



# Creating Urban Visual Identity Through Commercial Signage: A Comparative Study of Jakarta and Bandung

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**Abstract.** In Indonesian cities, commercial signage plays a role beyond information dissemination and it shapes how urban identities are visually constructed. However, signage often remains marginal in urban design policies, seen as a disruptive element rather than a potential tool for city branding and spatial coherence, while it has the potential to be capitalized and gain profit to the city. This paper examines how signage contributes to urban visual identity through a comparative-descriptive study on Jakarta and Bandung. From literature on visual culture, signage regulation, and city branding, the paper reflects on visual conditions in Blok M (Jakarta) and Braga (Bandung), two areas with distinct urban characters. This study highlights its development with comparative-analytical framework for assessing signage governance and practice across these two diverse, rapidly urbanizing contexts in Indonesia. Visual and regulatory analyses reveal the gap of design flexibility and formal guidelines in integrating signage with the city's visual character, identifying regulatory blind spots where economic pragmatism outweighs aesthetical sensibility. By reframing signage as a strategic urban design asset, this study calls for a more integrated visual governance framework that aligns regulations, aesthetics, and identity in shaping the public realm in Indonesia cities.

**Keywords:** Commercial Signage, Urban Visual Identity, City Branding

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The visual identity of a city is a critical factor that shapes how inhabitants and visitors perceive and interact with their surroundings (Kaefer, 2021). In many cities of the Global South, signage is not merely a communication tool, but an embedded element of visual culture, branding, and everyday experience. Yet in practice, commercial signage (especially outdoor advertising and billboards) often contributes to visual pollution and spatial clutter, especially when left unregulated or poorly managed (Halim, 2023; Iveson, 2011). Despite its omnipresence and influence on urban experience, signage is frequently peripheral in urban design policies, treated more as a technical or commercial issue than as a spatial and symbolic asset (Iveson, 2011).

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Consequently, many cities develop fragmented visual identities where signage design and placement are disconnected from architectural and public space characters, leading to aesthetic and governance challenges. In rapidly urbanizing cities like Jakarta and Bandung, where historic layers, commercial ambitions and public space demands intersect, signage becomes a critical but contested urban element. Heritage corridors and pedestrian-friendly areas face challenges maintaining visual coherence due to the growing presence of digital and large-format signage, which can disrupt historic ambience and cultural identity (Kurniawan, 2025; Utami, 2025).

To understand the contribution of commercial signage to urban visual identity, two areas become the representative: Blok M in Jakarta and Braga Street in Bandung. Each area is known for its cultural identity and is suitable as a reflection on both local signage conditions and existing regulatory frameworks. This study aims to identify opportunities and blind spots in current urban governance practices related to signage.

## 1.2 Research Significance and Contribution

This paper seeks to explore how commercial signage can strategically contribute to urban visual identity by examining two representative and contrasting areas: Blok M in Jakarta and Braga Street in Bandung. The significance of this research lies in moving beyond parcel-level compliance issues to address the critical gap in Indonesia urban policy regarding district-scale visual governance. Existing regulations in both cities remain largely building or parcel-based, failing to mandate visual coherence at the neighborhood or corridor level.

Using a comparative approach, the analysis revolves around the signage challenge across fundamentally different urban characters: a bustling modern-culture commercial hub (Blok M) and a culturally sensitive commercial-heritage corridor (Braga). This approach allows for the identification of common regulatory and design blind spots that persist despite their different historical contexts.

The result contributes as a critical reflection on local regulatory frameworks to propose an integrated visual governance framework. This framework advocates for the strategic inclusion of signage as an asset for urban branding and place-making, which is highly pertinent for improving urban legibility and fortifying city identities.

## 2 Literature Review

Signage plays a key role in place-based communication and greatly shapes how people experience a location, especially in commercial environments like business districts or main streets (Rahman, 2020). In rapidly urbanizing cities, signage becomes a reflection of economic aspirations, aesthetic preferences, and political authority. They communicate messages to the public, help people to navigate complex surroundings, act as identifiable social landmarks, and contribute to cultural expression (Pecquet, 2017). However, when left uncoordinated, signage often overwhelms the public realm, contributing to what scholars refer to as “visual pollution” (Wakil, 2021). Recent literature also po-

sitions signage within the framework of city branding, where urban visuals communicate identity, history, and market positioning (Yong, 2023). Moreover, effective city branding through signage must navigate the tension between commercial branding and preserving local authenticity and cultural identity (Nursanty, 2023). Signage that harmonizes with the city's character and place identity can strengthen both economic objectives and residents' sense of belonging, reinforcing a coherent and meaningful urban brand.

Emerging frameworks emphasize the integration of traditional signage with digital branding within smart city initiatives, advocating strategies that align physical signage management with dynamic, technology-driven brand communication (Screenfluence, 2024; Yodeck, 2025). These digital platforms recognize signage's ideological and spatial role in shaping social and cultural narratives embedded in the urban fabric. Consequently, signage governance is not only a practical regulation issue but also central to shaping a city's symbolic and spatial identity within broader urban branding strategies.

Despite the potential, many developing countries lack comprehensive regulatory frameworks to manage these assets strategically (Halim, 2023). In these context, signage is often shaped more by commercial incentives than by design principles or place identity goals. Studies show that over 20% of visual pollution in dense urban areas can be mitigated through design-aware signage control (Wakil, 2021).

In Jakarta, signage regulation is governed primarily through Governor of DKI Jakarta Regulation No. 148/2017, as amended by Governor of DKI Jakarta Regulation No. 100/2021, which outlines technical guidelines for outdoor advertisements (reklame). These regulations provide detailed specifications for individual sign permits, including types, dimensions, illumination, and tax mechanisms. However, they remain largely for building or parcel-based. There is no clause that addresses the spatial coordination of signage at the neighborhood or corridor scale, nor does it mandate visual coherence within designated urban zones. This lack of district-level regulation results in fragmented visual landscapes, where commercial interests dominate over collective place identity or urban design values.

Commercial signage in Bandung is mandated in the Municipal in the Mayor Regulation of Bandung Municipal No. 25/2023 concerning Amendment of the Mayor Regulation of Bandung Municipal No. 5/2019 concerning Guidelines of Outdoor Advertisement Implementation, and renewed with Local Regulation of Bandung Municipality No 5/2025 concerning Outdoor Advertisement. While the current direction elaborates types of signage according to the latest technology, the guidelines and designated area remain unclear to harmonize it with the spatial character of the city, predominantly because of the economic opportunities underlying every physical form of outdoor advertisement.

The integration of emerging technologies into outdoor digital signage introduces both governance challenges and opportunities. In smart city environments, digital signage demands flexible regulations that balance dynamic content management, technological infrastructure, and urban aesthetics (Yoo et al., 2025). Absent proactive measures, cities may face heightened visual clutter and tech fragmentation. Strategic management principles stress optimizing material choices, placement, and innovations to boost signage efficacy while curbing negative effects (Yoo et al., 2025).

By synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that effective signage governance must move beyond parcel-level regulation toward spatially coordinated, design-aware frameworks that integrate technological advances and local cultures identities. Such strategies offer pathways to mitigate visual pollution, reinforce place identity, and leverage signage as a meaningful component of urban branding and communication.

### 3 Methodology

This study adopts a comparative-descriptive method with two case study locations: Blok M (Jakarta) and Braga Street (Bandung). These corridors were selected due to their high commercial activity, public visibility, and contrasting historical identities. The comparative lens aligns with international studies highlighting the importance of considering both the physical and regulatory context in signage governance.

The association between signage and regulation are measured through four key aspects, such as signage typology and scale, spatial integration with urban landscape, regulation clarity, and branding coherence (Table 1). These aspects were selected with each role in evaluating and assessing the signage and regulation condition. Visual data of the signages were collected through google street map observation, field documentation, and observational notes in 2024-2025. The analysis is operationalized through four aspects derived from urban design literature and local standards. Signage typology follows the framework of Rahman & Mehta (2020), while spatial integration is assessed based on visual pollution criteria by Wakil et al (2021). The branding aspects utilizes Anholt (2004) city branding theory, all of which are cross-examined with Jakarta Regulation 100/2021 and Bandung Regulation 4/2025.

**Table 1.** Key Measurement Aspects

No	Aspect	Description	Reference
1	Signage Typology and Scale	Signage form and dimension. Assess the variety and density of sign types (e.g., wall signs, digital billboards, banner ads) and their proportionate size relative to the building facade and streetscape.	Rahman & Meta (2020)
2	Spatial Integration with Urban Streetscape	Evaluate the placement and coherence of signage. This dimension was operationalized by documenting the extent of visual obstruction and clutter that compromises pedestrian legibility and the alignment of signs with architectural features.	Wakil et al. (2021)
3	Regulation Clarity	Analyze the specific municipal regulations (Jakarta Regulation No. 100/2021 and Bandung Regulation No. 5/2025 ) to identify explicit provi-	Jakarta Reg. 100/2021 & Bandung Reg. 5/2025

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			sions for district-level aesthetic guidelines and spatial coordination, noting the absence of these as "regulatory blind spots"	
4	Branding	Coherence	Assess the degree to which individual commercial signs reinforce or detract from the collective place identity of the corridor (e.g., "Little Tokyo" in Blok M or the "Art Deco Heritage" of Braga).	Anholt (2004)

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The analysis involved documenting the signage within the selected area and categorizing the signage into general typology that influences the city visual. The collected sample data was analyzed on its integration and branding coherence with the urban landscape, in streetscape scale. The associated local regulation was identified and correlated with the existing signage conditions. This systematic framework facilitates the identification of strategic urban governance gaps that impact the aesthetic and symbolic legibility of signage in these diverse urban environments. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how commercial signage expression mediates between economic, cultural, and regulatory domains, providing transferable insight pertinent for improving signage governance and strategic urban branding in Indonesian cities

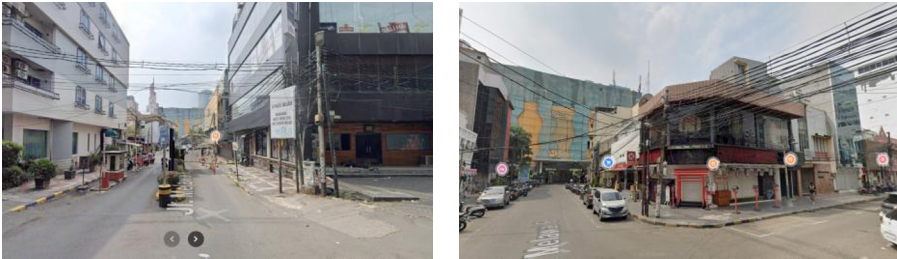
## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Blok M, Jakarta

Blok M has a rich history as a key commercial and cultural hub in South Jakarta. Originally developed as part of the Kebayoran Baru garden city plan, it evolved from a planned economic center and transit node in the 1950's to a vibrant retail and entertainment district by the 1980's and 1990's (Fig. 3). Key landmarks like Pasaraya Blok M (opened in 1981), Blok M Plaza (1991), and the underground Mal Blok M (known as Blok M Hub) anchored its role as a bustling shopping destination. Blok M also became known as "Little Tokyo", a cultural enclave with a concentration of Japanese restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues, enhancing its unique urban characters.



**Fig. 1.** The new branding of Blok M in 2025 (source: CNN Indonesia, accessed in 9 October 2025)

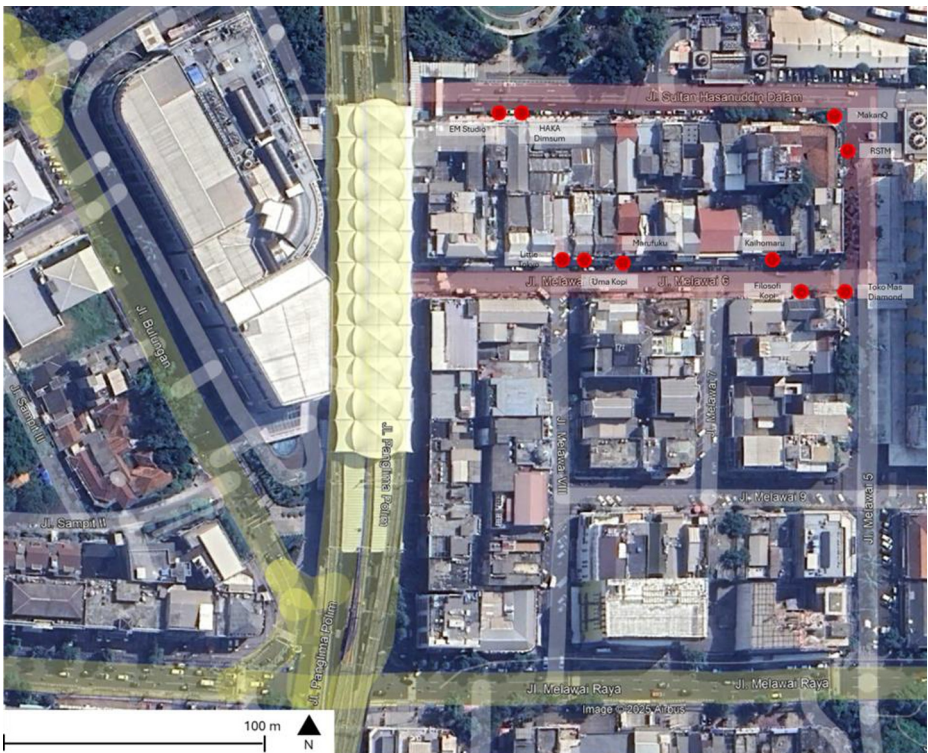


**Fig. 2.** Fragmented visual appearance due to lack of integrated signage control in Blok M. (source: Googlestreet, accessed in 9 October 2025)

Recent revitalization efforts in the 2020s, including renovation of public parks, refurbishment of Mal Blok M for culinary and small scale business (SMEs) activities, and enhancements in pedestrian and public transport infrastructure, have sparked renewed interest in the area. Reinauguration of Blok M Hub in 2025 symbolizes the ambition to reposition Blok M as an "ASEAN economic and creative hub (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 3.** Block M Parking Lot in 1970 (source: [id.pinterest.com\\_bintoro\\_hoepodio](https://id.pinterest.com_bintoro_hoepodio) in [kempar.go.id](https://kempar.go.id), accessed in 12 October 2025)



**Fig. 4.** Observed spot in Blok M, Jakarta

Blok M's commercial signage environment mirrors these dynamic urban transformations but remains largely uncoordinated. Moreover, Blok M lacks specific district-level signage policies integrating visual coherence with urban identity. Existing regulations primarily address technical aspects at the building or tenant level but do not mandate cohesive spatial coordination or aesthetic guidelines relevant to Blok M's multi-functional streetscape. Consequently, signage in Blok M is characterized by a wide variety of signage typologies and scales, reflecting the commercial ambitions of individual businesses rather than a unified district brand (Fig. 4).

Furthermore, the introduction of high-luminance digital LED poles and animated displays has added a layer of temporal complexity to the already crowded environment. While these digital assets align with the "creative hub" narrative by injecting modern energy into the district, their placement often lacks a rhythmic interval or a common visual anchor. The result is a high-contrast environment where digital brightness competes with stagnant, unmaintained static boards. This technological friction not only contributes to light pollution but also highlights the gap between the district's high-tech aspirations and its lack of fundamental maintenance and design coordination.

This lack of uniformity in size and placement directly compromises spatial integration with the urban streetscape, resulting in persuasive visual clutter that hinders pedestrian legibility and dilutes Blok M's potential place for city branding (Fig. 2). Furthermore, the fragmented visual environment demonstrates a low level of branding coherence, as the competing signs fail to reinforce the collective identity of "Little Tokyo" or the new "creative hub" narrative. Many ads appear informally installed without clear ownership or adherence to coordinated placement strategies. This governance issue stems from a lack of regulation clarity that prioritizes aesthetics and coordinated urban design over mere technical compliance.



**Fig. 5.** Signage in coffee shop or restaurant in Blok M (source: Group 4 RK5200 Urban Design program ITB, 2024 and Googlemaps, accessed in 9 November 2025)

The lack of integrated signage governance in Blok M represents a significant missed opportunity for leveraging signage as a tool for urban branding and identity formation (Fig. 5). As the district strives toward economic revitalization and creative hub status, a shift towards regulation clarity, spatial coordination, and visual coherence in signage management could enhance Blok M's symbolic and aesthetic urban legibility. In summary, Blok M's signage landscape currently reflects individual commercial imperatives rather than collective urban identity goals. To fully realize its renewed economic and cultural aspirations, coordinated signage governance that aligns with Blok M's historical legacy, urban functions, and visual identity is essential.



**Fig. 6.** Types of signage in Blok M (source: Group 4 RK5200 Urban Design program ITB, 2024 and Googlemaps, accessed in 9 November 2025)

In the end, the transition of Blok M from a traditional transit node to a contemporary creative epicenter requires more than just infrastructure, it requires a visual curation. The current state of signage acts as a barrier to authentic place-making, as the iconic "Little Tokyo" and the UMKM or Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) driven creative energy are forced to coexist within a framework of visual noise (Fig. 6). By establishing a design-led governance model, Blok M can transform its current visual clutter into a vibrant diversity, turning its signage into a narrative asset that guides the observer through the district's rich history and into its innovative future.

## 4.2 Braga, Bandung

Braga was a luxurious commercial street during the Dutch Indies colonization in Bandung, with a number of art deco style buildings designed by renowned architects, such as Aalbers and Wolff Schoemaker among others. After the independence of Indonesia, it remains intact in its physical form and function, hence it is a main attraction and visual brand of Bandung until today.





**Fig. 9.** Observed spot in Braga Street, Bandung

The regulation in Bandung concerning outdoor advertisement is mandated in the Local Regulation of Bandung Municipality No. 5/2025. Advertisement is stated as a media, tools, or activity to introduce, advise, promote, or attract the general public for commercial purposes. The main principles and guidelines in the regulation consists of plan,

design, placement, utilization, permits, maintenance, and control for commercial use to realize a harmonious utilization of urban space of Bandung municipality.

For advertisement placement, there are three designated area classification based on the extent of restriction in Bandung, such as, Special Area (Kawasan Khusus), Restricted Area (Kawasan Terbatas) and General Area (Kawasan Umum). Only in Special Area that is clearly stated the scope or list of area or function that is considered within the scope of area, consists of 10 streets, public facilities/buildings and the listed heritage buildings as well. In both Restricted and General Area, the exact location is further directed through the Mayor's decree, as stated in this regulation.

The object of advertisement within this regulation consists of conventional, permanent and digital form, which could be permanent or incidental. The designated object has already considered covering diverse forms of advertisement, in order to accommodate the rapid development in advertisement technology, which is happening in Braga currently (Fig. 9).

Braga street, Bandung, was once celebrated as an exclusive commercial destination which exhibited a high-class lifestyle of the Dutch in the 1900s (Fig. 7). It was one of the main attractions during the Asian African Conference in 1955, as it was within the close vicinity with the main venue, Merdeka Building. After the independence of Indonesia and the national development shifted to Jakarta, Braga street was once abandoned and vacant, with the buildings being neglected and unsafe for public activity. After the revitalization and reactivation in the 2000s, Braga has regained its status as a tourist destination on a national and global scale. Its identity as a heritage corridor imposes aesthetic constraints and cultural expectations, as its visual streetscape is being preserved carefully (Fig. 8).

Since the street revitalization in 2008 (Kompas, 2008), the signages were designated to be in harmony with the building facades, in the form of wall signs with the store brand and street poles with fabric banners, as part of street furniture. The signage tends to be smaller and more regulated, showing Braga's visual identity with art deco style. The color of these signage is in line with Braga street's image, in color that matches with black, grey, brown/gold, or white.

But the emerging trends of digital signs have reformed the way commercial advertising and visual branding interact with people. The information is dynamic and animated, in purpose to give an interactive, appealing engagement to the viewers. In 2024, the street poles had transformed into digital and animated sign boards, attached to the street pole. The color remains in line with Braga street's image, in color that matches with black, grey, or brown/gold and using art deco archetype. On the other side, types of advertisement or information are getting more diverse, and to attract visitors of Braga street, signage placement could be anywhere in vacant space. The visual image of Braga is overflowing with various types and forms of information.



**Fig. 10.** Types of Commercial Signage and Advertisement in Braga Street (source: Apriani, 2025)

The initial revitalization of Braga street was also trying to emphasize the building's significance, as a number of these properties are designed by renowned Dutch architects with art deco style (Dana, 2020). The popularity of pop up stores with its strong, distinctive personal visual identity branding has emerged in 2024 as well, integrated on the building facades of Braga, through color or signage form (Fig. 10). The balanced color palettes to Art Deco of minimum intervention was left behind, to create a uniformed visual image of the brand identity.



**Fig. 11.** Variety of Building Facade in Braga Street that is Attached with the Store Visual Identity (source: Apriani, 2025)

These phenomenons have the potential to either create a new visual identity or become a visual chaos of the existing Braga streetscape (Fig. 11). The current local signage regulation has not been able to provide clear direction of Braga within these conditions, giving a sense of disorientation of Braga visual branding as a heritage corridor.

**4.3 Comparison: Blok M and Braga**

To systematically synthesize the findings and clarify the distinction in governance challenges, a comparative analysis was conducted across the four analytical dimensions (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparative Analysis of Signage Governance: Braga and Blok M

Dimension	Blok M, Jakarta	Braga, Bandung	Key Outcome & Challenge
Signage Typology and Scale	Types of signage: Features a mix of small to large ads.	Types of signage:	Types of signage:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Digital street poles</li> <li>● Wall mounted signboards like 3D channel letters or lightboxes</li> <li>● Hanging signboards</li> <li>● Sticker of banner in street furniture or utility boxes</li> </ul> <p>Scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Signage is aggressive but also in some place more less</li> <li>● In some famous culinary facade, signage can cover 100% of building facade.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Digital street poles with animated advertisement</li> <li>● Wall mounted signboards</li> <li>● Hanging signboards</li> <li>● Stickers or banners, attached to the street furniture.</li> </ul> <p>Scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● wall sign or hanging sign: ¼ part to fully covered building facade</li> <li>● Street poles: 3 m</li> <li>● Stickers/banners: small size attached to the street furnitures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Digital street poles with animated advertisement</li> <li>● Wall mounted signboards</li> <li>● Hanging signboards</li> <li>● Stickers or banners, attached to the street furniture.</li> </ul> <p>Scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● wall sign or hanging sign: ¼ part to fully covered building facade</li> <li>● Street poles: 3 m</li> <li>● Stickers/banners: small size attached to the street furnitures</li> </ul>
Spatial Integration	<p>Placement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Signage is highly fragmented; advertisement are placed independently to represent individual building rather than collective district vision</li> <li>● Wall and hanging sign are placed in any area on building facade</li> <li>● Street poles and facade signs are placed without a common rhythm, creating a fragmented streetscape</li> </ul> <p>Visual legibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is no captured visual diversity; instead, the 3m sidewalks are occupied by overlapping signs that create</li> </ul>	<p>Placement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● street poles placement interval along the corridor approx 20 m</li> <li>● Sticker placement could be anywhere in vacant space or attached to the street furniture</li> <li>● Wall and hanging sign are placed in any area on building facade</li> <li>● Banners are attached to street furniture, e.g. street lamps</li> </ul> <p>Visual legibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The street with 3 m sidewalk and 7 m road is occupied with various types of signage in a small interval and close distance</li> </ul>	<p>The spatial integration of signage in both cities remains primarily driven by building-specific commercial needs rather than a coordinated urban design strategy. This leads to a "bottom-up" manifestation of the streetscape, where signage placement is determined by individual unit visibility rather than collective spatial harmony.</p> <p>When signage is placed sporadically and without coordination, it creates high visual noise that obscures the city's landmarks and architectural identity.</p>

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Branding Coherence	<p>a "tunnel effect" and visual confusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A significant gap exists between the "Modern Creative Hub" branding for Jakarta's youth and the stagnant, uncoordinated physical execution on the ground.</li> <li>● The absence of a common design thread or coordinated guidelines leads to a "busy" but chaotic image that dilutes the city's branding efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The public street furniture and signage were designed with a harmonious uniformity to Braga street's image, in art deco style.</li> <li>● Private advertisement and building facade were taking in any available/possible vacant space with their own distinctive personal design/ visual identity.</li> </ul>	<p>An abundance of signage with a diverse type and flexible placement has the potential to create a vibrant visual image of the area and strengthen the commercial character, which increases the economic value and visual identity.</p> <p>Uncontrolled placement and unclear guidelines may cause visual disorientation and chaos.</p> <p>The regulation has covered the diverse types and forms of signage, which accommodate the rapid development in advertisement technology, through a mix of form and land-use based code.</p>
Regulation Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The regulation already consist about classifies areas into strict, moderate, and low-restriction zones.</li> <li>● Observations indicate a significant presence of advertisements with illegal permissions or expired permits.</li> <li>● While the regulation focuses on the technical size and tax compliance (economic pragmatism), there is no specific mandate for better visual place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The regulation consists of form and placement guidelines and classification of designated placement areas for advertisement based on the degree of restriction.</li> <li>● Unclear list and direction of area/function in each of designated areas for advertisement placement aside the Special Area.</li> </ul>	<p>Regular updates become necessary to keep up a better control with the signage and advertisement advancement. Also, the shared challenge is a "regulatory blind spot" where tax collection is prioritized over the aesthetic harmony and updated city branding of the district.</p>

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In conclusion from Table 2, the comparative reflection across these four dimensions reveals that while both corridors utilize signage as a primary driver of economic vibrancy and technological modernization, they face a shared "regulatory blind spot" regarding aesthetic coordination and district-level branding. While regulations effectively address technical and tax-related compliance, they remain largely silent on the issues

of spatial friction and identity mismatch caused by uncoordinated placement and stagnant enforcement. Ultimately, without a shift toward an integrated urban design strategy that moves beyond purely building-specific commercial needs, the potential for signage to act as a cohesive tool for city branding will continue to be undermined by visual chaos and a lack of environmental legibility.

#### 4.4 Best Practice: Japan and the USA

In exploring effective commercial signage management that reinforces urban identity, the bustling districts of Tokyo's Shibuya (Fig. 12) and New York City's Times Square (Fig. 13) emerge as exemplary economic centers comparable to Blok M Jakarta. Shibuya's iconic pedestrian crossing, surrounded by a vibrant fusion of massive digital billboards, LED screens, and dynamic advertisements, attracts an estimated daily footfall of over 2.4 million pedestrians as seen in (JR Rail Pass, 2024). The signage here is not merely functional but a celebrated cultural phenomenon that reflects the youthful, trendsetting character of the district, seamlessly blending commerce, technology, and urban aesthetics. This curated approach maximizes brand visibility while sustaining a coherent and energetic atmosphere that amplifies both local and global engagement through social media and experiential marketing.



Fig. 12. Outdoor Advertising at Shibuya Crossing (source: The Jakarta Post, accessed in 12 October 2025)



**Fig. 13.** Times Square Outdoor Advertising (source: nyc tourism.com, accessed in 12 October 2025)

On the other hand, cultural commercial precincts like Kyoto in Japan (Fig. 14) and Soho (Fig. 15) in New York, USA represent successful models where signage is integrated into historic and artistic urban fabrics, mirroring conditions similar to Braga Street in Bandung. Both precincts maintain signage that respects architectural heritage, scale, and aesthetic harmony while reinforcing their unique cultural identities. In Kyoto, signage adheres to strict guidelines that ensure visual subtlety aligned with traditional aesthetics and preserved natural landscapes, while Soho embraces eclectic but carefully controlled signage that reflects its reputation as a creative and historic neighborhood.



**Fig. 14.** Outdoor Advertising at Kyoto (source: “Signs in Kyoto” by the Kyoto City Government in goingaijin.com (2020), accessed in 12 October 2025)



**Fig. 15.** Outdoor Advertising at SoHo (source: sohobroadway.org, accessed in 12 October 2025)

These examples highlight how clear regulatory frameworks, stakeholder collaboration, and design-aware guidelines enable signage to strengthen place identity and urban branding, whether in economic power centers or cultural heritage districts. From these best practices, Blok M could draw inspiration to harness signage as an urban asset that supports its dynamic commercial ambitions while Braga could further refine its heritage signage strategies influenced by cultural precinct paradigms.

#### 4.5 Comparative Reflection

The comparison between Blok M and Braga reveals two distinct trajectories in how signage interacts with urban identity. Blok M, as a vibrant but commercially fragmented urban hub, exhibits signage that largely reflects individual business interests rather than a unified urban image. Conversely, Braga maintains a heritage-driven signage approach that aligns with its historical architectural context but now faces new challenges due to the proliferation of digital and personalized signage.

Both cases highlight a common challenge noted in recent urban identity literature: signage management often occurs in isolation from broader urban design and place branding frameworks. This fragmentation undermines efforts to build coherent, legible, and memorable visual identities.

From the lessons learned, the need to integrate signage governance with the comprehensive urban strategies that encompass regulation, aesthetics, and cultural context is evident. This holistic approach transforms signage into an asset for urban legibility, brand coherence, and place-making, ensuring signage supports rather than disrupts the symbolic fabric of the city (Chen et al., 2024). Furthermore, evolving signage technologies, especially digital formats, require adaptive governance to balance commercial

dynamism with ambient visual harmony. Applying these insights, addressing Blok M and Braga's signage challenges requires evolving from fragmented, building-level controls to integrated, district-scale frameworks that prioritize design coherence, stakeholder collaboration, and technological innovation, thus contributing to resilient and distinct urban identities.

#### **4.6 Lesson Learned for Commercial Signage as City Visual Identity**

Several global cities provide valuable lessons on successfully integrating signage within their urban visual identity and branding strategies. In vibrant economic centers like Tokyo's Shibuya and New York's Times Square, signage transcends mere advertisement, it becomes a key urban element reflecting the districts' cultural vibrancy and economic dynamism. Studies show that Shibuya's digital billboards and dynamic public displays contribute substantially to the area's identity by harmonizing cutting-edge technology with urban aesthetics, creating a strong sense of place that attracts both locals and tourists (Fan, 2023). Similarly, Times Square's carefully regulated signage landscape exemplifies how high-density advertising can be managed to reinforce a coherent and globally recognizable urban brand (Rodrigues, 2021).

Conversely, in culturally rich precincts like Kyoto and Soho, signage practices emphasize harmony with architectural heritage and local identity. Urban design research highlights how these areas use signage to enhance the sense of place through scale regulation, material choice, and culturally sensitive aesthetics, reinforcing the districts' unique character while balancing commercial needs. Such places demonstrate that diversity in signage expression can coexist with visual coherence when guided by comprehensive regulations and stakeholder collaboration.

These examples collectively affirm that successful commercial signage strategies require clear design guidelines, multi-stakeholder engagement, and integration with urban branding frameworks. When aligned effectively, signage becomes not only an economic asset but also a powerful visual tool that supports placemaking, enhances urban legibility, and fortifies city identity (Ulimaz et al., 2024).

## **5 Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that commercial signage plays a significant yet underacknowledged role in shaping urban visual identity. Through a comparative reflection on Blok M and Braga, it becomes evident that signage governance remains fragmented, often subordinated to commercial interests or heritage narratives without an integrated urban design perspective or city branding perspective.

Both cases reflect missed opportunities to align signage with the spatial logic, character, and branding of the districts they inhabit. The findings suggest that signage should no longer be treated as a peripheral or purely technical matter, but rather as a strategic design element embedded in the production of place identity.

This paper contributes to urban design discourse by calling for a new visual policy framework, one that integrates regulation, aesthetics, and spatial meaning especially in

Indonesia. Such a framework would require multi-stakeholder collaboration, clear guidelines, and adaptive governance mechanism to respond to emerging digital signage technologies, especially in fast-evolving urban contexts common in the Global South.

Such a framework would enable cities to curate a more coherent, legible, and locally grounded visual environment, especially as urban spaces in the Global South continue to evolve under complex socio-cultural and economic pressures. Future studies could focus on the evolving role of digital and interactive technologies in urban visual identity and how governance frameworks can adapt to balance innovation with cultural heritage preservation. Additionally, empirical research involving multiple stakeholders, such as local communities, businesses, and policymakers would provide insight to participatory approaches for more inclusive and responsive signage governance.

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