

Participatory Digital Heritage Branding: Transforming Government-Centered Communication Through Generation Z Co-Creation in BandungAlamsyah¹, Eli Jamilah Mihardja²^{1,2} Master of Communication Science, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Universitas Bakrie, Indonesia**Article History**

Received : 26 August 2026
Revised : 28 August 2026
Accepted : 2 September 2026
Published : 2 September 2026

Corresponding author*:

Alamsyah

Contact:

alamdudu88@gmail.com

Cite This Article:

Alamsyah, & Mihardja, E. J. (2026). Participatory Digital Heritage Branding: Transforming Government-Centered Communication Through Generation Z Co-Creation in Bandung. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 5(05), 8–17.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.56127/jukim.v5i05.3068>

Abstract: Contemporary city branding remains dominated by government-centered, one-way communication, while Generation Z increasingly creates and shares city narratives through digital platforms. Previous Indonesian studies rarely integrate participatory communication, digital storytelling, user-generated content (UGC), and Generation Z within heritage branding. **Objective:** This study aimed to analyze the shift toward participatory city branding and formulate the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM) for Bandung Heritage. **Method:** A qualitative literature review and conceptual analysis of 31 scholarly sources published between 2000 and 2024 was conducted using thematic coding, conceptual synthesis, and model-building. **Findings:** The study identified a shift toward multidirectional communication, with digital storytelling and UGC strengthening authentic heritage narratives and Generation Z acting as co-creators. **Implications:** Local governments should act as facilitators of participatory digital ecosystems. **Originality:** PDHBM integrates government strategy, Generation Z, digital storytelling, UGC, public engagement, and heritage brand image within one conceptual framework.

Keywords: City Branding; Participatory Communication; Digital Storytelling; User-Generated Content; Generation Z; Heritage Tourism; Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM).

INTRODUCTION

Cities are increasingly required to establish distinctive identities and reputations in response to growing competition for tourists, investment, creative industries, human capital, and cultural recognition. Within this context, city branding has developed beyond the conventional use of logos, slogans, and promotional campaigns into a strategic process of constructing and communicating a city's identity through policies, culture, public experience, stakeholder interaction, and reputation management (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Anholt, 2007, 2009). Kavaratzis (2004, 2008) emphasizes that city branding is formed through interconnected dimensions of urban development, institutional communication, and stakeholder perceptions rather than through promotional activities alone. This perspective is further strengthened by the identity-based approach of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), which considers place identity to be continuously constructed through interactions among internal and external stakeholders. Accordingly, contemporary city branding requires a multi-stakeholder orientation in which local governments, residents, businesses, communities, visitors, and other actors jointly contribute to the construction of place meaning and reputation (Govers & Go, 2009; Zenker & Braun, 2017). This shift is particularly important for cities whose competitive identity is strongly associated with cultural and historical assets because authentic experiences and stakeholder participation can provide a more sustainable foundation for place reputation than promotional communication alone.

Bandung represents a relevant context for the development of heritage-based city branding because its urban identity is closely associated with historical architecture, cultural landscapes, creative communities, and important historical areas such as Braga, Asia Afrika, Gedung Sate, and Gedung Merdeka. Cultural heritage includes monuments, buildings, sites, and other cultural assets whose historical and social significance should be protected and transmitted to future generations (UNESCO, 1972). From a tourism perspective, heritage is not merely a physical resource but also an experiential and interpretative asset

through which visitors engage with the history, culture, architecture, and collective identity of a destination (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). The growing importance of cultural heritage tourism also indicates that historical resources can contribute to destination competitiveness when they are communicated through meaningful narratives and visitor experiences (UNWTO, 2022). However, the potential of Bandung Heritage cannot be strengthened solely through institutional promotion. Its heritage identity must be communicated in ways that connect historical values with contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations who increasingly interact with destinations through digital platforms. Therefore, the strategic challenge is not only how the government promotes Bandung's heritage assets, but also how these assets can become part of a shared and continuously reproduced urban narrative involving communities and digital audiences.

The development of digital communication has fundamentally transformed this relationship between government, citizens, tourists, and city identity. In the network society, individuals are no longer positioned solely as recipients of institutional information because digital networks enable them to produce, distribute, reinterpret, and circulate information independently (Castells, 2010). Social media further facilitates interactive communication and allows users to create and exchange content based on their own experiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Consequently, tourism communication has increasingly shifted toward participatory practices in which photographs, short videos, reviews, podcasts, personal narratives, and other forms of user-generated content contribute to destination perceptions. Jenkins (2006) conceptualizes this phenomenon as participatory culture, in which audiences simultaneously function as consumers and producers of media content, while digital storytelling provides a mechanism for integrating text, images, audio, video, and personal experience into narratives capable of generating emotional engagement (Lambert, 2013). This transformation is particularly relevant to Generation Z, whose familiarity with digital technology, visual communication, collaboration, and social media makes this cohort strategically important in contemporary digital communication (Prensky, 2001; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). From a co-creation perspective, value is not produced exclusively by an institution but emerges through interaction between organizations and their stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Thus, Generation Z can potentially move beyond being a promotional target and become a *co-creator* and *digital ambassador* who actively constructs and disseminates narratives about Bandung Heritage.

Previous studies in Indonesia have demonstrated the importance of government communication, cultural programs, social media, and stakeholder involvement in city branding, yet several limitations remain. Faradies (2020) examined Pekalongan's *World's City of Batik* branding and highlighted the central role of governmental planning, implementation, and evaluation, while Romli and Romli (2020) identified communication and public involvement challenges in the implementation of the *Bandung Juara* city brand. Lestari and Agustiningsih (2020) demonstrated the role of cultural events in strengthening tourism identity, whereas Sumarni et al. (2024) emphasized social media and collaboration with cultural actors in promoting cultural tourism. More recently, Triwulang, Amah, and Dupe (2025) highlighted digital communication in government branding within the Smart City context. Although these studies provide an important foundation, the existing literature remains predominantly focused on government-led communication, official promotion, events, or digitalization, while the integration of participatory communication, digital storytelling, user-generated content, heritage tourism, and Generation Z as active producers of city narratives remains insufficiently developed. Strategic communication theory also suggests that effective communication requires research, strategy formulation, appropriate tactics, and continuous evaluation rather than one-way message dissemination (Smith, 2021). Therefore, the research gap addressed in this study concerns the absence of an integrated conceptual framework that explains how government communication can be transformed into participatory digital communication by positioning Generation Z as a co-creator of heritage-based city branding. To address this gap, this study aims to analyze the transformation of city branding communication from a *government-centered communication* approach toward *participatory communication* in the digital era and to formulate the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM). The proposed model integrates government communication strategy, participatory culture, digital storytelling, user-generated content, and Generation Z participation to strengthen the image of Bandung Heritage. The novelty of the study lies in repositioning the government from the dominant producer of city-branding messages to a facilitator of a participatory communication ecosystem, while positioning citizens—particularly Generation Z—as strategic partners in producing, disseminating, and negotiating authentic narratives of Bandung's cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a literature review and conceptual analysis to examine the transformation of city branding communication from a government-centered model toward participatory communication in the digital era and to formulate the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting, comparing, and synthesizing theoretical perspectives and previous research rather than statistically testing relationships among predetermined variables. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore meanings, concepts, relationships, and emerging patterns within a specific social and communication context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In this study, the literature was treated as the primary source of research data and was analyzed to identify conceptual developments in strategic communication, city branding, heritage tourism, participatory culture, digital storytelling, user-generated content (UGC), and stakeholder co-creation. The conceptual orientation was particularly directed toward understanding how these theoretical domains can be integrated to explain participatory digital communication in the context of Bandung Heritage.

The literature selection was conducted purposively based on its conceptual relevance to the research objectives. The sources included scholarly books, journal articles, previous empirical studies, institutional publications, and other academic references addressing city branding, place branding, strategic communication, digital communication, heritage tourism, participatory culture, digital storytelling, social media, Generation Z, and co-creation. Priority was given to publications that provided theoretical foundations or empirical evidence directly related to the construction and communication of city identity. Foundational works were retained when they represented major theoretical perspectives required for the conceptual framework, including competitive identity and place reputation (Anholt, 2007, 2009), city branding communication (Kavaratzis, 2004, 2008), place-brand identity (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), network society (Castells, 2010), participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), digital storytelling (Lambert, 2013), social media and user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Literature concerning heritage tourism was also incorporated to establish the relationship between cultural heritage, visitor experience, and destination identity (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; UNESCO, 1972). More recent publications and Indonesian studies were subsequently used to contextualize these theoretical perspectives within contemporary city-branding practices.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to maintain the relevance of the literature to the conceptual objectives of the study. Literature was included when it: (1) addressed city branding, place branding, strategic communication, heritage tourism, digital communication, participatory culture, digital storytelling, UGC, Generation Z, or co-creation; (2) contributed theoretical concepts or empirical findings relevant to the transition from institutional communication toward stakeholder participation; (3) discussed communication practices applicable to urban identity, tourism, cultural heritage, or digital platforms; and (4) provided sufficient conceptual information to support comparative and thematic analysis. Foundational publications published before the contemporary digital era were retained when they represented essential theoretical references, while more recent studies were prioritized for interpreting current digital communication practices. Literature was excluded when its primary focus was unrelated to city branding, communication, tourism, cultural heritage, digital participation, or the development of the proposed conceptual model. This criterion also ensured that references without a clear analytical contribution to PDHBM were not used merely to increase the number of citations. Such purposive selection is consistent with qualitative research, in which information-rich sources are selected according to their relevance to the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2015).

The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic and conceptual synthesis. The analytical process consisted of several stages. First, the literature was organized according to the major theoretical domains of the study: strategic communication, city branding, heritage tourism, digital communication, participatory culture, digital storytelling, UGC, Generation Z, and co-creation. Second, the main concepts, arguments, findings, and limitations of each source were identified and compared. Third, recurring patterns and conceptual relationships were coded and grouped into broader analytical themes. The analysis particularly examined the changing role of government, the transition from one-way to many-to-many communication, public participation in producing destination narratives, the role of digital platforms, and the emergence of citizens as producers and distributors of city-branding messages. The process follows the logic of qualitative data analysis in which data are condensed, categorized, displayed, compared, and interpreted to generate meaningful patterns and conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The interpretation was

also conducted iteratively by comparing theoretical concepts with findings from previous studies so that the proposed model would not depend on a single theoretical perspective.

The Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM) was subsequently developed through conceptual integration of the themes identified during the analysis. Model development began by positioning the government communication strategy as the institutional foundation for defining heritage identity, communication objectives, target audiences, messages, media, and evaluation, consistent with the strategic communication perspective proposed by Smith (2021). This institutional component was then connected to the digital communication environment, in which communication is no longer controlled exclusively by government institutions but occurs through interconnected networks of users and stakeholders (Castells, 2010). The participatory dimension was derived from Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture, while the content-production mechanism was represented through digital storytelling and UGC (Lambert, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Generation Z was positioned as a potential co-creator and digital ambassador, reflecting its characteristics as a digitally connected generation (Prensky, 2001; Francis & Hoefel, 2018) and the principle that value can be jointly created through interactions between organizations and their stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). These components were conceptually integrated to explain how institutional city-branding communication can evolve into a participatory communication ecosystem for Bandung Heritage.

To enhance the credibility of the conceptual interpretation, the analysis employed source comparison and theoretical triangulation. Different theoretical perspectives and previous studies were compared to determine whether similar patterns emerged regarding stakeholder participation, digital communication, city identity, and heritage narratives. Triangulation is useful in qualitative research because interpretation can be strengthened when a phenomenon is examined through multiple sources or theoretical perspectives rather than a single analytical lens (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The final analytical framework therefore emerged from the intersection of strategic communication, city branding, heritage tourism, participatory culture, digital storytelling, UGC, and co-creation theories. The resulting PDHBM should consequently be understood as a conceptual model derived from literature synthesis rather than an empirically validated causal model. Its empirical validation through interviews, surveys, social-media analytics, observations, case studies, or mixed-method designs is recommended for subsequent research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformation from Government-Centered to Participatory City Branding

The literature synthesis indicates a fundamental transformation in city-branding communication from a government-centered communication model toward a participatory communication model. In the conventional approach, local governments primarily function as message producers, while citizens and tourists are positioned as audiences receiving information through official promotional channels. This approach is closely associated with promotional activities such as slogans, logos, advertisements, cultural events, government websites, and official social-media accounts. However, city branding is fundamentally broader than promotional communication. Anholt (2007, 2009) argues that place reputation emerges from the interaction between identity, policy, culture, people, tourism, investment, and stakeholder experiences. Similarly, Kavaratzis (2004) explains that city branding involves primary, secondary, and tertiary communication, indicating that perceptions of a city are influenced not only by deliberate institutional promotion but also by people's experiences and informal communication.

The findings from previous Indonesian studies demonstrate that governmental institutions have generally remained the dominant actors in city-branding communication. Faradies (2020), for example, identified planning, implementation, and evaluation by the local government as central elements in promoting Pekalongan as the *World's City of Batik*. Romli and Romli (2020) similarly highlighted the role of government communication in implementing the *Bandung Juara* brand, although limited public involvement and a weak sense of belonging were identified as challenges. Lestari and Agustiningsih (2020) demonstrated that cultural events could strengthen tourism identity, while Sumarni et al. (2024) highlighted the role of social media and collaboration with cultural actors in promoting cultural tourism. Triwulang, Amah, and Dupe (2025) further demonstrated the increasing importance of digital communication in government branding. Collectively, these studies indicate that Indonesian city-branding practices have gradually incorporated digital media and stakeholder collaboration, but the communication structure remains predominantly institution-led.

This pattern needs to be reconsidered within the contemporary digital communication environment. Castells (2010) explains that the network society enables individuals and institutions to simultaneously produce,

circulate, and interpret information through interconnected communication networks. Consequently, local governments no longer exercise exclusive control over narratives concerning a city's identity. Residents, tourists, communities, businesses, content creators, and other stakeholders can independently create representations of a city through social media and other digital platforms. From this perspective, city branding becomes a negotiated and continuously reconstructed process rather than a communication product entirely designed by government institutions.

For Bandung Heritage, this transformation implies a shift in the role of the Bandung City Government from the primary communicator toward a communication facilitator and ecosystem orchestrator. Government institutions remain important in defining strategic objectives, maintaining the accuracy of historical information, protecting cultural heritage, coordinating stakeholders, and evaluating communication programs. However, citizens and communities should be provided with opportunities to interpret and communicate heritage through their own experiences. This approach is consistent with Smith's (2021) strategic communication framework, which emphasizes formative research, strategy, tactics, and evaluative research. In a participatory environment, these stages should incorporate stakeholder perspectives rather than treating the public solely as the target of predetermined messages.

Digital Storytelling and User-Generated Content in Heritage Branding

The second major finding concerns the strategic role of digital storytelling and user-generated content (UGC) in transforming cultural heritage into accessible and emotionally meaningful city-branding narratives. Heritage tourism is fundamentally associated with the interpretation and experience of historical places, traditions, architecture, and cultural identity (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Therefore, the communication of heritage cannot rely exclusively on factual descriptions of buildings, historical dates, or conservation status. Heritage assets need narratives that connect historical significance with contemporary visitor experiences.

Digital storytelling provides a mechanism for constructing such narratives. Lambert (2013) describes digital storytelling as the integration of narrative with digital elements such as photographs, video, audio, text, and other multimedia components. Within Bandung Heritage, this approach can transform physical heritage assets into stories about architecture, historical events, cultural practices, local communities, and personal experiences. Braga, Asia Afrika, Gedung Merdeka, Gedung Sate, and other heritage areas can consequently be communicated not merely as physical tourism objects but as spaces containing social memories and cultural meanings.

Social media expands this process by allowing heritage narratives to circulate beyond institutional communication channels. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) emphasize that social media enables users to create, exchange, and respond to content interactively. Accordingly, photographs, short videos, travel reviews, personal stories, podcasts, and other forms of UGC can function as informal city-branding communication. Unlike official promotional materials, such content is generated from users' experiences and can therefore contribute to perceptions of authenticity.

This mechanism is particularly relevant to Kavaratzis' (2004) concept of tertiary communication. While secondary communication consists of deliberate promotional activities undertaken by city authorities, tertiary communication develops through word-of-mouth, media coverage, and stakeholder experiences. Digital platforms substantially amplify tertiary communication because individual experiences can now be disseminated to extensive online networks. Therefore, UGC should not be regarded merely as supplementary promotional content; it represents a structural component of contemporary city-branding communication through which the meaning and reputation of a place can be socially constructed.

Nevertheless, participatory content also presents a strategic challenge. Government institutions cannot completely control how heritage narratives are interpreted or represented by users. Participatory city branding should therefore balance creative freedom with the credibility of historical information. In the proposed approach, government institutions and heritage stakeholders can provide verified historical resources, digital archives, thematic narratives, and communication guidelines, while citizens and visitors retain the flexibility to translate those resources into creative digital content. This relationship enables institutional credibility and public creativity to complement rather than replace each other.

Generation Z as Co-Creator and Digital Ambassador

The third finding identifies Generation Z as a strategic actor in participatory digital heritage branding. The transformation of audiences from information recipients into content producers is consistent with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture. Within this environment, individuals participate in the production, circulation, and interpretation of media rather than functioning solely as passive consumers. This theoretical perspective provides an important basis for repositioning Generation Z within city-branding communication.

Generation Z has grown within a communication environment characterized by the widespread use of internet-based and digital technologies. Prensky (2001) describes generations familiar with digital technology as *digital natives*, while Francis and Hoefel (2018) emphasize characteristics of Generation Z associated with digital connectivity, visual communication, collaboration, and expectations of authenticity. These characteristics make Generation Z particularly relevant to heritage communication that relies on social media, visual narratives, and peer-to-peer interaction.

Within the Bandung Heritage context, Generation Z can therefore perform at least three interconnected communication functions. First, as content creators, they can transform heritage information and personal experiences into photographs, videos, reviews, podcasts, and other digital narratives. Second, as content distributors, they can extend the reach of heritage communication through their digital networks. Third, as meaning co-creators, they can reinterpret heritage according to contemporary cultural experiences and thereby connect historical assets with younger audiences.

This role corresponds with the concept of value co-creation proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), which suggests that value does not originate exclusively from organizations but is generated through interactions among multiple actors. Applied to city branding, the meaning and value of Bandung Heritage are not produced solely by government communication. They emerge through interactions among government institutions, heritage communities, residents, tourists, creative industries, and digital audiences. Generation Z can consequently function as a co-creator and digital ambassador, rather than simply a demographic segment targeted by promotional campaigns.

However, the term *digital ambassador* in this study does not necessarily imply a formally appointed government representative. Instead, it refers conceptually to young digital users who voluntarily participate in communicating heritage experiences and positive narratives through their networks. This distinction is important because the present study is conceptual and does not provide empirical evidence regarding an existing formal Generation Z ambassador program in Bandung.

Development of the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM)

The central result of this study is the formulation of the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM). The model was developed by synthesizing strategic communication, city branding, network society, participatory culture, digital storytelling, UGC, heritage tourism, and co-creation perspectives. Rather than conceptualizing city branding as a linear process in which the government communicates a predetermined city identity to passive audiences, PDHBM conceptualizes heritage branding as a collaborative communication ecosystem.

The first component of PDHBM is Government Communication Strategy. Government institutions provide the strategic foundation by defining communication objectives, identifying stakeholders, ensuring the credibility of heritage information, coordinating relevant actors, selecting communication channels, and evaluating communication outcomes. This component reflects Smith's (2021) strategic communication framework and maintains the institutional responsibility of government without positioning it as the sole producer of city-branding narratives.

The second component is the Participatory Communication Ecosystem. This component represents the transition from centralized communication toward interconnected communication involving government, residents, heritage communities, academics, creative industries, tourists, media, and digital users. The component is theoretically supported by Castells' (2010) network society and Jenkins' (2006) participatory culture. In this ecosystem, communication flows in multiple directions and allows different stakeholders to produce and negotiate meanings associated with Bandung Heritage.

The third component is Generation Z as Co-Creator and Digital Ambassador. Generation Z acts as a strategic participant capable of translating heritage information into communication formats that are

compatible with contemporary digital culture. Their participation connects institutional heritage narratives with peer-to-peer communication and younger digital audiences. The co-creator position is consistent with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) proposition that value emerges through interaction rather than being produced exclusively by organizations.

The fourth component consists of Digital Storytelling and User-Generated Content as the principal mechanisms of content production and circulation. Digital storytelling transforms historical information and personal experiences into multimedia narratives (Lambert, 2013), while social media enables these narratives to be produced, shared, discussed, and redistributed by users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Through these mechanisms, Bandung Heritage communication can move beyond formal promotional messages toward more diverse and experience-based representations.

The fifth component comprises the expected communication outcomes: public engagement, authentic heritage experience, and stronger Bandung Heritage brand image. Govers and Go (2009) argue that place identity involves constructed, imagined, and experienced dimensions, while Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) emphasize the dynamic interaction between identity and stakeholder perceptions. Therefore, a stronger heritage brand is expected to emerge when institutional identity and stakeholder experience become interconnected through continuous communication.

Conceptually, these relationships can be summarized as follows:

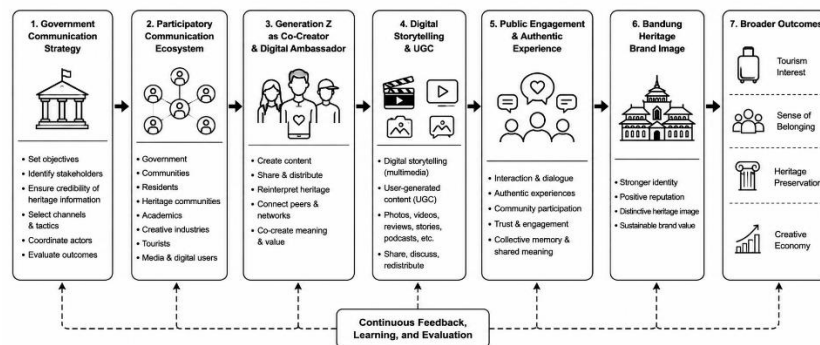


Figure 1. Government Communication Strategy and Participatory Communication Ecosystem in Strengthening Bandung Heritage Brand Image

Figure 1. Flowchart illustrating the government communication strategy that builds a participatory communication ecosystem by positioning Generation Z as co-creators and digital ambassadors. Through digital storytelling and user-generated content, this strategy encourages public engagement and creates an authentic heritage experience, ultimately strengthening Bandung's heritage brand image.

The model further proposes that a strengthened Bandung Heritage image may contribute to broader outcomes such as tourism interest, sense of belonging, heritage awareness, cultural preservation, and support for the creative economy. However, because the present study is based on literature synthesis and conceptual analysis, these relationships represent theoretical propositions rather than empirically tested causal relationships. Therefore, the arrows within PDHBM should be interpreted as proposed conceptual relationships requiring subsequent empirical validation.

Theoretical Implications

The principal theoretical implication of PDHBM is the integration of previously fragmented perspectives into a single conceptual framework for digital heritage city branding. Traditional place-branding literature emphasizes reputation, identity, communication, and stakeholder interaction (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), while digital communication literature emphasizes networks, participation, and user-generated communication (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Heritage tourism literature further emphasizes cultural meaning and visitor experience (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). PDHBM connects these perspectives by proposing that contemporary heritage branding occurs through the interaction between institutional strategy and participatory digital practices.

The model therefore extends the conceptual position of citizens within city branding. Citizens are not merely stakeholders whose perceptions must be managed; they are actors who can actively produce and circulate representations of the city. This perspective supports the transition from communication to audiences toward communication with and through audiences. In this sense, PDHBM conceptualizes city identity as a dynamic outcome of interaction between institutional narratives, stakeholder experiences, and digitally mediated public participation.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, PDHBM suggests that the Bandung City Government should not abandon institutional communication but redesign its role within a broader participatory ecosystem. Official communication remains necessary to provide credible information, strategic direction, heritage education, and coordination. However, it can be complemented by mechanisms that facilitate participation by heritage communities, universities, creative-industry actors, tourists, and particularly Generation Z.

Potential applications include participatory digital storytelling programs, heritage-content collaborations, community-based digital campaigns, curated UGC initiatives, and opportunities for younger audiences to reinterpret historical narratives through contemporary digital formats. Such programs should maintain historical accuracy while allowing creative expression. The government can therefore function as a facilitator, curator, connector, and evaluator, while participating stakeholders contribute experiences, narratives, and digital content.

This approach has the potential to make Bandung Heritage communication more interactive and socially embedded. Rather than presenting heritage solely as a collection of historical buildings, participatory communication can connect heritage with collective memory, contemporary urban experiences, creative culture, and community identity. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these proposed strategies cannot be concluded from the present conceptual study and should be examined empirically through subsequent research involving relevant stakeholders and digital audiences.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the transformation of city-branding communication from a government-centered approach to a participatory communication model in the digital era and proposed the Participatory Digital Heritage Branding Model (PDHBM) for the context of Bandung Heritage. The findings from the literature synthesis demonstrate that contemporary city branding can no longer depend solely on one-way promotional communication in which local governments function as the primary producers and controllers of city narratives. The development of digital media has enabled citizens, tourists, heritage communities, creative actors, and other stakeholders to participate actively in producing, interpreting, disseminating, and negotiating representations of the city. Accordingly, the role of government has evolved from that of a dominant communicator to that of a facilitator, coordinator, curator, and orchestrator of a participatory communication ecosystem.

The main conceptual contribution of this study is the development of PDHBM, which comprises the following interconnected elements: Government Communication Strategy, Participatory Communication Ecosystem, Generation Z as Co-Creator and Digital Ambassador, Digital Storytelling and User-Generated Content, Public Engagement and Authentic Heritage Experience, and Bandung Heritage Brand Image. The model conceptualizes Generation Z not merely as a target audience but as an active co-creator of heritage narratives and a potential digital ambassador for Bandung. Through digital storytelling and user-generated content, Generation Z can contribute contemporary perspectives on heritage and facilitate the circulation of these narratives across digital platforms. The model further suggests that the interaction between institutional communication and citizen-generated content may enhance the authenticity, relevance, visibility, and distinctiveness of Bandung Heritage branding. In the longer term, a strengthened heritage brand may support tourism development, public attachment to place, heritage preservation, and the growth of the creative economy.

Theoretically, PDHBM contributes to the city-branding literature by integrating strategic communication, place branding, participatory culture, digital storytelling, network society, user-generated content, heritage tourism, and value co-creation within a single conceptual framework. Practically, the model indicates that the Bandung City Government should adopt communication strategies that facilitate meaningful

collaboration with heritage communities, academic institutions, creative-industry actors, tourists, and Generation Z. Initiatives such as participatory digital storytelling, community-based campaigns, collaborative heritage-content production, and the strategic curation of user-generated content may help transform historical information into accessible, engaging, and authentic digital narratives while preserving the accuracy and credibility of heritage-related information.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Its conceptual and literature-based design does not provide empirical evidence concerning the causal relationships among the components of PDHBM or the model's effectiveness in strengthening Bandung Heritage branding. Therefore, PDHBM should be regarded as a theoretical framework and a proposition for further investigation rather than as an empirically validated model. Future studies should test the model through qualitative interviews, surveys, social-media content analysis, engagement analysis, case studies, or mixed-method research involving government institutions, heritage communities, Generation Z, tourists, and other relevant stakeholders. Comparative research involving other heritage cities would also be useful for assessing the model's applicability, contextual adaptability, and potential generalizability across different city-branding and cultural settings.

REFERENCES

- Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anholt, S. (2009). *Places: Identity, image and reputation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ashworth, G. J., & Tunbridge, J. E. (2000). *The tourist-historic city: Retrospect and prospect of managing the heritage city*. Elsevier.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Faradies, H. I. (2020). Strategi komunikasi city branding pemerintah Kota Pekalongan dalam mempromosikan world's city of Batik. *COMMICAST*, 1(1), 20–25. doi:10.12928/commicast.v1i1.2413
- Francis, T., & Hoefel, F. (2018). *True Gen: Generation Z and its implications for companies*. McKinsey & Company.
- Govers, R., & Go, F. M. (2009). *Place branding: Glocal, virtual and physical identities, constructed, imagined and experienced*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004). From city marketing to city branding: Toward a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding*, 1(1), 58–73. doi:10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990005
- Kavaratzis, M. (2008). From city marketing to city branding: An interdisciplinary analysis with reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(1), 58–73.
- Kavaratzis, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2013). The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory*, 13(1), 69–86.
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing places: Attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states, and nations*. The Free Press.
- Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Lestari, S. P., & Agustiningsih, G. (2020). Strategi city branding melalui gelaran budaya Tari Sparkling sebagai komunikasi pariwisata Kota Surabaya. *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Bisnis*, 8(1), 20–29. doi:10.46806/jkb.v8i1.646
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.
- Romli, R., & Romli, N. A. (2020). Implementasi strategi komunikasi “Bandung Juara” sebagai bagian dari city branding Kota Bandung. *PROfesi Humas: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Hubungan Masyarakat*, 4(2), 263–289. doi:10.24198/prh.v4i2.23547
- Smith, R. D. (2021). *Strategic planning for public relations* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Sumarni, L., Yuningsih, S., Jaya, H. W., & Hasna, S. (2024). Strategi komunikasi city branding Kota Tangerang dengan promosi wisata budaya Kali Pasir. *Jurnal Komunika Islamika: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Kajian Islam*, 11(1), 12–28. doi:10.37064/jki.v11i1.21238
- Timothy, D. J., & Boyd, S. W. (2003). *Heritage tourism*. Pearson Education.
- Triwulang, I., Mas’Amah, & Dupe, F. (2026). Strategi komunikasi branding Pemerintah Kota Kupang dalam mewujudkan Kupang Smart City. *MUKASI: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 5(1), 439–447. doi:10.54259/mukasi.v5i1.6232
- UNESCO. (1972). *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage*. UNESCO.
- UNWTO. (2022). *Global report on cultural heritage tourism*. World Tourism Organization.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17. doi:10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036
- Zenker, S., & Braun, E. (2017). Questioning a “one size fits all” city brand: Developing a branded house strategy for place brand management. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(3), 270–287. doi:10.1108/JPMD-04-2016-0018