

# *City Branding through Cultural Experiences: Analysis of Branding Strategies in the 2024 Solo International Performing Arts Festival*

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the city branding strategy implemented through the Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA) 2024 Festival as part of efforts to shape the image of Surakarta City as a center of arts and culture. The festival serves as an important medium for expressing local cultural identity while establishing global communication through cross-border artistic performances. This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method, which includes participatory observation, in-depth interviews with organizers, artists, and visitors, as well as analysis of visual documentation and festival promotional materials. The findings reveal that SIPA 2024 is not merely an arts performance event but is also utilized as an effective city branding strategy through three key aspects: cultural narrative, cultural tourism experiences, and the creation of inclusive public interaction spaces. The festival successfully reinforces Surakarta's image as an open, creative, and globally recognized cultural city. These findings underscore the importance of cultural events as strategic communication tools in city branding based on local wisdom and community participation.

**Keywords:** city branding, city image, cultural festival, SIPA 2024, cultural experience, communication strategy

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization and increasingly fierce competition between cities, city branding has become an important strategy in building identity, attracting tourists, and developing the creative economy [1]. Cities no longer compete solely on infrastructure or public services but also on how they represent themselves through symbols, culture, and the unique experiences they offer. One approach that is gaining prominence is the use of cultural experiences—including performing arts and cultural festivals—as a medium for shaping and communicating a city's image. Surakarta (Solo) is one of the cities in Indonesia that actively leverages its cultural wealth as a strategic asset to strengthen its city identity [2]. The Solo International Performing Arts Festival (SIPA), which has been held regularly since 2009, is one of the international cultural events showcasing performing arts from various countries. This festival is not only a platform for cultural expression but also a tool for cultural diplomacy and a city branding instrument. However, the effectiveness of SIPA as a city branding strategy requires further in-depth analysis [3]. How are the cultural experiences presented in this festival packaged to build the city's image? Are the visual, narrative, and symbolic messages in the festival capable of forming a positive perception of Solo City in the eyes of the local and international public? To what extent has the festival succeeded in representing the city's inclusive, creative, and globally competitive identity? These issues are important to examine, given that cultural festivals are no longer merely entertainment or tourism events but also serve as complex

strategic communication tools [4]. In this context, understanding branding strategies through cultural experiences is crucial, particularly in examining the relationship between visual elements, cultural narratives, and city branding objectives.

City branding is a strategic process that involves creating and promoting a unique identity for a city in order to attract residents, businesses, and tourists [5]. It encompasses a range of activities, from designing logos and slogans to implementing marketing campaigns and fostering community engagement. The importance of city branding cannot be overstated, as it can help differentiate a city from its competitors, drive economic growth, and enhance quality of life for residents. In today's globalized world, cities are constantly vying for attention and investment, making effective branding more crucial than ever.

City branding is not just about creating a catchy logo or slogan; it is about crafting a narrative that captures the essence and values of a city [6]. This narrative must resonate with both residents and visitors, conveying a sense of authenticity and uniqueness. Successful city branding campaigns often highlight a city's history, culture, and natural beauty, showcasing what sets it apart from other destinations. By creating a strong brand identity, cities can attract new businesses, talent, and investment, ultimately driving economic growth and prosperity. Additionally, a well-defined brand can instill a sense of pride and belonging among residents, fostering a strong sense of community and civic engagement [7].

An important study by Richards and Wilson (2004) shows that cultural festivals significantly contribute to strengthening city identity, enhancing tourist appeal, and creating an authentic city narrative in the eyes of the global community [8]. In the Indonesian context, research by Kartika and Sulistyarini (2018) highlights that local cultural festivals such as the Baliem Festival in Papua and the Dieng Cultural Festival in Central Java have successfully increased regional visibility through a strong cultural approach in regional marketing strategies [9]. The city of Surakarta, or Solo, is one example of an Indonesian city actively leveraging its cultural wealth as part of its city branding strategy. Through the regular holding of the Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA), the city government not only introduces local culture to the international community but also builds the city's narrative as a center for performing arts and interculturalism. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Dewi (2021), conclude that SIPA plays a significant role in shaping public perception of Solo's image as a modern cultural city open to global diversity [10].

The 2024 Solo International performing art event aims to capitalize on these principles of city branding by showcasing the best of what our city has to offer [11]. From our rich history and diverse culture to our stunning natural landscapes, this event will highlight all the unique aspects that make our city stand out. By bringing together residents and visitors alike, we hope to create a sense of unity and pride in our community. Through this event, we aim to not only attract attention and investment to our city but also to foster a deeper connection among all who call it home.

This event will feature a variety of activities and attractions, including live music performances, art exhibits and culinary experiences. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore different neighborhoods, learn about local businesses, and participate in community workshops and discussions [11]. Additionally, the 2024 Solo International performing art event will serve as a platform for local artists, musicians, and entrepreneurs to showcase their talents and promote economic growth within our city. With a focus on sustainability and inclusivity, we are committed to creating an event that reflects the values and aspirations of our community.

However, there are still gaps in research regarding an in-depth examination of how cultural experiences in festivals such as SIPA are constructed and communicated as a city branding strategy, as well as the extent to which elements of performance, symbolism, and public participation can shape the city's image in a sustainable manner. Therefore, it is important to analyze city branding strategies through a semiotic approach and cultural experiences in the SIPA festival to comprehensively understand the festival's role in city identity development in the contemporary era.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how the Solo International Performing Arts Festival is used as a city branding strategy through cultural experiences, as well as to examine the construction of meaning and representation displayed in the festival in the context of city branding.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using the case study method, as it aims to delve deeply into how city branding strategies are implemented through cultural experiences at the Solo International Performing Arts Festival (SIPA) 2024 [12]. This type of research is descriptive-analytical, meaning it explains the phenomenon of city branding and branding strategies through data collected from participants, documents, and observations. The research location is in the city of Surakarta, specifically the area where SIPA 2024 is held at Benteng Vastenburg and its surroundings.

The research period runs from July to October, covering the time before, during, and after the festival. In-depth interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders such as city officials, event organizers, and local businesses to gain insights into their branding strategies and goals. Surveys will be distributed to event attendees to gather feedback on their perceptions and experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of cultural events on city branding [13]. Additionally, social media engagement will be analyzed using tools such as sentiment analysis and reach metrics to assess the online visibility and engagement of the events. By triangulating these different sources of data, we will be able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of city branding through cultural events [14].

This data-driven approach will not only help us understand the current state of city branding efforts, but also provide valuable insights for future planning and decision-making [15]. By identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement, we can tailor our strategies to better align with the goals and values of the city. Through this thorough analysis, we aim to enhance the overall impact of cultural events on city branding and ultimately contribute to the growth and success of the city as a whole..

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the SIPA organizing committee, the Surakarta City Tourism Office, local and international artists, festival visitors, and business operators around the event location. Participatory observation activities were conducted by directly observing the festival process, visitor interactions, performance content, visual narratives, cultural symbols, and promotional media.

Secondary data was obtained through visual documentation (posters, photos, performance videos), the official SIPA website and social media accounts, activity reports from local government, and previous academic studies related to city branding, cultural festivals, and city image [16].

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The justification of the chosen approach lies in the need to ensure that city branding efforts are not only effective in the short term, but also sustainable in the long term. By conducting a thorough analysis of the current state of city branding and identifying areas for improvement, we can tailor our strategies to better align with the goals and values of the city. This approach will not only enhance the impact of cultural events on city branding, but also contribute to the overall growth and success of the city as a whole. Moving forward, it is crucial to consider the branding strategies used in the 2024 Solo Interna event and how they can be applied to future city branding initiatives.

One key aspect to consider is the level of community engagement and participation in cultural events. By involving local residents and businesses in the planning and execution of these events, we can create a sense of ownership and pride in the city's cultural identity. Additionally, leveraging social media and digital marketing platforms can help amplify the reach and impact of these events, attracting a wider audience and generating positive buzz around the city. Furthermore, partnerships with local artists, organizations, and sponsors can provide additional resources and support to ensure the success of future cultural events and enhance the city's overall brand image.

This collaborative approach not only fosters a sense of community and connection among residents, but also helps to showcase the diverse talents and creativity present in the city. By highlighting the unique cultural offerings and traditions of the community, we can attract tourists and visitors who are interested in experiencing the rich cultural heritage of the city. Through strategic partnerships and innovative marketing strategies, we can continue to grow and expand the cultural events calendar, making the city a vibrant and dynamic destination for both residents and visitors alike.

The Solo International Performing Arts Festival (SIPA) 2024 is not only a platform for international performing arts but also a strategic tool in shaping the image of Surakarta as a culturally open city embracing global collaboration. From a city branding perspective, SIPA leverages local cultural elements such as Javanese traditional arts, heritage sites (Vastenburg Fortress), and the city's narrative as a creative space.

Based on observations and interviews, it was found that city branding strategies are implemented through three main approaches:

### 1. Visual and Symbolic Narratives

The festival consciously uses cultural symbols (batik, traditional dance, gamelan) in promotional visuals, stage design, and performer costumes. This reinforces local identity and establishes Solo as a dynamic center of Javanese culture .

### 2. Direct Cultural Experience

Visitors are not merely spectators but are actively engaged in various interactive activities such as art workshops, SME exhibitions, and Solo-style culinary experiences. These immersive experiences create emotional memories that reinforce positive perceptions of the city.

### 3. Digital Communication Strategy

The SIPA organizers actively share the festival's narrative and documentation through social media, video teasers, and collaborations with local influencers. Digital channels are used to reach a wider audience and shape the city's image as modern yet rooted in tradition.

From the government's perspective, the Surakarta City Tourism Office uses SIPA as an opportunity to promote Solo as a cultural tourism destination while demonstrating the city's readiness to host international-scale events. This strategy aligns with the city branding framework emphasizing the importance of consistent messaging, cultural differentiation, and audience experience.

Thus, SIPA 2024 successfully became a strategic platform for constructing the image of Surakarta as a culturally rich, globally open, and creative city. Through a cultural experience approach, the festival not only strengthened the city's identity but also expanded its cultural diplomacy network with other countries.

promotion of the city can provide valuable insights into what has been successful in attracting visitors and fostering a sense of community pride. By analyzing past campaigns and initiatives, we can identify areas for improvement and develop new strategies to further elevate the city's cultural profile. Additionally, exploring the impact of cultural experiences on the overall economic development of the city can help us make informed decisions on where to allocate resources and focus our efforts. By continuously evaluating and refining our approach to incorporating cultural experiences into the branding and promotion of the city, we can ensure that we are effectively leveraging our unique cultural assets to drive tourism, economic growth, and community engagement. This approach requires collaboration with local artists, cultural organizations, and community stakeholders to ensure that our efforts are inclusive and representative of the diverse voices and perspectives within the city. By fostering partnerships and creating opportunities for cultural exchange, we can create a vibrant and dynamic cultural scene that attracts visitors and residents alike. Through targeted marketing campaigns, strategic partnerships, and innovative programming, we can showcase the city's cultural richness and diversity to a global audience, positioning it as a premier destination for arts and culture. Additionally, by measuring the impact of our cultural initiatives through data collection and analysis, we can track progress, identify successes, and make data-driven decisions to continuously improve and expand our cultural offerings.

implemented in the lead-up to the 2024 Solo International Performing Arts Festival will be crucial in determining the overall impact of city branding on the event. By analyzing key metrics such as visitor numbers, revenue generated, and media coverage, we can assess the success of our branding efforts and identify areas for improvement in future events. Additionally, gathering feedback from attendees and participants will provide valuable insights into the perception of our city as a cultural destination and help guide our branding strategy moving forward. Ultimately, the success of the 2024 Solo International Performing Arts Festival will serve as a

testament to the power of effective city branding in attracting visitors, stimulating economic growth, and fostering a sense of community pride.

By analyzing key performance indicators such as ticket sales, social media engagement, and press mentions, we can measure the impact of our branding efforts on the festival's overall success. This data will allow us to make informed decisions on where to allocate resources and how to tailor our messaging for future events. Additionally, soliciting feedback from attendees and participants through surveys and focus groups will provide valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions of the festival. This qualitative data will help us understand what aspects of the event resonated most with our target audience and what areas may need improvement in terms of branding and programming [17].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Solo International Performing Arts Festival (SIPA) 2024 plays a strategic role in building and strengthening the image of Solo as a city of culture at both the national and international levels. Through an experiential marketing and place branding approach, the festival has proven capable of creating a positive perception of the city's identity.

The cultural experiences offered—through cross-national art performances, local community participation, the use of historic public spaces (Vastenburg Fortress), and the cultural narratives highlighted—have become key elements in forming emotional attachment and city image in the minds of visitors.

Visual communication strategies, social media, and collaborations between artists and the government also contribute to expanding the festival's reach and strengthening the city's branding. These findings show that Solo's image is not only built through the cultural symbols displayed but also through active community involvement and visitors' direct experiences at the festival. Thus, SIPA 2024 serves not only as an artistic event but also as an effective branding tool to promote Solo as an open, dynamic, and multicultural city.

Recommendations for future iterations of the festival. By analyzing the feedback and data collected, we can make informed decisions on how to enhance the overall attendee experience and further solidify the festival's reputation as a must-attend event in the city. The insights gained from this evaluation process will not only benefit the planning and execution of future events, but also contribute to the overall success and sustainability of the festival in the long run. In conclusion, by continuously seeking feedback and actively engaging with our audience, we can ensure that the festival remains a dynamic and vibrant celebration that resonates with attendees for years to come. Moving forward, we will be implementing a more comprehensive feedback system that includes surveys, focus groups, and direct conversations with attendees. This will allow us to gather a wide range of perspectives and suggestions for improvement. Additionally, we will be analyzing data from ticket sales, social media engagement, and vendor feedback to identify areas of strength and areas for growth. By taking a proactive approach to feedback collection and analysis, we can stay ahead of trends and ensure that the festival continues to evolve and meet the needs and desires of our audience.

One key implication for future city branding efforts is the importance of incorporating feedback from events like the festival into overall marketing strategies. By listening to the voices of attendees and understanding what they value most about the event, city officials can better tailor their messaging and promotions to highlight those unique aspects. This not only strengthens the festival itself, but also enhances the city's reputation as a vibrant and engaging destination. Additionally, by continuously seeking feedback and making improvements based on that feedback, the city can build a loyal following of attendees who will eagerly return year after year, further solidifying its position as a must-visit location.

This approach not only helps to attract new visitors to the festival, but also fosters a sense of community and pride among residents. As word spreads about the event's success and the positive experiences shared by attendees, more people will be drawn to the city to experience the festivities for themselves. In turn, this increased tourism can have a positive impact on the local economy, boosting revenue for businesses and creating new opportunities for growth and development. Overall, by prioritizing the needs and preferences of festival attendees, city officials can create a win-win situation that benefits both visitors and residents alike.



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