

# A Visual Identity-Based Approach of Southeast Asian City Branding: A Netnography Analysis

Bahtiar Mohamad<sup>1\*</sup>, Raji Ridwan Adetunji<sup>2</sup>, Ghadah Alarifi<sup>3</sup>, Ahmed Rageh Ismail<sup>4</sup>, and Muslim Diekola Akanmu<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>College of Communication and Media Sciences, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

<sup>3</sup>College of Business Administration, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Applied and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Pauh Putra Campus, Malaysia.

<sup>1</sup>mbahtiar@uum.edu.my; <sup>2</sup>rajiridwanadetunji@gmail.com; <sup>3</sup>gaalarifi@pnu.edu.sa; <sup>4</sup>ahmed.rageh@uum.edu.my; <sup>5</sup>adiekola@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

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## Abstract

Cities and places had been progressively being marketed as brands by using the concept of 'City Branding', which is a unique idea. The scholars of 'City Branding' believed that the concept of branding helps the city in marketing activities. A city metaphorically could be seen as an entity given the advantage to display its visual characteristics to tourists, visitors, and residents. Unique visual identity such as iconic architecture and graphic design could make a city stand out from the others. Thus, the research examined the role of visual identity in city branding. Specifically, the aim was to contribute to better understanding of the concept of 'visual identity' in Southeast Asian cities. Netnography approach was employed to gain better understanding of the notion of visual identity of city branding and refine a conceptual framework that has been developed based on the existing literature. Elements such as iconic structure and graphic design (logo and slogan) of four cities in Southeastern Asia were emphasized. The research concludes that the components of the visual identity of the cities need to be reshaped to be aligned with their visual characteristics in order to boost their competitiveness among the global city brands.

**Keywords:** city branding, city identity, netnography, place branding, visual identity

## Introduction

Branding, in general, focuses on making products or services easier to recognise, identify, understand, and memorize. Virtually, branding can be applied in every ramification. Places (cities, regions, and countries) have been promoting their attractions and images throughout history due to the need to attract settlers, customers, visitors, traders, investors, and the category of people, who are called 'influencers' (Anholt, 2010). Brand elements such as logos, slogans, motto, tagline, and colour schemes play a critical role in most of the best city marketing campaigns since they enable a city to stand out from competitors. The alignment of the branding activities with the city identity is a key to make the city brand more authentic and distinctive to build reputation based on compelling and unique sense of place (Fasli, 2010). The concept of city and place branding has been widely discussed by many scholars as the image or representation developed to provide overreaching details of a city to market and generate economic, cultural, and political value for the city (Balakrishnan, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2004; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). In addition, city branding is a way of communicating competitive advantages, quality, history, culture, and lifestyle of a place to visitors, tourists, and residents (Björner, 2013; Mohamad et al., 2018). One of the city's common visual identities is an iconic architectural building which can either be new or refurbished such as the cultural facilities, public buildings, mixed-use developments, offices or towers, shopping malls, transport interchanges, public art or installations, and extensions of historic sites (Evans, 2015).

In addition, Dinnie (2010), Foroudi et al. (2016), and Kavaratzis and Dennis (2018) have unanimously included the development of logo and slogan as part of the crucial elements of a city and place branding. Giovanardi et al. (2013) regard city branding as centralizing the marketing activities of a place on the development of symbolic logos, slogans, and other positive images to promote the development, sales, and marketing of the place. In other words, city branding is centered on the development of a unique visual identity (architecture, logo, slogan, etc.) to shape the brand of a city. In city branding, the scholars believe that the concept of branding will help the marketing activities of a city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2007). Brand enables a city to be metaphorically seen as an entity with advantage of displaying its own visual identities and characteristics for attracting visitors and tourists and ultimately enhancing the economic value of the city (Stigel & Frimann, 2006).

Previous studies have mentioned that cities and places are being progressively marketed as a brand along the line with many tremendously costly companies and product branding campaigns. As it is usually perceived in connection with branding, multiple effects are generated by city branding, placing cities with no strong branding under pressure. Meanwhile, the fact that cities are increasingly rated based on their attractiveness for tourist, residents, and investors is enforcing city planners and local authorities to strategize and prioritize the branding of their cities (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). City branding is a unique idea symbolizing a collection of representations that are the result of the city's architecture, art, lifestyle, and its reflections in mass communications such as graphic design (logo and slogan) for advertisement campaigns. In other words, a prosperous city brand should reflect

all the dimensions of the description of the city ranging from its geography, architecture, culture, commerce, and people.

The research aims to review and discuss the current elements of visual identity such as iconic architecture, slogan, and logo of four major cities in Southeast Asia (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, and Ho Chi Minh). It is to attain better understanding on the visual identities of the cities and provide city brand managers with insights on how to project a realistic and inspiring city image for tourists. Certainly, each city has its own unique distinctive characteristics and meanings in its culture, history, economy, politics, and religions. Hence, studying city branding element for each city and their roles in branding activities is of paramount. These elements can be uncovered by several methods, which complement each other; however, the current research takes the netnographic approach. The research, henceforth, broadens the process of understanding city branding especially in the region of South-Eastern Asia by highlighting the importance of reshaping the visual identities of the four major South-Eastern Asian cities. The four cities have been chosen due to the characteristics and the promotional campaigns done by the cities' authorities in the past 10 years. Singapore and Kuala Lumpur represent the architecture design of modern-day urban image while Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh Cities are rich with the historical elements of architecture that symbolize heritage values.

City branding in the context of Southeast Asia regions are believed to have two main problems. First, the visual identity of city brands varies in relation to the culture, social context, and lifestyle of people in the cities (Kavaratzis, 2005). Hence, the elements of visual identity used as basic tactics for city branding among Southeast Asian cities are often not centered on the unique characteristics of the cities. Meanwhile, place branding scholars have argued that the primary drive for city branding is developing an all-encompassing image which represents all that a city should be known for. It can be done by reflecting the iconic architecture or the specific culture and lifestyle of the city in the logo, slogan as well as the advertisement that are created and designed by city officials and consultants to drive the process of city branding (Oliveira, 2015). In contrast, the lack of uniformity in the elements of visual identities of Southeast Asian city brands is significantly limiting the adequate representation of the city brands (Govers, 2013).

Second, there is a paucity of literature concerning city branding in Southeast Asia region. It is believed essential to focus on the process of city branding due to the increasing importance of tourism in the economic development of the Southeast Asia region. In addition, the majority of the Southeast Asian cities have recently become some of the global tourist destinations. Hence, it is considered essential to study the underlying factors such as iconic architecture, slogan, and logo for developing strong and globally acceptable city brands in the Southeast Asia region. For instance, Bangkok is occupied with modern and cultural heritage buildings as its most visible characteristics. Siemreap of Cambodia is an enormous ancient city recognized by the UNESCO as a heritage site. However, it is unclear how the city council or the local authorities of such cities takes the representation of such heritage and iconic structure importantly as part of the process of city branding. Therefore, the main discussion of the research is to broaden the understanding of city branding through literature review on

both corporate branding and city branding. The research underscores the need for integrating strategic actions towards the development of the visual identities that reflect the unique characteristics of those cities to fully capitalize on their potentials and to increase their acceptance among the global competitive city brands.

## Literature Review

City branding is relatively an emerging and new concept contrary to city promotion and city marketing. In Southeast Asia, city branding is often delimited by advertising, campaigns, designing visual images, and slogans (Kavaratzis, 2008). For example, Kuala Lumpur is branded along the line of its cosmopolitan characteristics through its slogan: "A City of Contrast and Diversity." On the other hand, Singapore exploits mind-set, serving, and attitude as global market using an attractive slogan of "Passion Made Possible." Furthermore, Ho Chi Minh City is simply branded as "Vibrant Ho Chi Minh." A further example is Jakarta, which emphasizes its lively characteristics through the slogan "Enjoy Jakarta".

Moreover, branding involves more than imagery but also identity building. Klein (2000) adds that the core value of a place is represented by a brand meanwhile advertisement simply means a way of communicating such identity. Brands are employed a means of interactions between residents, visitors, tourists, and business investors while city brand is predominantly used within the global marketplace as a competitive way of differentiation. In other words, Mommaas (2002) reports that city branding enabled people to have interaction through sharing of similar identity. According to Kavaratzis (2008), "the rationale behind city branding is that the city must first decide what it wants to become and how it can create the mental, psychological and emotional ties that are necessary for the city to become this brand."

Additionally, city branding can be the process of sharing to the world, an existing identity. For example, the features of a creative city may be in place while there is no awareness for external audience. A branding exercise in this context is more of marketing and promotion of what is in existence rather than conscious creation of imagery identity. The creation of such identity as the core of city branding is considered by Evans (2005), Hankinson (2004), Julier (2005), and Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005).

The unique characteristics of a city inspire the concept of city branding, and the same time primarily focus on the process of establishing, maintaining, and extending the identity of the city (Stigel & Frimann, 2006). Therefore, the city is viewed metaphorically as an organization with internal management of its members (Adamu, Mohamad, & Rahman, 2018; Adamu, Mohamad, & Rahman, 2016) while the management acts in accordance with the values of the city brand to be kept happy with presentable publicity for the organization and encouraged to act as the city ambassadors (Christgau & Jacobsen, 2004). In another view, Kavaratzis (2007) reports that branding is a tool to create city's self-attribution and to create positive image in the mind of the stakeholders to gain positive outlook. Additionally, places and cities are marketed increasingly as trademark with the known lines from campaigns of

product branding and many intensive costly companies (Mollerup, 1995; Olins, 1999; Schulz & Hatch, 2000).

As it has generally been observed in connection with branding, snowball effects are created by city branding, making cities with no brand to be under pressure to create self-development. However, it is made difficult for the local authority (city council) to maintain and improve the ratings of the places for attraction for residents, investors, and tourists (Langer, 2001). The research tends to focus on visual identity elements to connect to the concept of city branding. The visual identity is mostly defined as a collection of visual elements that serve to represent and differentiate a brand. More specifically, it refers to any visible components of the city such as an iconic architecture, logo, and slogan that help tourists identify a characteristic of the city.

## **Methodology**

### **Netnography**

The research is based on the data of tourist experiences on the selected Southeast Asian cities. Caru and Cova (2008) state that tourism is a singular experience enjoyed by individual which cannot be directly accessed for the purpose of the research. Therefore, the research only interprets what is expressed by their subjects in writing, verbal activity or through their behaviour. Caru and Cova (2008) add that verbatim are argued instead to be important to understand the private nature of the experience being studied. The ethnography approach has been conducted to deeply understand the emotions or feelings experienced by tourists (Caru & Cova, 2008; Rageh, Melewar, & Woodside, 2013).

Kozinets (2002) reports that to identify and understand the needs and decision that influence relevant online consumer groups, netnography has been employed as a tool of marketing research. Many people are now adopting internet as another medium in which they can chronicle their lives since internet access becomes widely more available with the additional dimensions of having more audience. Thus, alongside with the emergence of blogs, a great explosion in personal storytelling has arisen. Consumers are using virtual communities and other online platforms to share ideas such as boycotters, build communities such as on-line coffee communities and contact fellow consumers such as the Star Trek and X-Files fans (Kozinets, 1997; Kozinets, 2001; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998).

The approach enables researcher to get access to discussion with tourists by participating or by observing in communications on publicly available online platforms and collecting data where tourist narratives are of interests to the researchers (Nelson & Otnes, 2005). With respect to the present research, netnography is the most suitable qualitative method done by utilizing a content analysis of tourist review of their past experiences within selected major cities in Southeastern Asian countries. The tourist experiences are used to conceptualize the research. In addition, the research follows Kozinets' criteria to choose the most suitable reviews. Therefore, the results are considered to be valid and reliable. The

research elaborates procedures and stages are recommended to adapt netnography to the online context (Kozinets, 2002).

### **Entrée**

This is the identification of the online communities that are mostly related to the research interest and learning as much as possible about the identified communities. The research identifies one website called Tripadvisor (tripadvisor.com), a popular review platform in the industry of tourism for users and researchers. Several previous research have used the reviews on the website (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). Tripadvisor is chosen since the reviews are more focused and relevant to the questions raised in the research. There is also a higher post traffics and more rich data in details. Similarly, same procedures are used by Yang and Fang (2004) to analyze complaints and compliments from the customers with security brokerage services. In the research, a netnography in a form of non-participant observation is used in accordance with the customer reviews published on Tripadvisor. The rationale behind choosing the non-participant observation is due to the undesirable effect of the outsiders to the group (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003). Furthermore, the research is unobtrusively conducted as the netnography is capable of being conducted in a way that is entirely unobtrusive (Kozinets, 2002).

### **Data Collection**

The researcher directly copied the tourist reviews that are relevant to the study from Tripadvisor, while some selective parts are considered when choosing the tourist messages. For example, all messages are examined, but some irrelevant messages and reviews are discarded. Moreover, the reviews are accessed for a long time to secure enough volume of reviews on city branding.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

Examination on data collection is implemented, in which the messages that are related directly to the research questions are evaluated while the qualitative analysis involving the constant comparative methods is performed (Strauss & Glaser, 1967; Kozinets, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The research analyses the tourist reviews following the principles of analysis and interpretation of qualitative data (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Spiggle, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The data is first coded into discrete parts, then closely evaluated and compared for differences and similarities with each code representing a specific aspect of the phenomenon of interests. Patterns are established across multiple sources of data to integrate and contextualize coding categories. By using the selective coding, relationships are specified between the constructs and move to a higher level of abstraction described as empirical grounding for an etic understanding (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). From the review

interpretation, the research could find out the measures of the customer's experience, its outcomes, and the main causes.

Analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data of the tourist reviews are directly examined with the research questions. The research analyses the experiences of the tourists from the journal entries following the analysis and interpretation principle of qualitative data (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Spiggle, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Related themes such as logo, slogan, and iconic architecture have been recognized, and the emergent themes are compared with presumptions from the previous research.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **The City Identity and Its Characteristics**

Within the personality and developmental psychology, the concepts of identity have been a problematic and contested issue for long time (Erikson, 1971). It is considered a challenge when the identity of a person is constantly subject to change and dynamic (Mohamad et al., 2016). Similarly, the identity of the city varies about situation and social context in which the residents of the city interact. "Identity is the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places," Lynch (1960) states. Identity is a distinction which is visible and obvious at first sight and active in echoing memories and striking a recall in the mind of people (Mohamad, Ismail, & Bidin, 2017). Therefore, identity is not reproducible but always exclusive. Every city has a unique and peculiar identity comprising memories and images that are either positive or negative. The image of a city is formed by the characteristics of a city which includes monumental building, geography, culture, and other historic features. The evidence of such an explanation is visible among cities that are strongly branded today.

The branding of a city is reflected in its slogan, name, and logo (Sáez, Perriáñez, & Mediano, 2013). First, it should be noted that when discussing the image of cities from a branding perspective, nowadays many cities make attempts to promote themselves with the aid of iconic structure, architecture, logo, and slogan. From a general perspective, three keys and characteristics are used to qualify city branding, namely: 1) authenticity, 2) image, and 3) uniqueness. Kavaratzis (2007) reports that virtually every city has city branding to redevelop its image on its agenda. Mainly, branding is developed from marketing strategies, and it is more applied for promotion and marketing of city like in the case of products. Kotler, Brown, and Knight (1999) argue that places are products of marketed values and identities. Ashworth (2009) states that to create or discover uniqueness, which distinguishes a city from others, is one of the purposes of place or city branding.

Articulation of cities to the global world is the major purpose of creating brands for cities. The city should work to generate enticing image and economic wealth. Therefore, branding of a city has to be linked with marketable identity that can be accepted by people, especially on the culture, history, social development, landscape, environment, architecture,

and economic growth (Deckker, 2000; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). As a holistic approach, city branding serves as a tool of promotion for creating unique image for a city. The city image accordingly can be considered as one of the most paramount key concerns for both city branding and city identity. The best interpretation of image concept can be an intersection of city identity and city branding as depicted in Figure 1 since the image is an indisputable constituent of both. In addition, in one way or the other, it can also be suggested that image influences the tourist intention to visit.

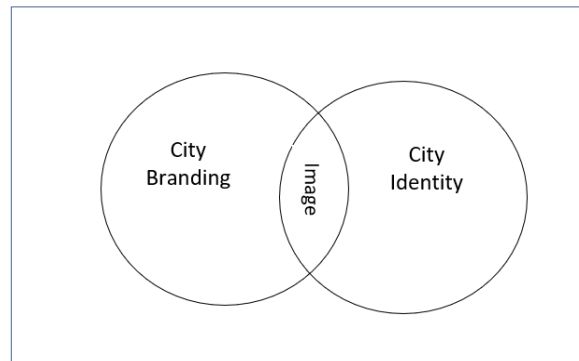


Figure 1. City Identity and City Branding and their Relations to Image

City identity is important with city marketing and place promotion to attract tourists. Moreover, the visual identity (e.g. the iconic architecture, slogan, and logo) during the entangling or capturing in a capital city is determined by the arena of place marketing and promotion. This is the part of the attempts by cities to forge distinctive atmospheres and images, which act as a bait to both people and capital of the right sort (e.g. influential and wealthy). Therefore, city branding and city identity are connected together through the practices of place promotion tools via images with effect on the tourist attention. The research is limited to the effects of visual identity based on iconic architecture, slogan, and logo for reshaping city branding in the context of Southeast Asian cities.

Table 1 presents the Tripadvisor total number reviews for each city. Singapore has the largest number of reviews (1.531.335), followed by Ho Chi Minh City (797.098), Kuala Lumpur (630.800) and Jakarta (359.581). On specific reviews like the iconic architecture as presented in Table 2, Gardens by the Bay receives 59.521 and becomes the famous landmark in Singapore among the tourists. Petronas Twin Tower has maintained her popularity as an icon for Kuala Lumpur with 30.112 reviews. National Monument (MONAS) of Jakarta at the top rank for many years since it officially opened on 2 July 1975 with 4.142 reviews. However, the Ho Chi Minh City Hall is not listed as one of the top 5 iconic buildings based on the numbers of tourists' reviews. It shows that the decision of city authority of Ho Chi Minh City is not in line with the tourist perception on the best architecture.



Table 1. The total number of reviews for each of the cities from TripAdvisor website

Cities	Number of Reviews
1. Singapore	1.531.335
2. Kuala Lumpur	630.800
3. Jakarta	359.581
4. Ho Chi Minh City	797.098

Table 2. The total number of reviews for each location within the selected cities

Top 5 Reviews	Number of Reviews
<i>Singapore</i>	
1. Gardens by the Bay	59.521
2. Singapore MRT	24.047
3. Singapore Zoo	22.361
4. Singapore Botanic Gardens	19.814
5. Singapore Flyers	17.341
<i>Kuala Lumpur</i>	
1. Petronas Twin Tower	30.112
2. KLCC Park	13.084
3. Menara Kuala Lumpur	8.641
4. Kuala Lumpur Bird Park	7.959
5. Jalan Alor	7.502
<i>Jakarta</i>	
1. National Monument (MONAS)	4.142
2. Grand Indonesia Mall	3.235
3. Istiqlal Mosque	2.681
4. Taman Mini Indonesia	2.289
5. Jakarta Old Town	2.005
<i>Ho Chi Minh City</i>	
1. War Remnants Museum	32.967
2. Chu Chi Tunnels	25.443
3. Central Post Office	17.100
4. Ben Thanh Market	13.049
5. The Independence Palace	10.200

The three elements of iconic architecture, slogan, and logo have been widely used by the selected cities for their promotional tourism activities. Therefore, the comparative marketing values for the promotional strategy will help the policy makers and the advertisers to enhance their marketing and promotional tools.

### Singapore and Its Branding



Figure 2. Singapore – Passion Made Possible (2017)

### *Iconic Architecture*

Singapore tries to associate its slogan with the city image, especially the new iconic building Marina Bay Sands. It is found by an integrated resort fronting Marina Bay and Las Vegas Sands Corporation in Singapore. In 2010 at the opening ceremony, it was named as the most expensive standalone casino property in the world with S\$8 billion, which includes the cost of the land. The resort designed by Moshe Safdie comprises convention and exhibition centre, hotels, malls, shops, art science exhibits, a museum, the world greatest atrium casino, two floating crystal pavilions, and restaurants. The most unique complex is the 340-metre-long SkyPark with an infinity swimming pool placed on top of the most significant world's public cantilevered platform which overhangs from the North tower.

Findings from the netnography study are more consistent with the popular iconic architecture in Singapore. Tourists reflect on the perception of the happiness and uniqueness of their experiences. For example, these three comments are emphasized on their experiences:

*"It was stunning; magnificent tree structures with plants embedded in them, all illuminated at night, different sizes and a high-rise walkway between them giving you a different eye view."*

And:

*"I would 100% recommend visiting Gardens by the Bay (GBTB) whilst staying in Singapore, it was one of the highlights of my trip!"*

Another example:

*"It's one of the most iconic places in Singapore so you must visit to at least take a photo. You must visit this iconic place, which is large, green, crowded at times, and simply breathtaking".*

These examples show that recognition of important iconic architecture is a catalyst for marketing strategy. Even though the photo of Marina Bay Sands has been used widely in many social media to represent Singapore, it is not officially used as part of the logo for marketing promotional activities.

### *Slogan and Logo*

Singapore slogan of "Passion Made Possible" aims to entice business and tourism by showcasing the mind-set and attitude of Singapore to serve as a platform for Singaporean to globally market their images. The brand's development involves respondents from ten countries (Australia, Belgium, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, UK, and US) and from Singapore to understand what Singapore stands for. As a result, the spirit of Singapore is best reflected by the themes of 'passion' and 'possibilities' as shared by the respondents. The 'passion' to strive is said to drive 'possibilities' when possibilities are strongly linked with Singapore as a destination.

What Singapore stands for as a country is articulated by the brand of Singapore supported by telling many stories about the people and destination. This is appealing to more

influential tourists who are looking towards more inspiration and value as Singapore is making shift from being primarily an investment-driven economy to one that innovation will lead. International and local companies that are seeking to create new products, services, and solution successfully handle in Singapore and change possibilities to realities are sent a clear and loud signal by the brand.

While a logo coined as “SG Mark” is also featured by the unified brand with a circle of letters “SG,” and the TSLA design developed the brand identity within it. The TSLA is a design and branding practice of creative shop, the secret little agency (TSLA) in Singapore. The coming of age with quiet confidence and the true personality of the nation of Singapore are expressed by the SG Mark. It can be observed in the typeface of the custom and the abbreviation of the country “SG”. The logo is applied throughout the campaign of the Passion Made Possible and stands as a trademark as applicable to text headlines and key visual icons of Singapore with a ‘distinctive Singapore perspective’ in the same way to a trademark logo.

Although the logo of Singapore does not represent the iconic building such as Marina Bay Sand and other historical buildings, the slogan “Passion Made Possible” can be interpreted by the tourists as a representation of the iconic monument of Singapore. The iconic architecture offers the spirit of Singapore through “passion” and “possibilities”. However, it is difficult as a branding slogan to imagine what an associated development in tourism focus and plan should be for Singapore.

### **Kuala Lumpur and Its Branding**



Figure 3. Kuala Lumpur – A City of Contrast and Diversity (2016)

### ***Iconic Architecture***

Argentine architect César Pelli designed the Petronas twin towers as a distinguished post-modern style which was selected to create a 21st century icon for Kuala Lumpur. Petronas Twin Tower as the tallest twin tower in the world remains to be relevant among iconic architecture globally. Its unique characteristic attracts a million tourist every year and is the most picturesque building in Kuala Lumpur. Tourists, through expressions, are amazed in their posts which stemmed from a discrepancy between what they expect and what is

experienced. A striking example explained the surprise element of Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) as an iconic architecture and must-visit place:

*"It's often said that no visit to Kuala Lumpur is complete without visiting the iconic Petronas Towers, and observing the building lit up in the evening makes it very easy to see why."*

*"KLCC as we know is a must visit when you go to Kuala Lumpur. It's an iconic scene in KL."*

*"I think is pretty self-explanatory. Amazing twin tower. One of a kind. The pride of every Malaysia. The tallest twin tower in the world. A must tower if you are in Kuala Lumpur. There is no way you can miss this iconic tower."*

Tourists consider KLCC as an iconic amazing place for Kuala Lumpur because the view, futuristic shape, and majestic skyline, which is illustrated in the tourists' comments:

*"It is truly an amazing architectural design and a must see if in KL."*

*"Iconic building. I especially love it at night time."*

*"Excellent tour of this iconic building. Dizzying views of the city."*

*"What a majestic view of this skyline. It is certainly iconic! Plus, the fact that you could go shopping luxury brands!"*

The iconic building of Kuala Lumpur does not appear in the logo, but the 'exciting', 'surprising' and 'enticing' elements are embedded in Petronas Twin tower. It shows that the city council of Kuala Lumpur has strategized contrast and diverse elements of the city's characteristics. In city branding models, the cityscape (or 'urban landscape') is characterized in several ways as a 'place physics' (Anholt, 2006).

### ***Slogan and Logo***

Regarding Kuala Lumpur as a city for future, a few developments and strategies have been set up to show its uniqueness and vibrant characteristics. The current development demonstrates the Kuala Lumpur aggressively offered a unique identity to the stakeholders. Kuala Lumpur is branded as 'A City of Contrasts & Diversity', and coherently tagged onto its new logo are the words 'exciting', 'surprising' and 'enticing'. Kuala Lumpur is unique, so 'contrasts and diversity' is a way to portray Kuala Lumpur's distinctiveness, and on the basis that the identity of the city is created on its people, history and traditions in the culture and arts.

The words "Kuala Lumpur" is featured in the logo written in grey colour with a drop shadow giving the city description as 'exciting, surprising and enticing' and brands it as a 'city of contrasts and diversity'. The logo and branding are specially designed to relate to the city heritage which established and grew due to tin mining industry. Since Kuala Lumpur grew as a significant tin trading centre as the tin mining industry developed in the environs of Petaling and Ampang, the logical direction of the approach of the brand design to connect

the tin and tin mining industry to the heritage of Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the letters in the logo are crafted to appear with a metallic finishing in the texture of raw tin.

The new brand identity of Kuala Lumpur does not reflect the ‘contrasting heritage, multi-cultural society and religion, diverse attractions and metropolis.’ The destination attraction needs to spread throughout the city and does not concentrate on the iconic building.

### Jakarta and Its Branding



Figure 4. Jakarta – Enjoy Jakarta (2004)

### *Iconic Architecture*

The National Monument, well-known as Monas by the locals has been highlighted as a central part of the ‘Enjoy Jakarta’ campaign. Monas is historically important to Indonesians, especially to remember their struggle for the country’s independence. The netnography analysis shows how important Monas is as a central idea of the city branding campaign. The iconic architecture, people, and strong culture allow tourists to enjoy the Jakarta city. The architecture reflects the slogan which focuses on the tangible value of the visual identity.

The analysis of the tourist reviews shows the importance of Monas as an iconic architecture in Jakarta. Many references are made related to how this architecture shows its own characteristic and symbolism. Some particularly striking examples of this are provided by the tourists on TripAdvisor website:

*“The iconic statue of Jakarta symbolic”*

*“The area of MONAS is large enough. And the place is peaceful and environmentally friendly with plants and deer around. This is iconic architecture of Jakarta.”*

*“Monas now becoming one of the iconic places to visit in Indonesia especially Jakarta. There will be laser/light show during night time.”*

As a representation of the independence of the country, Monas stands by its own quality and historical value for many years. It is evident that tourists find interesting historical monuments. For example:

*“Monas, a historical monument, covered with gold at the top, symbolizes the city of Jakarta. The build-up is impressive with white marbles and thick walls”.*

*“The largest monument in Jakarta. It's really huge and fascinating, I really enjoyed going there, and it's good to know about heroes and history behind the monument. It's also an excellent building concept, historical building and architecture. You can go to the top of Monas to see around the city from the top... that's really amazing.”*

*“It is a monument structure in Jakarta with gold on the top, is a must visit structure”*

Monas is considered as iconic architecture for Jakarta based on two elements – symbol of country's independence and heritage. The iconic architecture of Monas is built on symbolic and heritage legacies, which creates new destinations and experiences and becomes a part of a city brand portfolio (Evans, 2015).

### *Slogan and Logo*

The tagline of Enjoy Jakarta was launched in March 2005. The primary objective is to find a new branding for Jakarta using facts and not just the common desire of a person responsible and also to increase the number of international tourists to visit Jakarta to 2.2 million people by the end of 2005. The nine slogans have been shortlisted as following: 1) Enjoy Jakarta, 2) Jakarta, The Spice of Life, 3) Jakarta, its Real, 4) Jakarta, It's cool to be Hot, 5) Jakarta, there is more in Jakarta, 6) Jakarta, Asia's Hidden Secret, 7) Jakarta, Rhythm of Life, 8) Jakarta, Feel the Pulse, 9) Jakarta Smile City. Finally, the 'Enjoy Jakarta' has been chosen to represent the city of Jakarta. The city council has a major plan for the city, including the infrastructure development to transform Jakarta as a city that people enjoy (Suherlan, 2016).

Six areas are identified by the research where the city is “as good as or better than other Southeast Asian capitals”, and six areas where they are worse. The strengths are golf, shopping, dining, nightlife, marine tourism, and spas. “Enjoy Jakarta” is a city's brand that promotes ‘enjoy the good bits and ignore the bad’. The National Monument (Monas) appears as a central symbol of the city branding logo. It is based on two colours (blue and orange) palette, while the sketch word shows the informal fonts. Although, the logo appears simple, it represents the ‘enjoyment’ characteristic. The research has a problem to find the justification of the colours and the font type due to limited literatures.

## Ho Chi Minh City and Its Branding



Figure 5. Vibrant Ho Chi Minh City (2011)

### *Iconic Architecture*

Between 1902 and 1908, Ho Chi Minh City Hall or Saigon City Hall was built in a French colonial style in the city of Saigon. After 1975, it was renamed as Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. It remains one of the most stunning colonial monuments, especially in floodlights at night. Although the monumental building is not open to the public, the Saigon City Hall is popular for its great opportunities in photos. Photographs can be taken outside by the tourists, and most of the tourists choose to do so at night when the building and its grounds are lightened up. Although, the Ho Chi Minh City Hall is an essential and historical monument to the city, the connection of the building to the slogan is unclear. The characteristics of the building seem not to be in line with the meaning of 'vibrant'. Moreover, the findings from the netnography analysis show that War Remnants Museum is the main iconic architecture discussed by the tourists. Similarly, the City Hall building is not in the top five list of the tourists' reviews.

Although the findings are not consistent with many literatures that suggesting the iconic architecture could be a central idea of place branding, Ho Chi Minh City Hall has a unique characteristic to be considered. Tourists have expressed their good experiences about the building. A further elaboration on their feelings is expressed:

*"Looks beautiful in night when the city hall is lighted up & walking street alive, needs more development to make it more tourist friendly".*

*"Best visit is the evening when the weather is cooler. City hall is a beautiful photographic attraction. There is also a musical dancing fountain".*

*"Apparently, this is a beautiful garden with lots of colourful flowers and lovely fountains for a moment of calm in the middle of the busy city."*

Contrast with the Marina Bay and KLCC, Ho Chi Minh City has a close historical characteristic with Monas of Jakarta. With full of history of French architecture, tourists always associate this building with the colonial era. Some tourists' comments are:

*"You will be impressed with the European architecture, which is still being well taken care by local government."*

*"We undertook a self-guided tour of French colonial architecture, for us this building was the highlight, (built in the early 1900's) it overlooks a magnificent square with very walkable streets lining the square (hardly any scooters to contend with), it was the centre piece of the walk".*

Although Ho Chi Minh City Hall is not popular based on the number of tourists' reviews, the building has chosen to be important element for the city branding. The historical value situated in a part of the Ho Chi Minh Square makes the iconic architecture stand out as compared to other buildings. It is in line with Evans (2015) suggesting that the heritage quarters indicate the importance of historical and symbolic association and contribute to the identity of the city.

### ***Slogan and Logo***

The "Vibrant Ho Chi Minh City" has been used to portray the tourism promotion program of the city. The slogan is familiarized with the part of the city's brand development campaign since 2011. The campaign as designed by a Cowan Company proposes the concept of an attractive, peaceful, powerful, and friendly land with its peculiar features. Moreover, many resolutions have been brought up by this company to create products for tourism and completing of traveling lines, especially the airlines in Ho Chi Minh City.

The slogan is made available in many printed materials for advertising tourism to promote the Ho Chi Minh City, a vibrant city. Besides, for foreign visitors and the economic centre of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City is also a top landing city. The colourful logos for the marketing tools of HCMC have presented the Ho Chi Minh City Hall buildings as a centre of vibrant activities. It shows the dynamic image regarding colours, but the iconic building does not reflect the context of 'vibrant'. The mixed characteristic between old and new makes it confusing for tourists to recognize the identity of the city.

### **Conclusions**

The research illuminates that city branding is a process of developing concrete policies to achieve economic development, which concurrently serves as a channel for the residents to associate themselves with their city. Notably, it is vital to address urgent social issues like cultural diversity and social exclusion on the other hand. The conceptual ideas focus on the use of city branding and its possible impact on the residents, and the ways they relate with the experiences in their city; this is based on an integration of measures of city marketing. Furthermore, it is explained that the city brand is not only established in the design of logo,



slogan, and advertising campaigns but also in the collection of all those visual identity elements including iconic architecture. Therefore, a coherent branding strategy should focus on building an integrative identity along the lines of city logos, city slogans, and the iconic architecture of the cities. Nowadays, modern societies are using city identity such as slogan, logo, and iconic architecture as symbols of development and admiration in the world. Historic architecture has been an essential tool in communicating the symbols of cities and to entice visitors. Thus, in the branding and promotion of city image, visually attractive iconic architecture turns out to play a significant role.

The city agencies of some of these Southeast Asian cities have also attempted to create a brand for their cities across the elements of visual identity, including iconic architecture, slogan, and logo. However, the brand of those cities, including Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore has created disuniformity. As seen within the context of the Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, and Kuala Lumpur, iconic architecture influences the image of cities. Consequently, through the selected buildings in the research, the visual identity (architecture) is affected as it has been attempted to be questioned and evaluated regarding visual and spatial features. It is revealed from the past studies that the “Sand Skypark” was designed by Moshe Safdie while the Petronas Twin Tower was designed by an Argentine Architect Cesar Pelli. The tower has positive presentation on the visual identity of the city as they fit perfectly to the present context. In another vein, the City Council in Ho Chi Minh City is a non-contextual approach putting aside the existing context and reducing the value of the immediate surroundings. Lastly, it is noted that the old French building does not reflect the ‘vibrant’ city.

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## **About The Authors**

Dr. Bahtiar Mohamad is an Associate Professor of Corporate Communication and Strategy at Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, UUM Kuala Lumpur. He teaches Public Relations, Corporate Communication, Communication for Managers and Organizational Image management, which all combine to support his hybrid profession linking communication with the management. He is carrying out research and publication in the area of corporate identity, corporate image, crisis communication, and corporate branding from the point of view of public relations and corporate communication. Bahtiar has published over 100 research papers in reputed journals and conferences and has authored, co-authored, and edited 8 text-books.

Dr. Ridwan A. Raji is Assistant Professor in Integrated Strategic Communications in the College of Communication and Media Sciences, Zayed University, UAE. His research focuses on Brand Management, Marketing Communication, Media Management and Social Media. He has several publications in International Journals and has a book chapter published in Rutledge Research in Higher-Education book series. He is a reviewer of Indexed journals such as Journal of Brand Management, Computers in Human Behavior, Journal of Marketing Communication, Journal of Promotion Management, and Spanish Journal of Marketing and serves as the board of the editor for the Messenger Journal.

Dr. Ghadah Alarifi is the Dean of College of Business Administration, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University. Her research interest is related to entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, sustainability, impact investing, entrepreneurial orientation, social enterprise's performance, cognitive social perspective in entrepreneurship and gender.

Dr. Ahmed Rageh Ismail received the PhD degree in management studies (Marketing) from Brunel University, Brunel Business School, London, UK, in 2010. He is currently working as an Associate Professor of Management/Marketing at Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYAGSB) Universiti Utara Malaysia. His main research and teaching interests fall into areas such as branding, sustainability, cross-cultural marketing, consumer behavior, value and ethics. He has published in the Qualitative Marketing Research: An International Journal, Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, Asia-Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, Young Consumers amongst others.

Dr. Muslim Diekola Akanmu is currently a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Applied and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia. He bagged his Doctoral degree in Technology, Operations and Logistics Management and Master's degree in Technology Management from Universiti Utara Malaysia. He is also an External Moderator at Peninsula College and a Co-researcher with the Institute for Youth Research (IYRES) under the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Malaysia. He is a graduate member of Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE), an affiliate member of Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM) and an associate member of Malaysian Society for Engineering (AMSET).

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