

Decoding City Branding Through Social Media: Overseas Student Perceptions of an Instagram Account

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Abstract. Instagram can be used as a mass communication media that can reach a wide audience in the digital world, and Instagram users can be categorized as an active audience to play a role in giving meaning to various accounts, including the official account of Sparkling Surabaya (@surabayasparkling). The purpose of this research is to look at Sparkling Surabaya's Instagram account as City Branding of Surabaya. This type of research is descriptive qualitative. The object of this research is Sparkling Surabaya Instagram and the subject of this research is students who are followers of the Surabaya Sparkling Instagram account. The determination technique uses purposive sampling, with data obtained from in-depth interviews. The method used in this research is encoding-decoding reception analysis method by Stuart Hall, where reception includes perception, thinking, preference, and interpretation. The results obtained from this study indicate that different receptions/meanings by informants based on the experiences and backgrounds of each informant are influenced by internal and external factors of the informants, namely Instagram Sparkling Surabaya is considered still lacking in providing information about the city of Surabaya.

Keywords: reception analysis, city branding, instagram

1 Introduction

Along with the development of information communication technology, competition between countries or even between cities, in introducing their tourism and cultural potential. One of the popular strategies in increasing excellence and introducing the potential of a city is called City Branding. Simon Anholt said City Branding is a management to create a city image with strategic innovation and supported by coordination from all aspects, such as economic, social, cultural, commercial, and city government regulations. [1] The main goal of City Branding is the development of cultural arts which will have an impact on trade, industrial centers, and even education, it can improve the welfare of the community. This strategy was chosen as an effort in global competition in the tourism and cultural sectors that can highlight the special characteristics possessed by the region and supported by the existing regional potential. The development of the tourism sector in a region will certainly have an impact on other sectors such as improvements in infrastructure, increased regional assets and increased labor. Because tourism is one of the sectors in the region whose activities provide a large income to the region. [2]

City Branding can also be used as an identity for an area, or it can be said that City Branding is an effort to increase tourist attraction or highlight the unique culture of the region. According

to Prasetyo, 2012 in [3] City Branding makes it easier for city owners to introduce their city to the target market, namely investors, events, talents, tourists using positioning sentences, slogans, icons, exhibitions and other media. City Branding is a strategy in selling tourist attractions and culture by using the uniqueness of an area. Many regions that use City Branding strategies make Surabaya also apply City Branding in introducing itself as a city that has something unique. Starting from the end of 2005 "Surabaya Sparkling" was introduced to the Surabaya public in the inaugural meeting of the Surabaya "Tourism Promotion Board". [4]. According to Chaniago City Branding is an effort in shaping the brand of a city to make it easier for the city to introduce itself. [5]. City Branding is a brand that must be visualized and visible to stakeholders. [6]. So City Branding is a way to create a brand for the city so that its existence can be known and accepted by the community.

The development of technology in this era of globalization has a great influence on many aspects, and the biggest one is used in a marketing process. [7]. In Ardianto's book (2007) the Internet appears and becomes a necessity for audiences in communicating and searching for information. [8]. The acceleration of information is also felt by almost all groups, especially students, it can be seen from the large number of student interest who mostly seek information through social media, this is also supported by the covid pandemic disaster which has caused an online lecture system that utilizes social media and the internet. [9]. Not only that, social media is also used by students to find their identity and open up opportunities for them to introduce themselves which will be useful for building their branding and image. Moreover, now there are many students who become content creators and utilize what is around them as content material. It is seen because currently social media is able to invite anyone who is interested to participate or contribute freely and openly, by commenting, or sharing information. So is the City Branding effort, in building a City Branding, media is certainly needed to support these efforts, building branding from the community so that they can participate in recognizing and promoting the branding. One of the social media that is currently favored by many people is Instagram. In 2021 Instagram is ranked 3rd in "Most-Used Social Media Platforms". Written on the databoks website in July 2021, it was recorded that the number of Instagram users in Indonesia reached 91.77 million, and the 18-24 age group was the largest user. This makes Instagram can be utilized as an informative media supported by attractive visuals which will have many followers. Instagram is utilized in the City Branding strategy because it is believed to be an intensive media in disseminating information, can target many diverse audiences, and also City Branding relies heavily on effective communication. [10]. Currently, there are many cities that use Instagram as a medium for City Branding activities and a means of communication with audiences. [6]. Instagram created with the aim of City Branding efforts must be able to provide an overview or communicate the City Branding concept that has been created. Surabaya City also utilizes Instagram social media to support the City Branding process.



Fig. 1. Sparkling Surabaya

Source: Instagram account @surabayasparkling

City Branding of Surabaya with "Sparkling Surabaya" means the sparkling city of Surabaya. [11]. While the meaning of the logo illustrates the philosophy of clear and green, therefore the dominant green color is given, then the star icon is a representation of the five leading areas in Surabaya but with different tourism potential. The name sparkling itself means that the city of Surabaya never sleeps, is always crowded and many national and international activities or events are held. [12].

The opportunities that Surabaya city has are big enough to make investors and tourists interested in coming to it. The strong historical value of the city of Surabaya is due to the many historical buildings in various corners of the city that are still maintained by the government and residents. As well as the many tourist destinations that continue to be developed by the government and the community make this city quite appropriate to be used as a place to find entertainment. Not only that, Surabaya's increasingly sophisticated and very complete infrastructure is an attractive offer for migrants. The potential of Surabaya city includes 2 types of tourism potential including cultural and natural potential. Culture is the potential that grows in the community, for example, arts, customs, and livelihoods, natural in the form of physical and geographic potential such as nature. Basically, tourism product is a series of services and products that can be enjoyed by tourists in tourist destinations as one component that can provide experiences for tourists. [13]. Even though it already has a good image and branding, it must maintain that image to survive in the face of increasing competition. This is related to research conducted by Caisar, Bagus and Agus Widiyarta (2020) entitled "City Branding Strategy for Sparkling Surabaya City in Increasing Tourist Visits" which found that Surabaya has carried out several strategies to increase tourist visits, one of which is by using a marketing or promotion strategy in city branding through a website, Instagram account, and other websites. [3].

Instagram is utilized as a communication medium and supports *City Branding* efforts through photo and video posts that are presented. The above is in line with the creation of the @surabayasparkling Instagram account, this account is managed by the Surabaya City Government Culture and Tourism Office (DISBUDPORAPAR), here the @surabayasparkling Instagram exposes a lot of footage from the city of Surabaya from various angles of its beauty which can make the audience interested, and generate interest in visiting. Judging from the number of followers reaching 84.3 thousand, its existence is quite good because this account is also well visualized and attractive. This account disseminates information about the city of Surabaya, it helps audiences and followers in getting information about the latest facilities that can be used by the general public, culinary specialties from the city of Surabaya. In addition, this account also provides informative messages about education, awards won by the city of Surabaya, even activities or events about tourism and entertainment that take place in Surabaya.



Fig. 2. Instagram page @surabayasparkling Source: Instagram account @surabayasparkling

From the phenomenon of utilizing social media as a City Branding effort that has been explained, of course, audience acceptance of the message content and content presented will be different in understanding each post from the @surabayasparkling account. These differences can occur depending on each individual with different experiences, with daily backgrounds, and the way individuals interpret the content presented. The strategy of using Instagram as an effort to support City Branding from each city has its own uniqueness. As the content of the message conveyed and the image or identity that wants to be built in the minds of the audience will vary, so will the audience in interpreting it. Judging from some comments, the @surabayasparkling account is still not optimal in conveying information. The interaction of the @surabayasparkling account in the comments column indicates a lack of feedback. Meanwhile, as a City Branding effort, there needs to be good feedback from the community. This condition then makes the media less able to be utilized properly. and also departing from Yudha Delonix R's research (2019) with the title "Visual Communication Design for Sparkling Surabaya Brand Activation Through Ambient Media" the author conducted research using a questionnaire distributed to 200 tourists with a vulnerable age of 20-35 years, the survey showed that 71% of them did not know the existence of this "Surabaya Sparkling" brand, the level of public awareness of the brand was considered low. Not only that, a survey was also conducted on Surabaya residents themselves by distributing questionnaires to 200 people aged 20-30 years, the survey showed that 35% of them did not know the meaning of "Sparkling Surabaya". [14]. Based on this, it can be concluded that the level of awareness of tourists and the public towards Sparkling Surabaya is still lacking.

This is important to study because it wants to know the utilization of Instagram as a *City Branding* effort seen from the audience's side, which in the study focuses on the acceptance of overseas students in Surabaya. And it is expected to have a positive impact on the utilization of social media as a medium for *City Branding*, and can be an overview of the practice or efforts of *City Branding* on social media and audience acceptance of it.

Researchers use reception analysis to get students' meaning and understanding of the content of messages and content on the @surabayasparkling account. This reception analysis focuses on individual attention in the process of understanding and making deep meaning from the media, and how individuals interpret the content of the media. The reception analysis used is Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory which focuses on media and audiences. Based on this background, the researcher raised the title "Analysis of Instagram Followers

@sparklingsurabaya About City Branding (Reception Analysis of Overseas Students in Surabaya)".

2 Research Methods

This research uses qualitative research. Where qualitative research is a method that focuses on observations that can produce a phenomenon and without any non-numerical calculations. This approach can assess the marketing communication strategy implemented by the @reabayaku account in increasing product sales through promotional activities on Instagram.

The research used is a type of descriptive qualitative research using reception analysis theory, which aims to analyze in detail the object to be studied. Qualitative research is used to be able to examine what participants feel, understand the mindset of participants, and understand central phenomena from the point of view of participants, either individuals or groups subjectively. [15]. Reception analysis is related to qualitative methods because reception analysis studies audiences in interpreting a message from certain media can be accepted or not, the meaning of a media text can be different depending on the point of view of the reader or audience.

The subjects in this study are followers of @surabayasparkling and specifically students, these individuals can be sampled and studied to become subjects with the aim of providing the information needed in the study. Overseas students who are not native Surabaya residents were chosen because they are considered to be able to provide subjective opinions and students are considered more capable of determining their needs and being able to give deep meaning to a message in the media. While the object in this research is the @suarabayasparkling Instagram account.

The research was conducted in stages and followed the following steps: The first stage is the selection and collection of data that will be used as research material, usually called the orientation or description stage. Researchers conducted interviews with informants, not only that, researchers also saw the content presented by the @surabayasparkling account, as well as comments from the audience and followers contained in it. The second stage is called the reduction stage, meaning that researchers will reduce the various information obtained in the first stage, then focus and categorize on certain issues. The categories are made based on the concept of Stuart Hall (1973) regarding the decoding process of receiving messages including perceptions, thoughts, preferences, and interpretations. And finally, the author can conclude the final results of this research.

The purposive sampling technique is used by researchers because researchers have certain considerations in taking informants, therefore this technique is suitable for single case studies that are representative of being observed and analyzed. There are several criteria for determining the informants to be used in this study:

- 1. Become a follower of @surabayasparkling account
- 2. Students who come from outside Surabaya who study and live in Surabaya.
- 3. Live in Surabaya for at least 3 years
- 4. Active users of social media instagram (from May December 2022), also understand the use and various features in it.

From the criteria mentioned above, there are 9 sources who will be used as informants in this study, informants have different backgrounds, and from several campuses in Surabaya.

3 Results and Discussion

The results of the interview from the informant are categorized into 4 indicators in the process of decoding media messages according to Stuart Hall, namely, Perception, Thinking, Reference, and Interpretation. Perception in this study means the response or first impression of the individual when viewing the @surabayasparkling account, if the individual can support and accept it, it will definitely leave a special message in the reader's mind. And later it will cause special interest or attention from students to the Instagram account. So that in the process of acceptance can interpret it by sight, and make a decision whether the account is felt to be interesting and useful. Only after that will the results of thoughts from immigrant students who live in Surabaya be obtained, whether students can accept the city branding message from @surabayapsprakling. The results will be classified using the theory of acceptance (encoding and decoding) by Stuart Hall. There are three positions in responding to a text proposed by Stuart Hall, namely the *Dominant-hegemonict position*, this position means that readers or viewers interpret media messages with acceptance because it matches what is felt and the message dominates in society. Second, Negotiated position, which means that individuals receiving messages can accept media messages but follow up by making some exceptions. More simply, the individual uses his own beliefs or beliefs that are compromised with the media message presented. And the last is *Oppositional position* which means the opposite of the first, the audience rejects the meaning of the message conveyed by the media because they have their own way of thinking about the topic conveyed by the media.

From the explanation that has been explained, the researcher analyzes the results of the interview to find out the student's reception of Instagram @surabayasparkling.

3.1. Perception

Perception is the first indicator in a reception process. According to [16]. Perception is an experience of an object obtained through the five human senses, meaning that a message is received starting with the audience's impression captured through their five senses. From these five senses, a person will gain experience about an object, event, or even connect information and interpret messages. The quality of a person in obtaining the information they receive depends on their interest in gathering information.

Through an initial assessment when viewing the @surabayasparkling account. In the biography of the @surabayasparkling account itself, it has explained the sentence Official Instagram Account of Department Cultural and Tourism Surabaya City Government. So that the followers of the @surabayasparkling account have no doubt about the content of the posts presented. Then in the informant's vision, the @surabayasparkling account is a trusted account. Informants can judge because the @surabayasparkling account has been verified account by the social media instagram, which means that the account has been recognized by instagram.

Informant Opinion @almasferdiansyah

"The first time I saw this account I was a little surprised, because this account has been verified by Instagram, it turns out that this account can provide us with information about Surabaya area tourism as explained in the bionya"

A verified account makes people tend to think your account is trustworthy. Reported by B2C, only 2.26% of Instagram accounts in the world have verified status, which can increase the credibility of the account because considering, there are only a few accounts in the world that have this exclusive right. The use of online media @surabayasparkling also meets the characteristics of good governance, one of which is "building trust between the government and

its citizens or legitimacy." [17]. Informants were able to explain in detail about the attractive appearance, posts and news presented by the @surabayasparkling Instagram account in accordance with what is in the field, the speed when providing information, the number of followers, the sentences and language used, the infographics provided were able to attract the attention of followers.

Informant opinion @rivandhanyy

"The content is good, especially for festival events, he shows the videos so that those of us who usually don't know about the event know about it, especially for me who is from outside Java, I think that's the plus point."

But not only that, informants are also able to compare Sparkling Surabaya's Instagram account with other accounts on Instagram social media. This is in accordance with the opinion of Sarwono (2012) which defines that perception is the process of transferring, interpreting, selecting, and organizing sensory information. [18].

Informant opinion @juntaaks

"Surabaya Sparkling only provides information about events in Surabaya, while other social media that I know of also provide information and news about the ups and downs outside Surabaya"

Informant opinion miftanq

"What I catch most is that this account uses more formal language when compared to other accounts about Surabaya"

The @surabayasparkling account is also able to fulfill their expectations, when informants have proven and read the news. The information provided or presented on the @surabayasparkling account can fulfill their curiosity about what they have not previously gotten. @surabayasparkling is able to provide a detailed explanation of the information presented so that it can make its readers feel satisfied. information on Instagram social media accounts can provide motivation for each information they present to informants.

Informant opinion @bilaalif

"My first impression is that the information provided is quite interesting, and a lot. Now from there, in my opinion, it is very easy to find recommendations for walking in Surabaya, in my opinion, the uniqueness of this account is that it focuses on what is in Surabaya, this account also actively provides new things in Surabaya, besides that the posts are also very unique "

The motivation they get is also positive and in accordance with what they like so that it can affect their lives. Informants can remember information that is being discussed or information that is a hot topic in the Surabaya community. Here informants are able to explain how the content of the information they read and are able to connect or adjust to their lives.

3.2. Thoughts

The next process after perception is thinking. Thinking is an individual process of weighing, analyzing or combining, then finally making a decision. [19]. The factors that influence decision making are motives. Motives are drives or desires and other driving forces because motives are the forces that support individuals. In the results of this second analysis, thinking means that the motivation that comes from the informant and the informant's environment also affects the receipt of messages on the @surabayasparkling Instagram account, as well as the informant's behavior when thinking and finally making decisions.

Motivation can affect informants' attention or decisions, if informants like and approve of the @surabayasparkling Instagram account, then liking and acceptance can increase or decrease depending on how consistent the informant is in receiving the @surabayasparkling Instagram account. Like one informant who lost motivation to consistently pay attention to the @surabayasparkling Instagram account because he felt that Instagram posts were too rigid, so he did not pay attention to the @surabayasparkling Instagram account anymore and there was a feeling that this account was less attractive to the current gen z market.

Informant Opinion @rivandhanyy

"I think the name sparkling is appropriate because this account displays various colors in its posts, especially the informative side is really featured. but the formal look of this account is a bit stiff"

Informant opinion @juntaaks

"For the need to pamper my eyes to see cool photos, I feel it's enough, if to fulfill my information needs, I don't use it enough, so I feel it's enough."

Informant Opinion @almasferdiansyah

"This account hasn't fulfilled my needs yet because other accounts are more fulfilling hehehe, but I can understand because this account is held by the government so you can't carelessly spread the info"

The other informants are still motivated to keep waiting for interesting uploads/posts from the @surabayasparkling Instagram account, because they want to know more about arts and culture and historical buildings in Surabaya City.

Informant opinion Ulumil September 3, 2022

"It's complete in my opinion, especially the information about the museum info, because what makes me most interested in visiting it is the information about it and it is very clear in the caption"

The thoughts that have been conveyed by several informants are in accordance with the statement [20] which states that thinking is the action of individuals in considering, describing, connecting and finally making decisions, because one of the functions of thinking is making decisions. thinking is the result of the thinking process. The personal factor that influences the thinking process to make decisions is motive.

3.3. Preferences

The third indicator in the acceptance process is preference. According to [18] preference is a thought that arises from the emotions that individuals have, so that it can lead to perceptions when receiving information, whether the informant likes something or not. Preference is a person's behavior to choose a product in the form of goods or services according to their interests, preference is also defined as subjective behavior carried out by viewers in providing a ranking or level measured by the utility of the bundle. Offered in the form of goods or services.

Informant Opinion @michellelaurence

"I think that's because this is an account held by the government, so yes, the information is less varied and like the target audience is people who are involved in the government, maybe in my opinion, and all the info posted by @surabayasprakling is on infosby so I prefer the infosby account."

Informant opinion @miftahnq

"The most visible difference is that the @surabayasparkling account is less in providing event information compared to other accounts, but if there is an event in the square and the

government is the first to post, so. So I don't make it my first choice when looking for recommendations."

The acceptance of migrant students in Surabaya on the @surabayasparkling Instagram account reveals a preference, which can be seen from the results of interviews with informants. The informant stated that although the @surabayasparkling Instagram account is a government account that can be used as a medium of information, the informant still considers it insufficient to know what is happening in the city of Surabaya as the main media, so the informant prefers to get information from other Instagram accounts that feel more complete and look a little more interesting.

3.4. Interpretation

The fourth indicator is interpretation. According to Sumarwan (2009) Interpretation can be interpreted as the process by which an individual can interpret the signs or signals received as important or not. [21]. The reception of migrant students in Surabaya to the @surabayasparkling Instagram account shows an interpretation where the experience possessed by the informant on Instagram accounts providing information about the city of Surabaya causes the emergence of an interpretation of the @surabayasparkling Instagram account.

Mirza's opinion @mirzadian

"In my opinion, with this account created by the agency, it is a very good initiative, so the mind is more advanced and can take advantage of technology and young people in the agency, right if the ladies and gentlemen may not understand social media."

Michelle's Informant Opinion @michellelaurence

"I think it's lacking because it's less hitz and less viralized if the intention is really for city branding, lose to other accounts"

According to informants, the @surabayasparkling Instagram account is no better when compared to Instagram accounts providing information about the city of Surabaya, even with the ownership of the culture and tourism office. For some informants, Sparkling Surabaya Instagram is very helpful for posts about arts and culture, because Sparkling Surabaya Instagram is very focused on this, but on the other hand other informants are very interested in information about events that will be held in the city of Surabaya. So that informants hope that the @surabayasparkling account can provide information on other cities in Surabaya such as Instagram accounts so that they are more interesting.

This is in line with [20] which defines in interpretation, stimuli combined with other stimuli will become a meaningful whole. Interpretation is closely related to history or past experiences, interpretation is an understanding of the evidence and theories formed from existing knowledge.

3.5. 3 Position of Message Content Reception

From all the explanations above, it will be classified with audience acceptance of media messages (decoding) with three patterns of thought. The first is Dominant Reading, this position occurs when informants interpret the message with their acceptance. From the interviews conducted, most informants can accept messages from the @surabayasparkling account, informants assume that this account provides a lot of new knowledge in terms of culture and art in Surabaya. The most captured by informants in the account is that this account highlights the city of Surabaya in terms of tourism which is very close to historical and cultural heritage in

Surabaya. The second position, Negotiated Reading, in this position the reader makes several exceptions in his acceptance, or the uploads submitted by the account are not necessarily fully accepted. In this case, there are several informants who do so, because the informants have previously known other accounts similar to @surabayasparkling, and compared them. Informants argue that when compared to other accounts, the @surabayasparkling account is still less interesting in packaging the information, and has not met the needs of informants when looking for information, especially information about events in Surabaya. Also the lack of feedback provided by the account with followers. The third, Oppositional Reading, in this position is the opposite of the first, the audience rejects the meaning of the messages conveyed by the media, in this position there are no informants who reject the messages presented in the @surabayasparkling account.

No **Instagram Name** University City of origin Length of stav Origin in Surabaya 1 UNAIR 4 years @mirzadian Pasuruan 2 @rivandhanyy 3 years **UNAIR** Jakarta 3 Mojokerto 3.5 years @milinsani UPN Veteran 4 @michellelaurence Pasuruan **UBAYA** 4 years 5 4.5 years @tweedjyaa UBAYA Bali 6 4 years @bilaalif **STIKOSA** Kediri 7 @almasferdiansyah **UNAIR** Blora, Central 4.5 years 8 @miftang **UNESA** Java 4 years @juntaaks **UBAYA** Porong 4 years Bontang, East Kalimantan

Table 1. List of informants

4 Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, this study concludes that overseas students with different faculty backgrounds and study programs tend to have the same level of acceptance as informants, namely considering the @surabayasparkling Instagram account very interesting in terms of the account content posted.

This is based on the reception analysis of the informants themselves, by comparing the @surabayasparkling Instagram account with other accounts about Surabaya. In the perception section, the opinions of all informants are the same, namely, they are interested in following the @surabayasparkling Instagram account based on their curiosity. Then in the thinking section, the motivation of each informant is different, this is because factors within the informant can influence his decision. In the preference section, informants argue that the @surabayasparkling Instagram account is not their main media for getting information about the city of Surabaya, they prefer other Instagram accounts because there are so many Instagram accounts similar to @surabayasparkling which they think are more complete and interesting. Finally, the interpretation part, the informants' experience before and after comparing other accounts with the @surabayasparkling Instagram account is positive because the @surabayasparkling

Instagram account is believed to have the potential to develop into a more interesting account and can involve the "-z gene" in everything that will be published.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Allah SWT. For all his grace and guidance so that the writing of this journal can be completed as well as possible. Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Umsida Communication Science lecturers who have provided a lot of knowledge and guided during this research process. Thank you also to my parents, family, friends who always provide support, enthusiasm and prayers during the writing of this Scientific Journal, and to the informants of the @surabayasparkling account followers who want to take the time so that this Scientific Journal can be completed properly.

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