart PLS 4.0, data were examined in relation to the procedures created by (Hair et al., 2019) to evaluate the proposed hypotheses.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One hundred respondents in all whose comments could be further analyzed were evaluated in this study. The profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 2 below, which includes information on age, gender, most recent education, and number of visits. The results show that most visitor respondents are between 18-29 years old (37%), female visitors (65%), number of visits more than 4 times (67%), and come from Central Java (37%).

Table 2. Respondent profile

	Characteristic	%
Age	18-29 years old	37
	30-39 years old	34
	40-49 years old	18
	> 50 years old	11
Gender	Female	65
	Male	35
Number of visits	1 time	13

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

	2-3 times	20
	≥ 4 times	67
Regional origin	Jakarta	21
	Jawa Barat	12
	Jawa Tengah	37
	Jawa Timur	11
	Sumatra	5
	Kalimantan	4
	Sulawesi	3
	Others	7

Source: analysis result, 2024

4.1 Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The variables of city branding, city image, social media promotion, e-WOM, and visit decisions are measured reflectively in the study's reflective measurement model. The loading factor of greater than 0.70, composite reliability of greater than 0.70, Cronbach's alpha of greater than 0.70, and Average Variance extracted (AVE) of greater than 0.50 are the criteria used in (Hair et al., 2019) evaluation of the reflective measurement model. The assessment of discriminant validity includes the Fornell and Lacker criteria as well as an HTMT (Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio) below 0.90. According to (Hair et al., 2019), the loading factor value more than 0.7 is used as an indicator for reliability testing, and the construct reliability (CR) value greater than 0.7 is used as an indicator for validity testing (Confirmatory Factor Analysis test). The items are valid and reliable, according to the results displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Outer Loading, Composite Reliability dan Average Variance Extract

Variables	Measurement items	Outer loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
City Branding	CB1	0.879	0.892	0.921	0.70
	CB2	0.809			
	CB3	0.815			
	CB4	0.825			
	CB5	0.853			
City Image	CI1	0.842	0.927	0.943	0.734
	CI2	0.861			
	CI3	0.914			
	CI4	0.873			
	CI5	0.825			
	CI6	0.823			
Social Media Promotion	PM1	0.881	0.940	0.953	0.772
	PM2	0.910			
	PM3	0.921			
	PM4	0.928			
	PM5	0.764			
	PM6	0.856			
e-WOM	WOM1	0.857	0.916	0.941	0.801
	WOM2	0.939			
	WOM3	0.940			
	WOM5	0.839			
Visit decision	KK1	0.807	0.934	0.947	0.719
	KK2	0.806			
	KK3	0.755			
	KK4	0.793			
	KK5	0.870			
	KK6	0.928			
	KK7	0.903			

Source: data processed with Smart PLS 4, 2024

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

4.2 Evaluation of Goodness of Fit Model

In order to ascertain whether the suggested research model could be used for hypothesis testing, the model was transformed into structural equations and its goodness of fit was evaluated. The findings are shown in Figure 3 below:

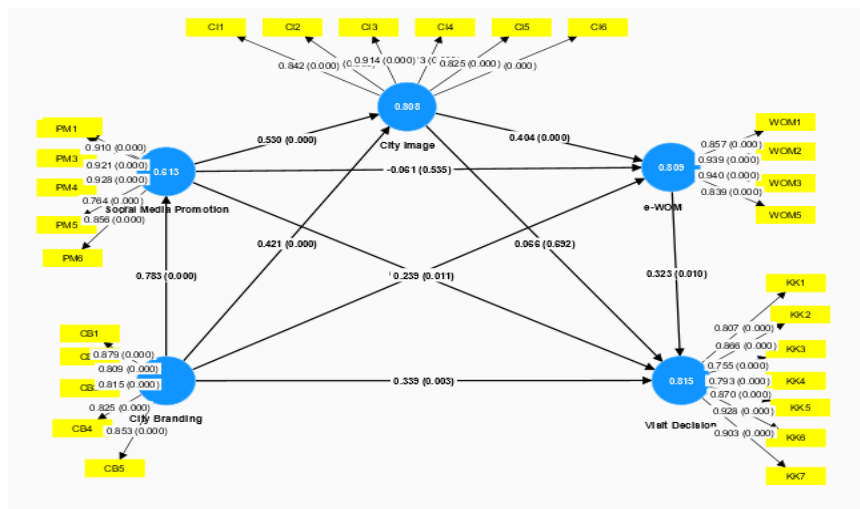


Figure 3. Model testing results

Measures to declare the proposed model acceptable include R square, Q square, SRMR (Hair et al., 2019). Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is a measure of model fit. In (Sarstedt et al., 2021) the SRMR value of 0.058 is below 0.08, indicating a model fit. R square greater than 0.66 (Chin, 1998) indicates high influence. The results of goodness of fit testing can be presented in table 4 below:

Table 4. Goodness of Fit Test

Goodness of fit Index	Cut off value	Result	Evaluation
R square:			
Social Media Promotion	> 0.66	0.613	moderate influence
City Image		0.808	high influence
e-WOM		0.809	high influence
Visit Decision		0.815	high influence
			(Chin, 1998)
SRMR	< 0.08	0,058	Fit
NFI	> 0.90	0.757	Marginal
GoF Index	< 0.36	0.753	Fit
			(Henseler et al., 2015)

4.3 Hypothesis testing results

To analyze data and verify the relationships in the proposed model, the proposed hypotheses were put to the test. The coefficient of effect between variables is indicated by the regression values, as Table 5 below illustrates.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Direct Effect		B	C.R	Results	
H1	City Branding	→	City Image	0.421***	4.520	proved
H2	City Branding	→	Visit Decision	0.339***	2.985	proved
H3	City Image	→	Visit Decision	0.066	0.396	Not proven
H4	City Branding	→	Social Media Promotion	0.783***	17.821	proved
H5	City Branding	→	e-WOM	0.587***	6.953	proved
H6	Social Media Promotion	→	City Image	0.530***	5.542	proved
H7	Social Media Promotion	→	e-WOM	-0.061	0.620	Not proven
H8	Social Media Promotion	→	Visit Decision	0.239***	2.554	proved
H9	City Image	→	e-WOM	0.404***	3.517	proved
H10	e-WOM	→	Visit Decision	0.323***	2.586	proved

Note: ***p-value < 0.001

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

City branding has a significant positive effect on city image and visit decisions (hypotheses 1 and 2 are proven). Solo city branding is able to form a city image for tourists. The results of this study are in line with the results of research (Putra et al., 2019); (Jannah, 2014); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017). Solo city branding as a cultural city with the slogan "Solo the spirit of Java" means that Solo is the soul of Java, giving tourists the perception that Surakarta City is a cultural city with various wealth it has, tourism; culture; tradition; historical sites; culinary; and the hospitality of its citizens. City branding formed with the city branding hexagon approach includes (1) presence, status as a cultural city; (2) place, measuring how the perception of the physical aspects of each city about the arrangement, comfort, tourist attractions; (3) potential, ease of access; (4) pulse, the public can easily find interesting things as a visitor such as cultural events; (5) people, friendliness of citizens; (6) prerequisite, describing public perceptions of the basic quality of the city provides satisfaction with the accommodation provided, as well as easy access to fulfill needs. City branding of Solo has succeeded in influencing tourists to visit. This is in line with the results of research (Fatmawati & Maharani, 2023); (Jannah, 2014); (Alvianna et al., 2022); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017); (Sudarmiatin et al., 2019) that city branding has a positive effect on visit decisions. Tourists visit Solo not only once but 67 percent of respondents have visited Solo more than four times. Respondents explained their return visit to Solo, among others, the existence of a cultural title agenda every year, the number of tourist destinations (palace, mosque, safari park), the culinary legend of Solo, and easy access.

City image has an insignificant effect on the decision to visit (hypothesis 3) is not proven). A good city image in the minds of tourists will not necessarily determine the decision to visit. The results of this study are not in line with research (Putra et al., 2019) and (Qu et al., 2011), but in-line with research (Alvianna et al., 2022); (Amrullah et al., 2022); (Purwanto & Soliha, 2017) city image has an insignificant effect on visiting decisions.

City branding has a positive and significant effect on social media promotion and e-Wom (H4 and H5 are proven). The utilization of social media in conducting city branding activities, especially to increase tourism, has been applied in various regions. The use of social media as one of the digital technologies in the tourism industry is fully supported by the government through the tourism theme built by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, namely Wonderful Indonesia Digital Tourism (WIDT) 4.0 Resources to Win the Global Competition in the Industry 4.0 Era. Solo City utilizes social media in conducting tourism city branding. According to Kimmert and Kitchen (2014: 2) e-WOM is the process of exchanging information through various online media. Online media is a place where people interact, participate, share and build networks. Good city branding on social media will have an impact on the positive image of city branding through e-wom.

Social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on city image (H6 proven). Social media promotion becomes brand positioning which is the process of positioning the city brand in the minds of tourists. The more intensive social media promotion will build a city image in the minds of tourists. Meanwhile, promotion through social media has an insignificant effect on e-WOM (H7 is not proven).

Promotion through social media has a positive effect on visiting decisions (hypothesis 8 proven). These results are supported by research (Hidayat & La Are, 2018) that social media promotion has a positive effect on visiting decisions. City Image has a positive and significant effect on e-WOM (hypothesis 9 proven) E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions (hypothesis 10 proven). The results of this study are in line with (Muslim et al., 2021) that electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on visiting decisions for tourist destinations in Banyuwangi. Electronic word of mouth (e-wom) as a process of exchanging information between potential consumers, actual consumers, or former consumers dynamically and continuously about a service, product, brand, or company via the internet which allows it to be accessed by many people and institutions. E-WOM is an online marketing communication using internet social media. Electronic word of mouth is the delivery of information about a product or service that is disseminated via the internet on various platforms by potential or former consumers. E-WOM refers to statements about positive or negative experiences from former customers on internet media through websites, social networks, instant messages, blogs and others (Canhoto & Kietzmann, 2013). eWOM is a service promotion tool aimed at influencing someone's decision to visit. The results of the study (Yudhistira, 2018) show that eWOM on Instagram social media and the decision to visit have a strong relationship. This research is supported by other researchers (Susilawati, 2017) who state that eWOM positively and significantly influences visitors' decisions to visit Sindu Kusuma Park. According to the results of research (Yuliyani & Suharto, 2021) explaining that electronic word of mouth will influence tourists' decisions to visit, recommendations from other people have a big influence on the decision to visit a tourist destination.

4.4 Marketing Communication through social media promotion and e-Wom mediate city branding, city image, and visit decisions

Marketing communication through social media promotion and e-wom as mediation of the research gap between city branding, city image and visiting decisions resulted in several indirect pathways. Table 6 shows alternative indirect paths that can be analyzed which paths effectively mediate the research gap. Table 6 shows the indirect path results to prove whether social media promotion and e-wom are able to mediate the research gaps raised in this study.

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

Through social media promotion and e-wom, the research gap between the impact of city branding on visit decisions is mediated. With an indirect effect path coefficient of 0.187 significant at 1% alpha, social media promotion acts as a mediator between the impact of city branding and visit decisions. The findings of this study are supported by research (Zhou & Wang, 2014) which states that social media is a new vehicle for marketing cities. Various levels of Chinese government have begun to integrate various marketing tactics to promote cities in China. This paper shows that using social media is an appropriate tactic to promote cities due to the participatory, interactive, open, and transparent nature of social media. e-wom mediates the effect of city branding on visit decisions with an indirect effect path coefficient of 0.190 significant at 5% alpha. These findings are consistent with a study (Dakwah et al., 2022) showing that eWOM-transmitted place branding and destination attractiveness can accelerate travelers' decisions to visit. A different study (Sudarmiatin et al., 2019) showed that e-WOM enhances the impact of tourist village's place branding on decisions to visit.

Table 6. Indirect Effect

<i>Indirect Effect (I.E)</i>	<i>I.E coeff</i>	<i>C.R</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
City branding → City Image → Visit decision	0.028	0.363	-
City branding → Social Media Promotion → e-WOM	-0.048	0.619	-
Social Media Promotion → e-WOM → visit decision	-0.020	0.584	-
City branding → City Image → e-WOM	0.170***	2.488	significant
Social Media Promotion → City Image → visit decision	0.035	0.397	-
Social Media Promotion → City Image → e-WOM	0.214***	3.313	significant
City branding → Social Media Promotion → City Image → e-WOM	0.168***	3.229	significant
City branding → Social Media Promotion → City Image → visit decision	0.027	0.397	-
City branding → Social Media Promotion → e-WOM → visit decision	-0.015	0.582	-
City branding → Social Media Promotion → City Image → e-WOM → visit decision	0.054**	2.026	significant
City branding → City Image → e-WOM → visit decision	0.055*	1.730	significant
Social Media Promotion → City Image → e-WOM → visit decision	0.069**	2.051	significant
City branding → Social Media Promotion → City Image	0.415***	5.240	significant
City branding → e-WOM → visit decision'	0.190**	2.429	significant
City branding → Social Media Promotion → visit decision	0.187***	2.530	significant
City Image → e-WOM → visit decision	0.131**	2.068	significant

Note: ****p*-value < 0.001; **< 0.05; * < 0.10

Social media promotion is able to mediate the research gap between city branding and city image with an indirect effect path coefficient of 0.415 significant at 1% alpha. Social media promotion has a very high impact in positioning city branding in the minds of tourists and affecting city image. These results are in line (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009) with three main concepts related to city branding, namely 1) *identity*, three important components related to building city identity are strategy, substance and symbolic. The strategy component is knowing what and where a place or city is perceived by stakeholders. Substance relates to the execution of primary communication strategies related to the potential influence of actions taken by a city that have unintended communication effects. The symbolic component is the substance that has the power of communication that has prominent properties. memorable, beautiful and has a dramatic unit, 2) *image*, image is related to all the associations that arise in a person's mind towards a chosen object in the form of activities, innovations, regulations/policies, reforms. The image of a city can appear in the minds of the community therefore in order to reach the community it needs to be communicated, 3) communication is a strategy to communicate a city. Communication carried out in city branding will seek to build the image and image of a city. Social media has a strategic role in communicating city branding so that it will build a city image.

The research gap between city image and visit decision is mediated by e-wom. e-wom mediates the effect of city image on visit decision with an indirect effect path coefficient of 0.131 significant at α 5%. With the use of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, customers can get information about products or services from a large and geographically distributed community (Dellarocas, 2003). The most popular eWOM forms that enable users to read and contribute to the opinions and experiences of other users are web-based consumer opinion platforms (online communities, review sites) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Travelers' sentiments for visiting a specific area are significantly influenced by information from eWOM marketing, according to (Jalilvand et al., 2013). According to (Govers et al., 2007), information published about a location on social media websites, or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), has an impact on the destination's overall perception of itself.

The finding of this study is that the indirect effect path between city branding - social media promotion - city image - e-wom - visit decision in one path has a significant coefficient. This proves that marketing communication through social media

Social Media in City Branding Strategic: Empirical study in Solo City, Indonesia

and e-wom is the power to shape the brand positioning of city branding to build city image and have a positive impact on tourist decisions.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATION, AND RECOMMENDATION

The concept of city branding is necessary for a city to form an identity that has a positive impression both for tourists and to attract investors. Some city branding research is applied in Indonesia, with different results. This is because there must be harmony between the government, local communities, business people, tourists and investors as well as appropriate marketing communications so that the city branding concept succeeds in creating a positive image of the city. In the face of very strong competitive pressures, it requires a city branding strategy in order to win the competition as measured by the increase in tourist visits in the region or city. The city branding strategy will be more effective by integrating digital-based marketing communications in its implementation.

This research implements marketing communication, namely social media promotion and e-wom to fulfill the research gap between the influence of city branding on city image which has an impact on tourist visiting decisions in Solo City. City marketing with social media is a force to win the competition. The results showed that city branding provides direct effects and indirect effects through social media promotion and e-wom on city image and tourist visiting decisions. While city image directly has an insignificant effect on tourist visit decisions, it has a positive and significant indirect effect on tourist visit decisions through e-wom mediation.

The finding of this research is that there is significant evidence of an indirect effect between city branding-social media promotion-city image-e-wom-tourist visiting decisions in one indirect path. This research implies that to increase tourist visits, social media-based city marketing or digital-based city marketing must be integrated in the city branding strategy of the cultural city of Solo.

The limitation of this research is that it has not explored the foreign tourist segment. Suggestions for future research are to expand the market segment of foreign tourists to expand the market.

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