

The Mediation of City Branding Identity: An Analysis of Aesthetic Elements in Surakarta's Iconic Architecture

Marinda Noor Fajrina Noviana Putri*, Retna Hidayah and Pita Asih Beki Cahyani

Architecture Study Program, Department of Civil Engineering and Planning, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Landmark buildings often serve as the most powerful visual representations of a city. However, the ways in which the visual qualities of architecture operate in shaping *city branding* remain insufficiently examined. Recent scholarship increasingly highlights the importance of architecture in constructing urban identity. Nevertheless, specific investigations into the aesthetic criteria of iconic buildings—particularly colour, ornament, and form—as factors that influence visitors' perceptions and place memory are still relatively limited. This study addresses this gap by proposing an analytical framework that connects architectural aesthetics to the core dimensions of city branding. Using a qualitative digital ethnographic approach, this research develops an Aesthetic–Branding Analysis Framework to map particular visual attributes to branding outcomes, including identity, representation, and experiential quality within the digital dimension. The findings indicate that aesthetic elements are not merely decorative features, but actively communicate meaning and shape visitors' expectations of a place. Building on these results, the study proposes a Conceptual Model of Aesthetic-Based Branding Formation, illustrating how architectural visuals interact with collective perceptions and urban narratives through ongoing reciprocal processes, ultimately producing shared meanings over time. Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that aesthetic decisions—often treated as secondary or supportive aspects—can function as key drivers in forming urban character and reputation. Practically, the findings encourage more strategic investment in iconic architecture as a tool for city brand communication, strengthen the rationale for heritage preservation beyond cultural considerations alone, and support the systematic integration of aesthetic factors as essential components of urban planning and development.

Keywords:
Iconic architecture
Visual appeal
City branding
Surakarta



This is an open access article under the [CC–BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

1. Introduction

These days city branding is really important for the sustainable of cities. Cities need to make themselves more interesting to get people to visit and invest in them [1] - [2]. The awareness to build the strategies increase aware that the built environment especially iconic architectural landmarks significantly influences public perception and strengthens a city's appeal to both tourists and potential investors [3], [4], and [5]. Building with iconic and symbolic qualities of architecture are now closely intertwined with the wider narrative of urban identity, serving as a key medium through which cultural values and representations are communicated [6] - [7].

Surakarta, also known as “Solo,” is widely recognized for its rich cultural heritage in Central Java, Indonesia, and is promoted through the branding tagline “Solo, the Spirit of Java.” This identity is strongly supported by the city's heritage architecture, particularly traditional landmarks such as Keraton Kasunanan and Pura Mangkunegaran, which serve as key historical and cultural site [5], [8] Nevertheless, while iconic newly developed structures like the Sheik Zayed Grand Mosque and revitalized heritage sites like Lokananta and Pracima Tuin began to emerge in Surakarta in 2022, the city still faces challenges in translating the architectural significance into an effective and coherent city branding strategies [5], [9].

*Corresponding author.

E-mail: marindanoorfajrina.np@uny.ac.id

<https://doi.org/10.21831/inersia.v22i1.82029>

Received 6 January 2025; Revised 19 May 2026; Accepted 30 May 2026

Available Online 31 May 2026

Research about the relationship between architecture and city branding is well-established. Yet, the specific mechanisms through which visual aesthetic elements such as colour, ornament, and form contribute to the formation of city brand identity, image, and experience remain insufficiently theorized [10]. This gap represents a critical oversight, as aesthetic attributes are often the primary means through which audiences encounter and interpret iconic buildings, particularly in the digital age where represent on social media platforms.

While Surakarta possesses numerous iconic architectural structures after the priority project, the city's branding strategy has not systematically leveraged the aesthetic dimensions of these buildings. Currently the branding of Surakarta efforts to emphasize cultural narratives and historical significance without adequately addressing how specific visual elements contribute to brand perception. This represents a missed opportunity, as empirical research demonstrates that aesthetic attributes of architectural elements directly influence visitor perception and urban memory formation [11]. The aesthetics and materiality of iconic buildings serve as powerful meaning generators that inform perceptions of both physical visitors and digital audiences about the unique character of a city [11]. Furthermore, architecture has been established as one of the most effective tools in formulating and communicating distinctive city images, functioning as both an identity definer and a promotional instrument that shapes cultural meanings of urban places [12]. More specifically, this paper help to understand the mechanisms through which color, ornament, and form influence the three primary dimensions of city branding: identity, image, and experience.

This research aims to achieve two primary objectives. Developed an aesthetic branding analysis framework that systematically maps the relationship between visual aesthetic attributes of iconic architecture and their impacts on city brand dimensions. Then formulated a conceptual model of aesthetic based on branding formation that explains the process through which visual elements dialectically shape public perception and urban narratives, thereby contributing to overall city brand development. Finally, the findings offer guidance for urban planners, architects, and city administrators in strategically designing and promoting iconic buildings as effective branding assets. Furthermore, the conceptual model can be applied to other heritage cities seeking to strengthen their urban identity through architectural intervention.

2. Methods

This research used qualitative thematic analysis of online reviews as an approach to examine how visual aesthetic elements of iconic architecture contribute to city branding formation [13]. This method is particularly suited to the present study because it allows researchers to access authentic, spontaneous expressions of visitor perceptions and emotional responses to architectural spaces as documented in social media platform.

Due to the limited availability of structured social media datasets, purposive sampling was employed, the data was collected with a purposive sampling strategy from visitor reviews in the online travel platform called TripAdvisor. This platform was chosen because of: (1) its extensive repository of user-generated content provides a large sample size for robust analysis; (2) its focus on travel experiences ensures that reviews contain detailed narratives about visitor perceptions of architectural sites; and (3) its global reach allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives from both domestic and international visitors. There are three procedure of data analyse the data refer in Figure 1.

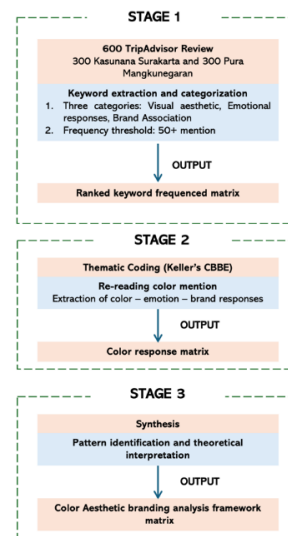


Figure 1. Method Stage 1

Based on Kozinet, the method of netnography approach that are some criteria for data selection. The criteria are public account and have relevant and meaningful review to the research context, enabling a deeper representation of the practices, narratives, and experiences being analyzed [14].

2.1 Sample and Time Period

This paper used 600 review from the platform and equally divided between the two case study sites: Keraton

Kasunanan Surakarta and Pura Mangkunegaran. All reviews were collected from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2024 and collect in data excel, This sample size was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, where additional reviews no longer yield new themes or insights.

2.2 Selection Criteria

The screening process was set the inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to filter for reviews that contained rich, descriptive data related to architectural aesthetics and brand perception after collecting the data. The criteria are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria for Review Selection

Criteria Type	Specification
Inclusion	1. Minimum Length of 50 Words
	2. Explicit Mention of Architectural or Aesthetic Elements
	3. Reviews in English or Indonesian
	4. Reviews from Individual travelers
Exclusion	1. Reviews Shorter than 50 Words
	2. Service-Only Focus
	3. Duplicate or Bot-Generated Content
	4. Ambiguous or Irrelevant Content

2.3 City Branding in the Context of Tourism and Urban Development

City branding is a planned by cities to create and share unique identities that set them apart in competitive global markets. As described in urban discussion, city branding is the intentional construction of a unique story, visual identity, and experience that make a city an attractive place for tourists, residents, and investors to visit [15], [16].

City branding have multifaceted objective. First, it serves a differentiation function, enabling cities to distinguish themselves from competitors by highlighting unique cultural, historical, or architectural attributes [17]. Second, it establishes emotional connections with audiences through the creation of memorable experiences and narratives. Finally, loyalty relationship was created with positive associations. In the context of urban tourism, city branding increasingly aligns with the broader vision of sustainable tourism development [18] - [19].

To achieve this, city branding typically involves multiple stakeholders including government agencies, private developers, cultural institutions, and local communities who collectively shape and communicate the city's public image. Within tourism, city branding functions not only to generate positive perceptions, but also to frame authentic

experiences that encourage repeat visits and longer stays, ultimately contributing to tourism revenue and cultural exchange.

2.4 Iconic Architecture as a Branding Asset

The discussion of architecture have many field of study, so it's necessary to understand and know what kind of iconic architecture are being considered. Many experts in architecture define iconic architecture as buildings that are not only recognized for their unique and memorable forms but are also rich in powerful symbolic meaning [3]. However, in the context of tourism, iconic architecture is simply a structure that typically has a silhouette different from what is usually seen in everyday life. Based on this, the definition of iconic architecture already differs depending on the context, but when viewed functionally, the iconic architectural approach has similarities where a building is not just a building but must go beyond its functional purpose. From there, it then developed into a symbol of the city's identity, cultural pride, and shared memory for the community.

When viewed in the urban context, iconic architecture serves as a key to the success of the city regeneration process. The successful development of iconic architecture can be considered a catalyst in the economic and cultural sectors [3]. This clearly demonstrates that iconic architecture can also serve as a city landmark closely tied to the city's values. Moreover, they used it as an asset to generate tangible economic benefits thru increased tourism, rising property values, and expanded business opportunities [20].

The Kasunanan Hadiningrat Palace, the Mangkunegaran Palace, and the Syeikh Zayed Grand Mosque, built in 2022, are some of the architectural buildings in Surakarta, serving as a catalyst to support tourism. Based on previous research, this building reflects diverse building characteristics [5]. This diversity shows the complex iconic form of the city, so this iconic asset needs to collectively communicate an identity in accordance with Surakarta's city branding.

2.5 Visual Aesthetic Characteristic in Architecture: Colour, Form and Ornament

After discussing the definition, it is necessary to identify the visual characteristics of iconic architecture so that the observation's unit of analysis can be easily determined. As is known, the visual aspect is an important aspect in the iconicity of a building, making it important to discuss this aspect. How visual aspects can interact and be interpreted.

This subsection will explain how the visual characteristics related to color, ornament, and building shape can serve as image stimuli. As per the background, these elements function as visitor attractions in UGC; the intensity of color, shape, and ornament can be used as content and shared by visitors [21], [22]. Based on the interaction between elements and visitors in the digital platform, it can expand the reach of a city's branding image [23].

Color is one of the characteristics of iconic architecture. The presence of color is often the first stimulus felt by visitors, making it a powerful element in the affective process of shaping experience. Color can provide the initial stimulus before the building's form, details, and function are further understood by visitors [24]. Therefore, it is concluded that the presence of color in buildings can be felt emotionally, not just cognitively. The initial impression that arises can be lasting and create an emotional bond with a person. In the case study of existing buildings in the city of Surakarta itself, color is related to the traditions present in the city of Surakarta. For example, in the Kasunanan Solo Palace building, the choice of colors reflects local identity and cultural uniqueness, often referred to as local color [25].

Kraton and Pura Mangkunegaraan in Surakarta city have facades dominated by the color blue. Symbolically, the blue and white colors on the Surakarta kraton represent the balance between heaven and earth. Not only in Indonesia, a similar phenomenon is also found in India. India is also a country rich in culture. One of the buildings named Hawa Mahal uses orange as the color for its facade. Orange is a strong color that reflects the local cultural character [26] - [27].

Visual characteristics as markers of a building's iconic status, beside color, are ornaments. Ornament is a visible marker that can be seen directly. Ornaments not only serve to enhance esthetic value but also enrich the local cultural value [28]. The presence of ornaments on a building's facade can influence visitors' perceptions, ranging from their association with authenticity, historical value, and esthetic sophistication. Ornaments rich in symbolic value serve as distinctive markers in supporting city branding strategies [29]. The intended markers can be present due to their complex shapes.

The more complex and unique the shape of the ornament, the closer the observation it can encourage and make it a photo or content background [30]. In the realm of digital tourism activities, ornaments can appear as photo backgrounds [30]. A previous study showed that ornamentation on buildings significantly affects the

spread of photos on social media, particularly Instagram [31]. So, what happens on social media has become part of modern tourism activities.

Its silhouette, scale, and spatial configuration are indicators of a building's form and mass elements. These three indicators can clearly represent the dimensions architecturally. Buildings with unusual structural typologies and strong symbolic value can influence visitor perception [32]. Examples of monumental-scale buildings like the Burj Khalifa and the Burj Al Arab in Dubai.

The visual elements of the building indirectly symbolize Dubai as a modern and advanced place [21]. This is also in line with what is happening in the city of Surakarta, where the form of iconic architectural silhouettes reflects certain perceptions. The palace building has a symmetrical facade silhouette with the characteristic silhouette of traditional Javanese buildings. Meanwhile, the Mangkunegaran temple uses construction elements that emerge from the textual meaning of concepts and language [33]. The appeal of the Sunanate palace buildings is partly due to their unique architectural form, which features a cultural blend of Javanese and European silhouettes [34]. The intricate and magnificent pillar shapes in the palace create an impression that is both grand and esthetic. This blend of styles offers tourists a unique and complex visual experience.

2.6 Dimension of City Branding: Identity, Image and Experience

City branding operates across three interconnected dimensions: Identity refers to the distinctive characteristics and values that define a city. It is the "essence" of what the city represents, communicated through its cultural heritage, architectural heritage, and contemporary aspirations [35]. Iconic architecture contributes to identity formation by embodying and visually representing core urban values [21]. Image refers to the collective perceptions held by external audiences about the city.

City Image based on tourist activities is formed through multiple channels direct experience, media representation, social media narratives, and word-of-mouth communication. Iconic architecture shapes image by providing visual content that circulates through these channels, creating consistent visual associations with the city [36]. The affective process; the direct sensory and emotional encounters that audiences have with the city [35]. This includes physical visits to iconic sites as well as digital experiences through photographs, videos, and

social media content. The aesthetic qualities of iconic architecture directly affect the visual sensory quality and memorability of these experiences.

2.7 Customer Based Brand Equity Framework

Branding is a strategy used by manufacturers with the ultimate goal of customer loyalty. That goal can be achieved if the strategic communication process is delivered well. In the context of this research, the producers are the government and the consumers are tourists. The Surakarta city government has a branding strategy to make Solo the soul of Javanese culture, or with the tagline "Solo, the Spirit of Java".

As is known, visual elements can influence the experience and perception of tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to know the extent to which this phenomenon is accepted, whether it is still in line with what was conceptualized by stakeholders, or whether it has changed. A theoretical approach is needed to interpret what is happening in the digital tourism phenomenon. The Customer-Based Brand Equity Framework (CBBE) is needed to address this. Branding generally originates from discussions in management science, but is beginning to be adapted into an urban context. There are 4 stages to achieve consumer loyalty, starting with brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and finally, brand relationship [37]. Figure 2 shows a further explanation related to CBBE.

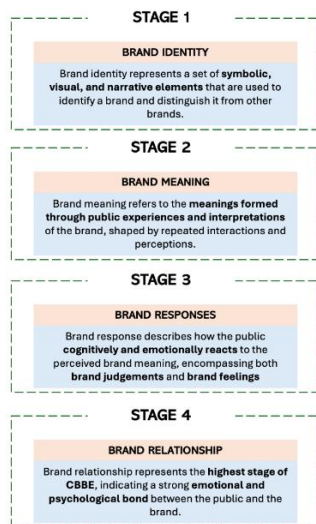


Figure 2. CBBE Stages

Based on CBBE, popularized by Keller, the strength of a brand lies in what can be seen, felt, and learned over time. The model developed by Keller provides a framework aimed at understanding how brands are built and developed to build brand equity.

3. Result and discussion

This chapter will discuss the results of the analysis related to the analysis of tourist comments on the Tripadvisor platform. The discussion will reveal how the visual elements of iconic architectural characteristics (color, ornament, form, and mass) are perceived by tourists and whether they align with the branding concept desired by the government. Based on the existing comments, they will be translated according to how brand equity is formed.

Table 2 shows some example of the findings organized according to Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework, explaining the CBBE concept on the cases consecutively based on the level.

Table 2. Response on the CBBE level

CBBE Level	Definition	Observable Indicators in Reviews	Example Review Excerpt
Brand Response (Judgements)	Cognitive evaluations	Mentions of "beautiful", "impressive", "authentic", "elegant"	"The architecture is truly impressive and authentic..."
Brand Response (Feelings)	Emotional reactions	Mentions of "peaceful", "awed", "fascinated", "connected"	"I felt a deep sense of peace and connection to history..."

The findings indicate that the visual aspect of tourism assets, specifically iconic buildings, plays a crucial role in building brand equity. This is demonstrated in the comments from the two objects used as the unit of analysis. Pura Mangkunegaran shows a stronger brand identity, with 42.7% supported by the visual elements of its ornaments. Meanwhile, the Kasunanan Surakarta palace is superior in brand perception by 27%. The history and culture of the palace tend to contribute to how architectural elements can contribute to its image.

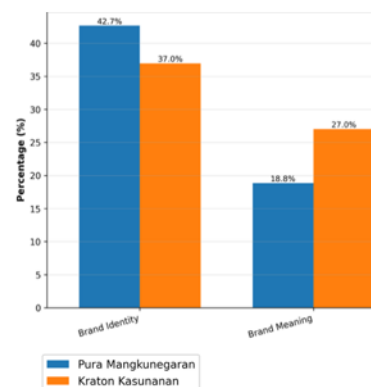


Figure 3. Overall Result of Brand Identity and Meaning

3.1 Colour as Visual Element in Customer-Based Brand Equity

In the literature review, these results support the idea that color plays a role in the fundamental layers of identity formation for a brand. Color-related comments appeared 26 times in the observation unit of Pura Mangkunegaran. Gold is the most frequently mentioned color in the references, with 19 reviews directly mentioning its association with brand identity recognition. The gold color present at the Mangkunegaran Palace is a distinctive color palette that contributes to the visual impression for visitors. As one visitor noted, "The gold decoration throughout the palace creates an unforgettable first impression," highlighting how color directly influences the formation of brand salience.

The Kasunanan Surakarta Palace provided different data results, with a more diverse chromatic vocabulary. Gold appeared 38 times (28 mentions of identity), while blue (biru) was mentioned 14 times (10 mentions of identity), and white (putih) appeared 9 times (7 mentions of identity). The color blue is highly significant in the identity of the Kasunanan Palace, as it represents a deliberate architectural choice that distinguishes this palace from other heritage sites. Visitor comments illustrate this: "The blue and white facade of the Kasunanan Palace immediately identifies it as a place of historical significance and cultural importance".

Although gold is the most frequently mentioned color in the reviews. However, based on the results of further analysis that looked at more than just the number of words that appeared. The use of blue by the Kasunanan Palace as a secondary color creates a more complex visual identity. The chromatic complexity of the blue color presented by this palace contributes to a stronger brand identity differentiation, as visitors can more easily distinguish the Kasunanan Palace from other architectural landmarks through its unique color combination.

The role of color in fostering brand loyalty and repeat visit intention is evident in the mention of relationship levels. For the Mangkunegaran Temple, the mention of gold in the context of brand relationships appears in 8 meanings (diagram 4) associated with recommendations and the intention to revisit. Visitors expressed statements such as "The golden beauty of this palace makes it worth recommending to friends and family" and "I will definitely return to experience the grandeur again."

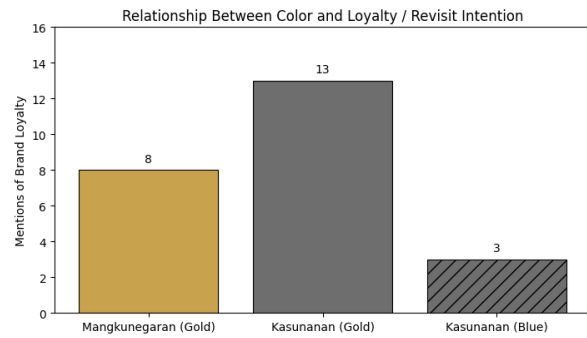


Figure 4. Color Contribution on Loyalty

In Figure 4, the relationship between colors in the Surakarta palace and colors in the context of loyalty or relationships can be seen (13 for gold, 3 for blue, slightly lower, indicating that although color contributes to initial appeal, other factors (such as condition and accessibility) may be more influential in determining loyalty. However, visitors who specifically appreciate the symbolic meaning of colors express a stronger intention of loyalty, as reflected in visitor reviews such as "Understanding the meaning of blue and white deepened my connection to this place and made me want to return".

3.2 Ornaments as Visual Elements Based on Customer-Based Brand Equity

At the cognitive stage, the stimulus provided by the ornament is slightly different from color. Color operates on the macro visual aspect, while the ornament operates on the micro aspect. Closer and more detailed observation of the ornaments on the building is needed. Ornaments represent expression. Based on the analysis of UGC, the mention of ornaments found in reviews of Pura Mangkunegaran is categorized into 35 categories. 21 out of 25 reviews directly contribute to the direct mention of identity. The presence of this ornament certainly makes a substantial contribution, reflecting the complexity of the ornament.

Meanwhile, reviews related to ornaments for the Surakarta palace are slightly lower. There were only 12 direct mentions of ornamentation out of a total of 15 mentions. However, there are reviews that use specific mentions of ornaments such as relief works and sculptures. Reviews that are direct, like sentences. The reliefs tell the story of Javanese history and culture, making them a key introduction to the significance of this palace. Based on this, it is concluded that the ornaments found in the Mangkunegaran temple play a role in shaping identity due to the complexity of the carvings. When linked to CBBE, the ornamentation at Mangkunegaran Temple holds additional value for brand identity. Meanwhile, the

ornaments in the Surakarta Palace provide more meaning from the story behind their presence. Therefore, ornamentation serves as the primary vehicle for communicating cultural meaning, historical narratives, and philosophical principles. The symbolic content embedded in the ornamental forms creates layers of meaning that distinguish heritage architecture from contemporary buildings.

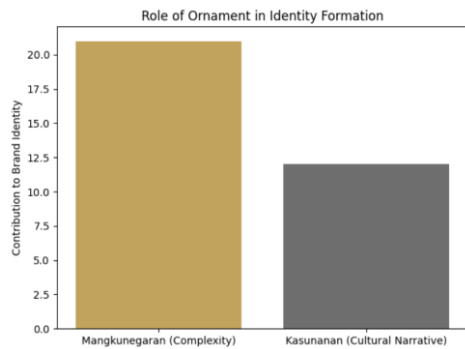


Figure 5. Ornament Contribution on Loyalty and Identity

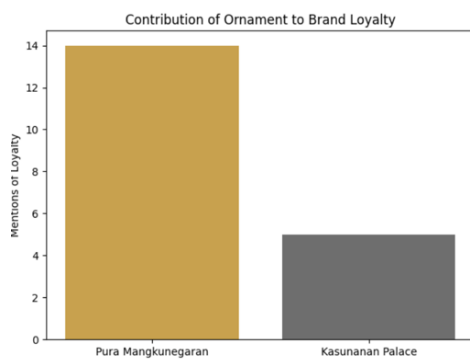


Figure 6. Ornament Contribution on Loyalty and Identity

The analysis results in Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that the visual elements of the ornament contribute to brand loyalty by creating a memorable esthetic experience and facilitating deeper cultural engagement. Based on the data, the expressions indicating loyalty to Pura Mangkunegaran related to ornaments total 14, with 6 mentions of the ornaments and 8 details. Reviews indicating loyalty are expressed with phrases like "I want to come back to see the details of the ornaments." Slightly lower than Pura Mangkunegaran, the results of loyalty to the Kasunanan Palace only have 5 reviews. The reviews do show that ornaments alone are not enough to drive loyalty. For the case of the kraton, complementary factors are needed, such as improved accessibility or interpretive programs

3.3 Form and Massing Based on Customer-Based Brand Equity

Compared to the previous two elements, which tend to be two-dimensional, the elements of form and mass represent the quality of space in three dimensions in architectural

design. Therefore, the operational analysis of reviews includes architectural elements as well as the spatial organization of the building. In this context, the architectural forms referred to are specific elements such as doors, columns, and roofs.

The overall architectural form and the specific elements (doors, columns, roofs) serve as the main identifiers in shaping the brand identity of both palaces. There are 75 architectural review data points for the Mangkunegaran Temple, 49 of which directly contribute to brand identity. This proportion highlights the strong role of the palace silhouette, roof profile, and overall massing as easily recognizable visual markers. Drawn deeper into the discussion of architecture, it is also revealed with more specific language. Mentions related to specific elements also strengthen identity, especially doors, windows, and komom, which were mentioned 16 times (10 times related to identity). The specific mention of curved elements enriches the formal visual vocabulary in architectural aspects.

At the Kasunanan Palace, the data shows that mentions related to architecture appear more frequently. The 87, with 69 directly related to brand identity, indicates a stronger reliance on the overall form. The complex silhouette with double pavilions and layered spaces forms a more elaborate formal identity. The specific element of the door is the most dominant element, mentioned 36 times, with 21 of those mentions contributing to brand identity. Based on this data, when viewed from the perspective of brand meaning and cultural associations, Pura Mangkunegaran recorded 24 mentions of meaning, reflecting a synthesis of Javanese architectural principles influenced by European styles. This is evident from the symmetrical massing geometry, balanced proportions, and spatial hierarchy. Conversely, the Kasunanan Palace exhibits an intensity of meaning that is almost twice as high, with 45 mentions. In the unit of analysis, the kraton is discussed more extensively in reviews that mention its hierarchical spatial organization and the procession's spatial arrangement, which communicate many reviews linking it to Javanese cosmology. Narrowed down to examine the emotional responses, the data source from the Mangkunegaran Palace recorded a total of 28 mentions of responses, the majority of which were positive, related to the harmony of proportions, the balance of massing, and the well-maintained condition of the buildings. Specific elements such as doors (6 mentions in responses) and curved elements (1 mention in responses) trigger esthetic appreciation. The Kasunanan Kraton records 45 mentions of responses, indicating a more complex reaction. Thus,

the architectural form is appreciated for its grandeur and historical value, but issues of physical condition and accessibility have led to criticism. The door (12 response mentions) received mixed responses, with some praising its monumentality and others criticizing its maintenance. Regarding the brand relationship and loyalty aspect, Pura Mangkunegaran recorded 21 mentions, primarily related to repeat visit intentions and recommendations based on esthetic appreciation. The Kasunanan Palace records 23 mentions, with loyalty more often driven by cultural significance and historical awareness, including visitors' commitment to preservation.

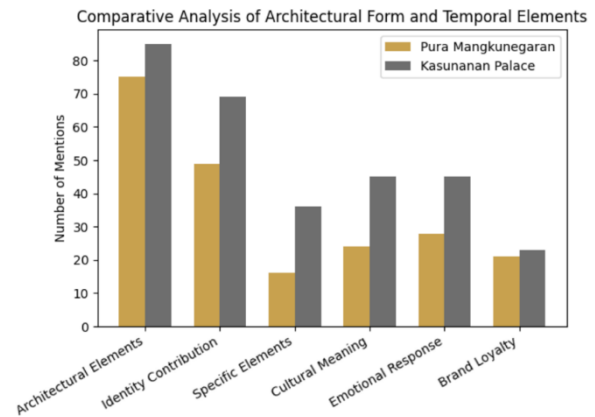


Figure 7. Comparative Element of Mass and Shape Between Two Case Study

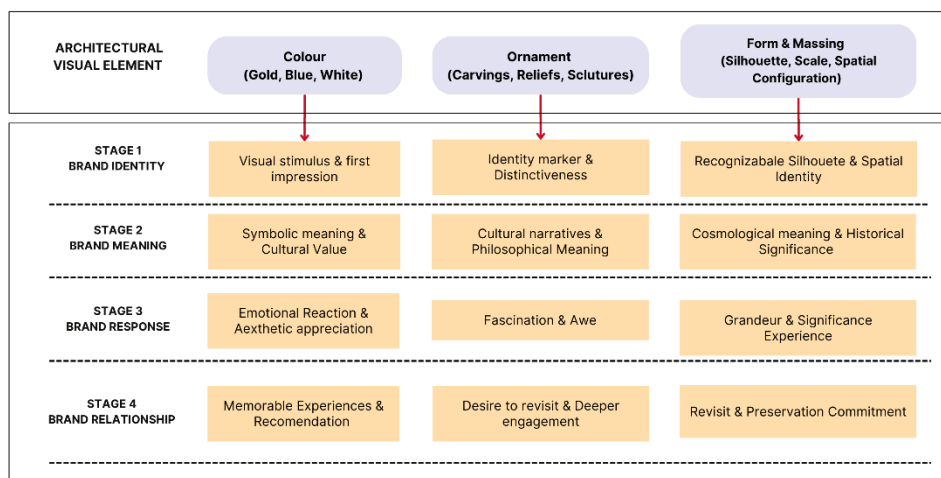


Figure 8. Contribution of Architectural Visual Elements to Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Levels

3.4 Comparative Analysis: Visual Elements and CBBE Integration

Integrated analysis of color, ornament, and form shows that visual elements work as a unified system in shaping architectural brand equity at both palaces in Figure 8.

These elements do not operate in isolation, but rather mutually reinforce each other in building a coherent brand perception. Pura Mangkunegaran represents a visual strategy oriented toward esthetic excellence, characterized by the dominance of gold color, rich ornamentation, and refined formal proportions. The integration of these three elements results in a brand identity that emphasizes visual beauty and quality craftsmanship, which further elicits a consistently positive brand response from visitors.

Conversely, the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace showcases a visual strategy that focuses on cultural meaning and historical significance. The use of symbolic colors (blue and white), meaningful ornaments, and complex spatial organization builds a brand identity rooted in cultural

authenticity and historical narratives. This approach resulted in strong brand associations with Javanese philosophical and civilizational values. Overall, the findings confirm that the brand equity of heritage architecture is not determined by the strength of a single visual element, but rather by the overall coherence of the visual system and its alignment with brand positioning strategies, visitor expectations, and cultural values

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that the visual elements of architecture, particularly color, ornamentation, and form and massing, play a key role in shaping the brand equity of heritage destinations in Surakarta. The findings indicate that visitors do not perceive aesthetic elements solely as decoration, but rather as a system of signs that build identity, produce cultural meaning, trigger emotional responses, and foster brand relationships such as recommendations and repeat visit intentions. Thus, brand strengthening does not rely on a single specific visual element, but rather on the integration and coherence

between visual elements as a unified strategy. Moreover, this study novelty is a conceptual model that elucidates how the aesthetic elements of iconic architecture namely colour, ornament, and form contribute to the formation of city brand equity through two distinct branding strategies, which subsequently generate outcomes in the form of a coherent city image, enriched visitor experience, and

enhanced heritage preservation value. Furthermore, the model demonstrates that this process operates as a continuous reciprocal cycle, wherein the outcomes reinforce and reshape the perception of the architectural visual elements over time in Figure 9.

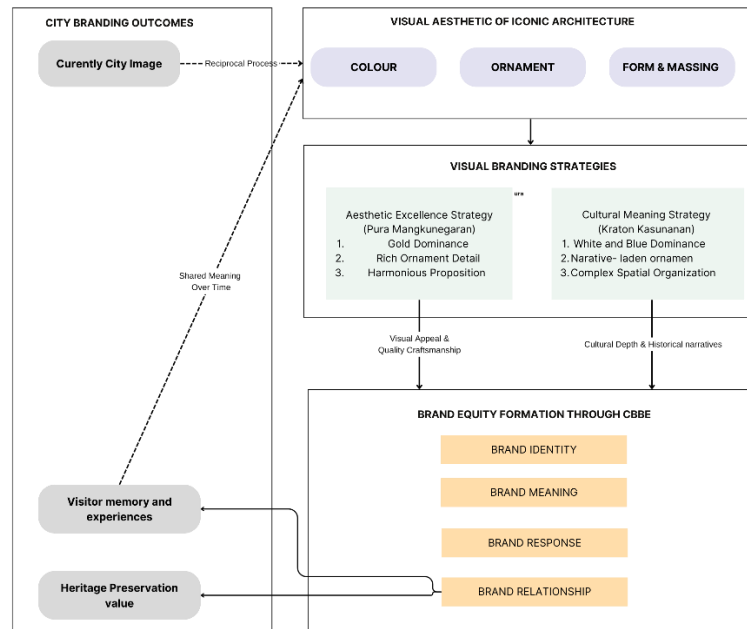


Figure 9. Conceptual Model of Aesthetic-Based Brand Equity Formation in Heritage Architecture

At the Mangkunegaran Palace, visual strategies tend to be oriented toward esthetic excellence and formal elegance. The striking color palette, the richness of ornamental detail, and the harmonious proportions create a visually recognizable identity that consistently elicits a positive response from visitors. The esthetic experience in this place serves as the main trigger for forming impressions, feelings of awe, and the desire to return, thus brand equity develops through the power of visual appeal and perceived quality of craftsmanship.

Meanwhile, the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace showcases a visual strategy more centered on cultural meaning and historical significance. The color choices rich in symbolism, the narrative-laden ornaments, and the complex spatial organization create an identity rooted in cultural authenticity and historical memory. As a result, visitors tend to link their experiences with philosophical meanings and Javanese civilization values. However, emotional responses to the Kraton are also more diverse because visitors' experiences are influenced by aspects of physical condition and accessibility, which in some cases enhance or diminish the quality of the experience.

Comparatively, both palaces equally demonstrate that visual elements can be a primary driver of brand equity

formation, but through different paths. Pura Mangkunegaran is more effective at building equity through aesthetic consistency and visual quality that elicit positive responses, while Kraton Kasunanan is stronger at building equity through the depth of cultural meaning and historical narratives that strengthen brand associations and value attachment. Therefore, this research confirms that the success of heritage architecture-based city branding is not determined solely by visual grandeur or uniqueness, but rather by how these visual elements are coherently orchestrated to shape an experience, meaning, and city image that aligns with visitor expectations and local cultural values

References

[1] M. Grębosz-Krawczyk, "Place branding (r)evolution: the management of the smart city's brand," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol. 17, Mar. 2021, doi: 10.1057/s41254-020-00167-2.

[2] M. N. F. N. Putri and T. M. Sunarharum, "Tinjauan Literatur Peran Smart Visual Identity dalam Membangun Branding Smart City," *Jurnal Lingkungan Binaan Indonesia*, vol. 14, no. 2, Jun. 2025, doi: 10.32315/jlbi.v14i2.448.

- [3] R. El Messeidy, "Architecture and City Branding: Role of Iconic buildings," 2019.
- [4] B. H. H. Al-Majidi and A. samari Ibrahim, "Role of iconic architecture in sustainable tourism development," *Al-Esraa University College Journal for Engineering Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 167–196, Jun. 2021, doi: 10.70080/2790-7732.1017.
- [5] A. Della Puspitasari, D. C. Natalia, M. Marsudi, and S. Marmoah, "Pura Mangkunegaran dan Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta sebagai Sarana Wisata Edukasi Sejarah," *Jurnal Abdimas Pariwisata*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 55–70, 2025, doi: 10.36276/jap.v5i2.481.
- [6] A. Mengoni, "Visual Semiotics," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Image Studies*, 2021, pp. 641–654. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-71830-5_39.
- [7] A. A. Amini and B. Adibzadeh, "The role of visual preferences in architecture views," *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 122–127, Sep. 2020, doi: 10.3846/jau.2020.12582.
- [8] A. D. Ipmawati and O. Hodijah, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Arsitektur Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed Solo Sebagai Destinasi Wisata Religi Roland Barthes ' Semiotic Analysis of the Architecture of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Solo as a Religious Tourism Destination," *JICN: Jurnal Intelek dan Cendekiawan Nusantara*, vol. 1, no. 5, pp. 8065–8075, 2024, [Online]. Available: <https://jicnusantara.com/index.php/jicn/article/view/1446/1597>
- [9] O. P. Angga Purnama, "EVALUASI PENERAPAN ARSITEKTUR TIMUR TENGAH PADA MASJID RAYA SHEIKH ZAYED SOLO Dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Iklim Tropis dan Konteks Budaya Setempat," *Jurnal SENTHONG*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 520–529, 2025.
- [10] Y. N. Al-Betawi and H. B. Abu Ehmaid, "Branding Cities Through Architecture: Identify, Formulate, and Communicate the City Image of Amman, Jordan," *Architecture*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sep. 2025, doi: 10.3390/architecture5030050.
- [11] A. Zamparini, G. Gualtieri, and F. Lurati, "Iconic buildings in the making of city identity: The role of aspirational identity artefacts," *Urban Studies*, vol. 60, no. 12, pp. 2474–2495, 2023, doi: 10.1177/00420980221144157.
- [12] Y. N. Al-Betawi and H. B. Abu Ehmaid, "Branding Cities Through Architecture: Identify, Formulate, and Communicate the City Image of Amman, Jordan," *Architecture*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sep. 2025, doi: 10.3390/architecture5030050.
- [13] R. Kozinets V, "Netnography : The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research," *Netnography: Redefined*, no. 416, pp. 1–52, 2020.
- [14] P.-Y. Kozinets, Robert V. Earley, Dolbec and Amanda, "Netnographic Analysis: Understanding Culture through Social Media Data," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sixth., Sage Publication, 2023, p. 262.
- [15] S. Anholt, *Competitive Identity: Brand Management for Nations*. 2007.
- [16] M. Kavaratzis, "From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands," 2004.
- [17] B. 'Baker, *Destination Branding for small City (the essential for succesful place branding)*. Orgeon: Creative Leap book, 2007.
- [18] M. Kavaratzis and G. J. Ashworth, "CITY BRANDING: AN EFFECTIVE ASSERTION OF IDENTITY OR A TRANSITORY MARKETING TRICK?," 2005.
- [19] S. Gönüllüoğlu and S. Arslan Selçuk, "City branding in the context of architecture, tourism, culture, and cultural identity interaction— bibliometric analysis of literature," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 2024, doi: 10.1057/s41254-024-00365-2.
- [20] B. Plaza, M. Esteban, I. Aranburu, and J. Johny, "Iconic Architecture As a Catalyst for Wine Tourism: a Case Study of Marques De Riscal," *European Countryside*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 168–182, 2024, doi: 10.2478/euco-2024-0010.
- [21] K. Elhagla, D. M. Nassar, and M. A. Ragheb, "Iconic buildings' contribution toward urbanism," *Alexandria Engineering Journal*, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 803 – 813, 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.aej.2020.01.020.
- [22] N. Li, F. Meng, and D. Martin, "The Distorted Gaze? Travel Photo Editing in the Social Media Era," *J. Travel Res.*, 2024, doi: 10.1177/00472875241274562.
- [23] S. Jojic, "City Branding and the Tourist Gaze: City Branding for Tourism Development," *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 150–160, 2019, doi: 10.2478/ejsr-2018-0066.
- [24] J. Outram, "Iconic Engineering: Reflections on the subject of colour in architecture, ornament and city planning," *Colour for Architecture Today*, pp. 99–105, 2020, doi: 10.4324/9781315881379-23.
- [25] M. S. Zuhri and I. P. Wardhana, "Symbolic Meaning in Tradition The Malem Selikuran of Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat, Indonesia," *Sabdasastra : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Jawa*, vol. 8,

- no. 2, p. 124, Sep. 2024, doi: 10.20961/sabpbj.v8i2.91464.
- [26] J. Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin : architecture and the senses*, 3rd ed. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1988.
- [27] C. Morganti, "Contemporary-Temporary Lexicon: Lifeguard Towers of Miami," in *Springer Tracts in Civil Engineering*, vol. Part F3500, 2024, pp. 173–187. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-65104-5_9.
- [28] F. Zahra and S. B. Shahir, "Spiritual Aesthetics of Islamic Ornamentation and the Aesthetic Value in Islamic Architecture," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 164–175, 2022, doi: 10.32350/jitc.121.08.
- [29] M. Wang and Z. Jia, "Investigating the correlation between building façade design elements and tourist satisfaction - Cases study of Italy and the Netherlands," *Habitat Int.*, vol. 144, Feb. 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.habitatint.2024.103001.
- [30] M. Nastasi and D. Ponzini, "Toward a photographic urbanism?," 2018, pp. 217–231. doi: 10.4324/9781315163956-17.
- [31] V. López-Chao and V. Lopez-Pena, "Aesthetical appeal and dissemination of architectural heritage photographs in instagram," *Buildings*, vol. 10, no. 12, pp. 1–15, Dec. 2020, doi: 10.3390/buildings10120225.
- [32] A. H. Alganawi and A. Ibrahim, "The Role of Mayadeen (Roundabouts) in City Branding: The Case of Jeddah," *The International Research & Innovation Forum*, 2023, doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-44721-1_20.
- [33] Sunarmi, "Puro Mangkunegaran Building as a Representation of the Javanese Palace, Indonesia," 2022.
- [34] H. Bagja Prasthia, A. P. Agustiananda, and R. B. Santosa, "Akulturasi dalam arsitektur jawa di Yogyakarta Fasad berpedimen dalam arsitektur jawa di Kraton Yogyakarta dan Dalem Notonegaran," 2023.
- [35] K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*. London: MIT Publisher, 1960.
- [36] J. Urry and J. Larsen, "The Tourist Gaze 3.0," 2011.
- [37] L. K. Keller, *Strategic brand management*, vol. 5, no. 6. 2013. doi: 10.1057/bm.1998.36.