



Smart Branding Innovation: Strengthening the Identity of The City of Solo

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Abstract. Smart City has many dimensions in it that need to be fulfilled gradually by every city that pushes itself into the Smart City development concept. One of the important dimensions in Smart City is Smart Branding. The aim of city branding is to attract the attention of tourists, visitors and investors. A city's identity influences how the economic, political and socio-psychological systems of a city are formed. The government has a role in identifying the identity of each existing place or city, this aims to introduce the city to the market (investors, tourists, talent, events). This study uses the theory of Smart Branding which has three variable components and indicators, namely tourism branding, bussiness branding and city appearance branding. This research uses qualitative methods using primary and secondary data. Primary data collection was carried out using in-depth interview techniques and field observations. Secondary data was taken using documentation techniques. Data validity was carried out by data triangulation.. The results of the study illustrate that Solo, using the branding "Solo the spirit of Java" provides an illustration that the success of strengthening a city's identity does not have to be owned by cities that have abundant natural resource wealth. This awareness is shared by the City Government so that what Solo prioritizes is strengthening its cultural identity and the strength of its trade routes. Tourism Branding is carried out in two ways, namely strengthening culture and developing tourist destinations. The development of the city's face in Solo also follows the identity that is being built, so that City Appearance Branding is prioritized and adapted to the large Smart City framework. the contribution of smart branding innovation in supporting the strengthening of cultural identity, business identity and attractiveness as well as building the face of the city so as to provide an illustration that innovation in e-government is not only in technological development alone.

Keywords: Smart Branding, Local Government and City Identity

1 Introduction

City branding is widely used by countries in the world in an effort to improve or change the image of a place or region, by highlighting the advantages and uniqueness of the area [1]. Identity is not something that is given or taken for granted. Identity in this case is a construction, a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and praxis in social life [2] but identity is not only influenced by past events, actions and consequences, but is also influenced by how an event or action is interpreted retroactively. building strong branding for a city is something that can increase competitiveness. Currently, cities in Indonesia are competing to promote the brand and

image that has been created. The aim of city branding is to attract the attention of tourists, visitors and investors. City branding itself has the influence of changing a person's view of a city and finding differences between one city and another.

In 2023, the City of Solo received an award for Smart City implementation in the Smart Branding and Smart Living categories [3]. The city of Solo itself is one of the cities that has city branding, carrying the slogan "Solo the Spirit of Java" and the Rajamala mascot. The branding formed by the Solo City Government will be a strategic aspect of the City of Solo in attracting tourists, entrepreneurs and investors [4]. A city's identity influences how the economic, political and socio-psychological systems of a city are formed. Research on Smart Branding is important in the context of urban politics because it can help cities to build a strong and attractive identity for residents, investors and tourists. City branding can influence political and economic decisions, city governments can design more effective strategies to increase competitiveness and community welfare. Smart Branding also allows cities to highlight their uniqueness and advantages so that they can attract more investment that supports sustainable economic growth.

Solo is one of the cities in Central Java province which has attractions, such as culture and arts which are tourist attractions. The advantages of the city of Solo are often published through the mass media, so that Solo is widely known among the domestic community. The city of Solo has now become a destination for domestic and foreign tourists as a place to spend their holidays. The increase in tourist flow indicates that Solo has become the place of choice for traveling. This reality requires the Solo city government to develop the tourism sector in a conceptual manner based on the strengths and potential of the city of Solo.

2 Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with a narrative approach. Cresswell divides five approaches in qualitative methods, namely narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies [5]. The technique for taking informants was purposive sampling, including: Communication and Information Service, Tourism Service, Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Service (DPMPTSP), local businesses and the community. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and documentation. This research will be analyzed using interactive analysis. Miles and Huberman say that data analysis consists of three activities that occur simultaneously, namely Data Reduction, Data Presentation and Conclusion Drawing [6].

3 Findings and Discussion

City Branding or City Branding is a combination of the words brand which is defined as a brand or label that describes an object [7] and a brand or label is also a way to provide a difference between one product and other products for the same needs [8] So based on this statement, it can be concluded that a brand is a set of assets which are a derivative of product value, whose use is to identify a product or service, as well as to

differentiate it from other similar products. Based on Handito's statement in [9] there are several benefits from city branding, namely introducing a city or region more deeply, improving the city's image, attracting domestic and foreign tourists, increasing investor interest in investing and increasing trade and business activities in a city.

The importance of the relationship between tourism branding, business branding and city appearance branding in improving the city's image is very significant. Tourism branding helps highlight tourist attractions by creating a strong and attractive identity [10]. Business branding, on the other hand, strengthens the image of local companies and attracts investment and economic opportunities [Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. [2009]]. City appearance branding ensures that the physical appearance of the city reflects the desired identity and values. When these three elements work together, they create harmony and consistency in a city's image that can attract tourists, businesses, and society as a whole. According to Kavaratzis [2008], tourism destination branding is one of the trends in city branding by making a city or region a tourist destination or city for local and national communities, as well as enabling a city to manage the tourism potential of its region as a unique identity and characteristic for that region, in order to build a competitive identity or brand in a region that is specifically a tourist destination and a place that wants to attract tourists.

Solo not only highlights its rich culture and history, but also integrates technology and innovation to create a unique and interesting tourist experience. Branding Solo, especially through the tagline "Solo, The Spirit of Java" has several important aspects with the aim of branding to communicate Solo's unique characteristics to the public. This is also supported by regulations and cultural preservation. The Surakarta City Government not only made branding changes to the logo but also issued a new mascot in addition to the Solo slogan in order to strengthen Solo's identity image. Solo has a mascot, namely Rajamala, which provides an overview of the philosophy and vision of the city of Solo, where Rajamala is a figure who is already known in the story of Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta.

Support for Solo's tourism branding is carried out through several regulations, including those outlined in the Surakarta City Tourism Master Plan which is regulated in Regional Regulation Number 13 of 2016, Solo provides funds for the maintenance of cultural objects through the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) and Special Allocation Funds (DAK). In an effort to preserve cultural identity, there are regulations governing the construction and design of buildings in Solo, especially for government-owned buildings, which must reflect local architectural characteristics such as pavilions and colonial styles. Recognition and preservation of Solo culture is also carried out with community involvement, so that culture does not stop until old age, but continues to be developed at school age. The government initiated programs involving local communities, such as distributing gamelan musical instruments to sub-districts and schools and holding art festivals to maintain the continuity of traditional arts. This serves to encourage community participation in cultural preservation. Disbudpar (Culture and Tourism Department) organizes various events and festivals that introduce and preserve local arts and culture, such as the wayang anak festival and the Ramayana dance ballet. It also serves as a means of promotion and attracting tourist attention.

Through branding "The Spirit of Java", the government seeks to promote Solo's unique cultural identity to tourists, creating a positive image that can attract visitors. This has an impact on increasing tourist visits from year to year. Since 2024 from January to May, tourist arrivals in Solo will reach 2,138,904 visitors consisting of 8,571 foreign tourists and 2,130,333 domestic tourists [11].

High tourist visits also have an impact on the regional business climate, including improving the regional investment climate. Economic activity in this city, which is dominated by the trade sector, is an important part of the business chain in the Soloraya area in particular, and Central Java in general. Regional investment development is also closely related to capital investment which of course will focus on investment. The City of Surakarta developed an OSS (Online Single Submission) application system to assist Company licensing services. Solo City investment data from 2020 to 2024 experienced a significant increase. The total number of companies in 2023 will be 11,344 and in 2024 it will be 21,359 [12]. This shows that Smart branding helps build a positive image of the City of Surakarta as a trade and service center. This attracts investors' interest in investing in the city, because they see large market potential and adequate infrastructure support.

The investment strategy carried out is collaborating with stakeholders in the City Government such as Bappeda (by creating investment potential that can be offered), Marge Making (cooperating with large companies, collaborating with micro-enterprises) and Mall in mall activities meaning in order to serve the community through different media. This shows that Smart branding helps build a positive image of the City of Surakarta as a trade and service center. This attracts investors' interest in investing in the city, because they see large market potential and adequate infrastructure support. By implementing smart branding, the City of Surakarta can increase its competitiveness compared to other regions. This is important to attract investors who are looking for strategic locations to invest.

It is hoped that the birth of the Solo City identity will open up new opportunities in realizing regional development, especially in tourism. With this brand, it is hoped that it can also build the image of the city of Solo as a center of Javanese culture while attracting tourists and investors both from within and outside the country. Specifically, City Branding "Solo, The Spirit of Java" has targets, two of which are to stimulate the activities of various public commercial and non-commercial activities, as well as tourism development. Strengthening Solo's identity is also carried out by promoting culture and MSMEs. Through international activities, such as bringing MSMEs abroad to promote local products, the City of Surakarta is trying to introduce and brand the city globally.

Based on several indicators contained in the Surakarta City RIPPANDA, there are several priorities related to the implementation of city branding, namely prioritizing market interest and competitive strength, optimizing public relations programs, programs to improve brand image, branding, and organizing national and international tourism events. From this it can be seen that the smart branding of the City of Solo for its city planning must collaborate with several investors who will later participate in

maintaining and preserving the smart branding built by the City of Surakarta itself. The presence of Smart Branding encourages improvements in facilities and infrastructure that support city development. This includes the development of public facilities, transportation and open spaces that suit the needs of the community and visitors. Roads are an important land transportation infrastructure to facilitate economic activities. The length of roads in Surakarta City in 2023 will reach 247.09 km, consisting of 23.24 km of state roads, 9.44 km of provincial roads and 214.41 km of city roads. 46.23% of the road surface in Surakarta City is in good condition [13]. Meanwhile, city roads in moderate, damaged and heavily damaged conditions were 44.53%, 8.64% and 0.08% respectively [14]. The city of Surakarta in 2023 will have hotspot points evenly distributed throughout all sub-district areas. The largest number of hotspots are in Banjarsari and Jebres sub-districts, each at 26% or 24 hotspot points. The fewest hotspots are in Serengan sub-district which has 11% hotspots or 10 hotspots [15].

Financing for the development of facilities and infrastructure in the City of Surakarta is carried out through several sources and integrated mechanisms. The main funding for the construction of facilities and infrastructure comes from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). The city government allocates a budget for various development projects that support the development of infrastructure and public facilities. The city of Surakarta is trying to increase PAD through various events and activities that can attract visitors. The city government also collaborates with the private sector and various stakeholders, including state-owned companies and local entrepreneurs. This collaboration can take the form of sponsoring events or investing in mutually beneficial infrastructure projects. Surakarta also receives grants from third parties, such as international institutions or other countries, to support infrastructure development. In some cases, facilities and infrastructure development projects can be financed through project-based funding schemes, where development costs are borne by private investors in exchange for management rights or profits from the project. Communities are also involved in the financing process through participation in programs that support development, such as donations to community projects or participation in income-generating events. Thus, Smart Branding not only focuses on the image and identity of the city, but also contributes to improving facilities and infrastructure that support the growth and development of the city as a whole.

The strategies implemented by the City of Surakarta seek to build a strong and positive image, improve the quality of life of the community, and attract more visitors and investment to the city. Smart branding helps create and strengthen the unique identity of the City of Surakarta. By highlighting local cultural, historical and unique aspects, effective branding can make a city more easily recognized and remembered by the public and visitors. Smart branding encourages collaboration between government, the private sector and society. By forming strong partnerships, all parties can work together to achieve common goals in city development. By creating an attractive and comfortable environment, smart branding contributes to improving people's quality of life. Good public facilities, green open spaces, and improved accessibility are some of the aspects that can be achieved through effective branding.

4 Conclusion

Smart branding plays an important role in building and strengthening the identity of the City of Surakarta by highlighting the rich culture and local potential. This helps create a unique and attractive image for the public and visitors. Through smart branding, the city of Surakarta can increase its attractiveness as a tourist destination and attract investment. Effective branding promotes the uniqueness of the city, thereby attracting the attention of tourists and business people to invest in the city. Smart branding encourages community involvement in the city development process. By involving residents in branding activities, such as cultural events and promotion of local products, residents feel they have a role in shaping the image of their city. Smart branding also emphasizes the importance of sustainability in city development. Smart branding encourages collaboration between government, the private sector and communities. The formation of a smart city council involving various stakeholders shows the importance of synergy in achieving common goals for city development.

Environmentally and socially friendly initiatives are part of the branding strategy, ensuring that city development is not only economically profitable but also environmentally and socially responsible. Smart branding can help cities that do not have attractive natural potential to continue developing their cities through strengthening cultural identity. The large number of incoming tourists must also be balanced with the arrangement of facilities and infrastructure that support tourists. This also has an impact on the influx of investors, especially domestic ones, thereby improving the regional investment climate.

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