

## **Stakeholders Reactions to Rebranding of Madiun City: Case Study in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

*The Indonesian people have called Madiun City “Kota Brem,” “Kota Pecel,” and “Kota Sepur” since the Dutch era. In line with the Mayor’s leadership policy, the city branding of Madiun was shifted from “Madiun Kota Gadis” to “Madiun Kota Karismatik” and finally to “Madiun Kota Pendekar”. This study examines stakeholders’ reactions to the rebranding of Madiun City. This study uses qualitative research paradigms and case study methods. The primary data sources were obtained through extensive interviews and non-participant observations. Secondary data came from documentation. Data analysis uses Miles and Huberman’s interactive model approach. The study found that the stakeholders are apathetic when responding to the city rebranding due to their low participation and lack of knowledge in the decision-making process. Differences of interest between the government and stakeholders result in a low response.*

**Keywords:** *city brand, city rebranding, reaction, rebranding, stakeholders*

## INTRODUCTION

The principle of regional autonomy through the law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 22 of 1999 on Local Government grants regions/cities around the archipelago the flexibility to implement any strategies to increase Local Own-Source Revenue (PAD) (Mantiri, 2018). The main sectors contributing to PAD include tax, retribution, and regional wealth (Aji et al., 2018). Regional tourism is one of the contributors to regional wealth because it is directly related to industry, trade, restaurants, and hospitality, which are producers of local taxes and retribution (Wahid, 2018). Tourism retribution and the number of visiting tourists significantly increase the local revenue (Yanti & Hadya, 2018). One of the strategies to strengthen the regional tourism sector involves the implementation of city branding (Herget et al., 2015; Mantiri, 2018; Pellokila et al., 2023). City branding refers to the promotion of regional/city products, including tourism and industrial offerings, to attract tourists and generate economic benefits (Prideaux et al., 2006), through a distinctive logo and tagline (Tiaraputri & Diana, 2021). Therefore, establishing city branding can be considered to improve the regional economy and support the regional/city tourism sector.

The implementation of a city branding strategy within a city is proven to bring about a positive influence on the decisions of tourists (Sa'diya & Andriani, 2018; Utami & Azis, 2021). Besides, city branding can stimulate economic growth in the region/city through investors (Paganoni, 2012). The successful implementation of city branding, according to Anholt (2007), is when the city meets the city brand index hexagon, which comprises six dimensions: presence, place, potential, pulse, people, and prerequisite. City branding strategies have been successfully applied in major cities in the world, such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Hong Kong (Setiawati et al., 2020). Several cities in Indonesia have also implemented city branding, with some undergoing rebranding multiple times. For instance, Jakarta's city rebranded from "Enjoy Jakarta" to "+Jakarta" (Aprianto et al., 2023), and Yogyakarta rebranded from "Jogja Never Ending Asia" to "Jogja Istimewa" (Nurjanah &

Nurnisya, 2016).

The previous study of city branding and/or city rebranding in Indonesia has not received special attention from both the central government and the community. This is evident through the absence of a legal basis that regulates and protects how to brand or rebrand a city (Yuli, 2011; Damayanti et al., 2017) and the lack of standardization in the development of branding for cities in Indonesia (Satria & Fadillah, 2021; Rahmanto, 2015). Nevertheless, some studies analyze that the application of city rebranding can serve as a government tool in communicating new policies (Joo & Seo, 2018; Yurisma et al., 2015; Jokela, 2019), representing local values within community life (Sudarmanto, 2022; Satria & Fadillah, 2021; Zinaida et al., 2020; Widodo & Setiansah, 2014), and strengthening a city's competitive advantage (Shirvani Dastgerdi & De Luca, 2019; Miladiyah & Slamet, 2014). However, the implementation of city rebranding requires substantial funds (TPBO, 2019) and involves a complex process that includes multiple stakeholders. Thus, establishing city branding can bring a lot of benefits, but it also may cause new problems.

Stakeholder involvement in the city rebranding elicits diverse reactions. City rebranding is closely related to political dynamics within the government. Rebranding efforts are often marked as a strategy to signify the power of the government (Ma et al., 2020; Firzal, 2018). Consequently, the government frequently overlooks the needs and participation of the city's residents in this decision (Mugobo, 2021). Conversely, cities that engage in effective communication between the government, residents, and other stakeholders receive positive reactions during the rebranding process (Wiyono et al., 2021; Monteiro, 2016). On the other hand, the city rebranding process with minimal government involvement faces numerous challenges and receives negative reactions from stakeholders during the implementation (Jannah, 2014).

This study analyses the stakeholders' reaction to the implementation of city rebranding in Madiun City, which has undergone three rebranding phases: from "Madiun Kota Gadis" to "Madiun Kota Karismatik"

and most recently to “Madiun Kota Pendekar”. Unlike prior research dominated by product rebranding (Webster & Keller, 2004), this study fills a gap by focusing on stakeholder involvement and responses to city rebranding. The responses given by stakeholders to the rebranding of the city vary: they either support, reject, or act indifferently depending on the strength of stakeholder involvement and responsibilities. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the various responses in the rebranding process of Madiun City.

### *Stakeholder Reactions*

The key to successful city rebranding is the involvement of stakeholders (Handoko et al., 2015). Previous studies on stakeholder involvement in the city branding process have been conducted by Braun et al. (2013), Mustika (2017), Saktianingrum et al. (2020), and Setiawati et al. (2020). Stakeholders refer to the group of people or individuals responsible for the development (Sulaiman et al., 2015). Their involvement varies according to their roles and responsibilities (Simanjourang et al., 2020; Medho, 2023; Ridho & Kurniasari, 2023). The stakeholders are divided into the triple helix stakeholders, which consist of government, business, and academics (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995). This model involved the quadruple helix by incorporating the community as a non-governmental organization, and it further developed into a quintuple helix with the addition of mass media (Carayannis & Campbell, 2010).

Based on their involvement, stakeholders play as policymakers, planners, facilitators, executors, and researchers (Mustafa & Marsoyo, 2020). Stakeholders awareness of responsibilities needs to be built in regular meetings through dialogue (Amalan et al., 2021; Simamora et al., 2016), coordination (Amalan et al., 2021; Mahfud et al., 2014), forum group discussion (Nugroho et al., 2014), and development planning evaluation (Muh. Asriadi et al., 2022; Purwaningsih, 2022; Amalan et al., 2021). Hence, stakeholders’ engagement in city rebranding needs to have the same vision to achieve successful city rebranding.

The term ‘reaction’ has been widely

known as one’s attitudes and feelings. In psychology, it refers to an individual’s reaction elicited by stimuli perceived through the five senses (Sobur, 2003). According to the S-R Communication Model, the response is interpreted as a simple action reaction to a stimulus from the outside (Karyaningsih, 2018). The response is feedback on the message delivered by communicators (Karyaningsih, 2018). Feedback is divided into negative and positive feedback (Robertson, 1991). Positive feedback comes up if the response is in line with the received stimulus, while negative feedback occurs when the resulting response goes the other way. However, certain cases pertain to a third type of feedback named zero feedback, which refers to the response in between. As studies progress, the type of feedback grows with the discovery of neutral feedback (Littlejohn, 2009). Thus, response is basically one of the properties of human psychology due to external conditions, such as the presence of positive feedback, negative feedback, or neutral feedback.

### *City Rebranding*

City branding is a strategy to identify the identity and uniqueness of the city and the way to communicate it to the target consumer (Herget et al., 2015). City branding constitutes the identity of a city through the visualization of names, logos, symbols, and events that are readily etched in the minds of the public and tourists (Mihardja et al., 2019). Therefore, the selection of city branding is necessary to emphasize the unique brand character but universal with a global appeal, and most importantly, representing the character of the community within (Dawood, 2023). Besides, city rebranding is the case of the renaming of cities, the name, logo change, and the city ecosystem change, making people and tourists feel at home and want to stay in cities (Herget et al., 2015). The decision to rename the brand is complex and takes a long time (Noviardi et al., 2020), due to market changes (Collange & Bonache, 2015; Noviardi et al., 2020), and driven by internal and external factors (Chan & Eunike, 2019).

There are three main challenges in implementing city rebranding: the effect of

city rebranding cannot always be anticipated, the lack of stakeholder responsibility, and lack of accountability among stakeholders in the process (Anholt, 2007; Henninger et al., 2016; Moilanen, 2015). Not all rebranding is successful; some of it fails. This failure is due to the lack of a well-planned remark (Lambkin & Muzellec, 2010; Miller et al., 2014; Lozano, 2013), the absence of involvement of stakeholders (Lambkin & Muzellec, 2010; Miller et al., 2014), the lack of a clear vision and the absence of a description of the future, the lack of understanding of consumer preferences, the lack of focus on product benefits, and the lack of communication of brand image (Miller et al., 2014). Thus, city rebranding occurs for various reasons, such as economic changes, demographics, government policy, or circumstances affecting the city's brand.

## **METHOD**

This research adopted a qualitative research paradigm with a case study approach. A case study is a qualitative approach to exploring a phenomenon, activity, or program over a specified period (Creswell, 2013). The case study was selected for this research because it needs to explore city rebranding activity in Madiun City, which has undergone several rebranding efforts. This study involved primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through non-participant observation and interviews. The secondary ones were obtained from previous research and official documents of the Madiun City government. The research instruments were the researchers themselves. The observation was performed on the phenomenon of changes in ornaments around Madiun City. The interview was conducted using purposive sampling, where the informants were selected based on their authority or knowledge relevant to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The key informants of this study were the Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth, and Sports (Disbudparpora) of the Madiun City, academics, businesspeople, the community, community leaders, and the media. Research Informants were chosen as they were stakeholders involved in the city rebranding of Madiun (see Table 1).

The data were analyzed following the four stages of Miles & Huberman's interactive model (Basrowi & Suwandi, 2008). Firstly, the data collection process involved preliminary studies, observation, documentation collection, and naturally in-depth interviews without strict rules. This method aims to foster a friendly environment between researchers and informants and mitigate suspicions. Secondly, data reduction, where the researcher classified data using a thematic analysis approach to obtain data that answers research questions. Thirdly, the data were presented in narrative form. Finally, conclusions were drawn, and data were verified before publication. The data validity test in this study was ensured through source triangulation by assessing the consistency of data obtained from each informant (Sugiyono, 2016).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Since The Dutch era, Madiun City was initially well known as the "Kota Brem", "Kota Pecel", and "Kota Sepur". Despite this, Madiun City has also implemented city branding initiatives and undergone rebranding three times from "Madiun Kota Gadis" to "Madiun Kota Karismatik" and finally to "Madiun Kota Pendekar". Madiun City experiences city rebranding with every transition of the regional head. This means that each city's branding only lasts for 5–10 years, depending on the tenure of the regional head. The city branding of Madiun reflects the vision and mission of the elected regional head, which is visualized in branding. The Madiun City rebrand to "Kota Pendekar" was not chosen without reason; it stands for Pintar (smart), Melayani (service-oriented), Membangun (Constructive), Peduli (Caring), Terbuka (Open), and Karismatik (Charismatic) that represent the aspiration of the current government. Additionally, the term "Pendekar" was selected to honor Madiun's local wisdom as the largest center of pencak silat in Indonesia.

The frequent rebranding of Madiun City has blurred the city's branding itself. Solo City is one of the successful cities in terms of city branding. With the branding "Solo the Spirit of Java", Solo has managed to become one of the cities in Indonesia with

**Table 1. Research Informants**

| No | Name | Category   |
|----|------|--|
| 1  | WPA  | Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth, and Sports of the Madiun City |
| 2  | WK   | Academics  |
| 3  | TPU  | Media  |
| 4  | MT   | Community  |
| 5  | TS   | Community leader   |
| 6  | IS   | Business owner   |

city branding that lasted for a dozen years and is still relevant today (Pandansari et al., 2020). The city branding of Solo has undergone changes, but the change was not that comprehensive, and it retains the tagline of the city (Pandansari et al., 2020). The sustainability of Solo City branding fosters a good response from people with diverse backgrounds (Mustika, 2017).

The response of pros and cons has recently also been harvested against the change of city branding of Jakarta. However, after being confirmed, Jakarta only changes the city slogan to adjust the vision of the elected governor. The city branding of Jakarta, “PlusJakarta”, is still maintained. Only the slogan is altered from “Maju Kotanya, Bahagia Warganya” to “Sukses Jakarta untuk Indonesia!” (TvOne, 2022). Therefore, the regional government should distinguish between city branding and government slogans because city branding is not only adaptive but also needs to last a long time so that the stakeholders and community know and actively participate in supporting the city branding.

*Stakeholder involvement in city rebranding*

City rebranding in Madiun City occurs with every change of regional leadership. The primary responsibility and the initiator of city rebranding in Madiun is the elected mayor. As the highest decision-maker, each new mayor of Madiun City made the idea of rebranding the city as a political campaign reflect their vision and mission. Consequently, Madiun’s city rebrands every electoral

cycle. This underscores the significant influence of the mayor in shaping and directing the city’s rebranding strategy. Thus, rebranding a city is a complex policy that requires the involvement of various stakeholders. The city’s rebranding of Madiun was initiated by the regional head, but the implementation involved the participation of various stakeholders. These stakeholders are classified as the quintuple helix, which includes the government, academics, business owners, community, and media. Each stakeholder plays a different role in the process and implementation of city rebranding.

The government takes the role of a policymaker and planner. The government possesses the authority to plan and initiate city rebranding. The government formulated the vision and mission and outlined it in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD). Additionally, the government oversees the implementation of the city rebranding policies by listening to the aspirations of other stakeholders during the Deliberation of Development Plans (Musrenbang) or by conducting regular meetings with communities in Madiun City. Through these mechanisms, the government ensures that city branding initiatives align with the needs and desires of the community.

The role of academics in the transformation of city rebranding in Madiun is as a researcher. Academics contributed ideas during the forum “Serap Aspirasi,” which was organized by the local government to gather aspirations. In these forums, academics provide perspectives rooted in their respective fields of expertise. The city rebranding pro-

cess to “Madiun Kota Pendekar” also involved collaboration with external academics from another city to formulate the “Pendekar” logo. This collaboration ensures that the rebranding concept is enriched by the city’s identity and cultural heritage and values. By integrating an academic perspective, the city rebranding of Madiun can develop both the cultural resonance and the identity among its residents.

The involvement of business owners in the decision-making process for Madiun’s city rebranding does not seem as prominent as in other sectors. Local entrepreneurs typically participate in Musrenbang as a part of the community, and there is no specific forum that directly facilitates discussions between the government and local business owners. Musrenbang is only attended by the community’s representatives who are conscious of the development of Madiun City. The limited engagement of business owners in the city rebranding decision may hinder the alignment of branding with the needs of the local business community. Indeed, business owners play a crucial role as executors, ensuring the success of city rebranding by providing supplies and products to meet the demand of the market. This potentially impacts the overall effectiveness of the city branding implementation.

Madiun is well known as a pencak silat community. In the decision-making process regarding the rebranding, the community reported not being involved from the beginning. However, dialogues between the government and the community were conducted in the implementation of city rebranding to ensure the safety and stability of Madiun City. Padepokan pencak silat entrusted as a Kamtibmas to maintain public security. So, communities in Madiun take the role of executor to leverage the strong cultural identity of pencak silat and maintain strong belonging between the community and their city.

Media plays a facilitator in a crucial role in informing and communicating the city’s branding. Additionally, the government collaborates with local media to launch and introduce the new city branding. The Madiun City government has also created its media, named “Madiun Today”, under the Department of Communication and Infor-

matics (Diskominfo) to inform the public about upcoming events in the city. This initiative helps to widely disseminate and enhance the recognition of Madiun’s city rebranding, ensuring it reaches a broader tourist.

This study found that the government is the primary stakeholder initiating city rebranding. However, in its execution and implementation, all stakeholders have been highly involved in discussion and dialogue. Nonetheless, each role needs a sense of awareness and responsibility. Thus, the city’s rebranding can have a good impact on urban living, including the economy, tourism, human resources, and infrastructure.

#### *Stakeholder reactions to rebranding*

The study found that most of the stakeholders in Madiun City are not involved directly in the process of city rebranding. It caused neutral feedback in responding to the city rebranding. They understand all the changes in Madiun, including its logo, and the brand, as a usual pattern for the new regional head. This change also does not directly influence society’s economic and social lifestyles. An informant as a community asserted,

*“The people here do not care. They also follow the government. As long as they have a good program within the safe limits of the community, it is still possible that they will follow the decision. That is what I know. Nobody refuses or does the demonstration. The most important thing is that the community feels the impact. Whatever the name the city is called, they will follow it. The community should also participate in that, but the people here accept it the way the government plans.” (Interview with MT, [05/06/2023])*

The decision to rebrand Madiun City was made internally by the local government and only facilitated the debate on the development plan with stakeholders after the establishment of a new city brand. This low involvement makes stakeholders and communities accept the rebranding less than optimally. In addition to neutral reactions, low stakeholder participation can also cause negative perceptions and rejection (Mugobo, 2021). The stakeholders need to be involved in the decision on the city rebranding from the beginning. They are also discussed in

research by Bonakdar & Audirac (2020), Firzal (2018), Masuda & Bookman (2018), and Mugobo (2021), which shows that current urban restructuring policies do not pay much attention to residents' aspirations and are dominated by leaders' power ambitions.

The stakeholder involvement in implementing city rebranding in Madiun City is relatively robust, as evidenced by the government's efforts to facilitate open dialogues to absorb aspirations with the stakeholders. However, the participation of stakeholders in these dialogues remains low. As a result, when city rebranding is already implemented, each stakeholder does not commit to their roles and responsibilities. The lack of critical nature of stakeholders leads to less optimal responses. Stakeholders tend to ignore and do not want to know the urgency of the city's rebranding policy. The stakeholders are easily able to accept the changes but tend to be passive in showing their support, even though one of the factors to the success of the rebranding is the active involvement of all stakeholders (Källström & Siljeklint, 2023). However, some stakeholders regret that the city's brand shifts as leadership changes. They believe this change has resulted in a loss of the richness and uniqueness of the city. As an informant from the media asserted,

*"Well, you see, consistency makes it easily recognizable. But Madiun's city branding keeps changing, and people get confused about what the city actually represents. That's the unfortunate part. For example, Madiun used to be known for its Pecel and Brem, but these are no longer prominent. Brem, in particular, is almost invisible today. Maybe the older generations still remember Madiun as the 'City of Brem', but the younger generations might not be aware of this heritage." (Interview with TPU, [05/06/2023])*

Clear policy decisions are essential to foster high levels of responsibility among all parties involved, ensuring stakeholders understand the rationale behind the city's rebranding. A lack of clarity and information about city rebranding can lead to confusion and misunderstandings and raise ignorance (Cleave et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the city rebranding of Madiun City does not meet the criteria by excluding the ability of stakeholders to understand and participate in the

city rebranding so that the stakeholder reaction to city rebranding remains neutral. Like branding in a product or company, city branding should stay for a long time.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the city rebranding in Madiun engages quintuple helix stakeholders, namely: the government as policymakers, planners, and coordinators; academics as researchers; community and businesspeople as executors; and the media as facilitators. However, diverse stakeholders have not taken the city rebranding in Madiun seriously. The city rebranding by the government often functions solely as a part of the leader's vision and mission without adequate consideration of the sustainability of the city's identity. The stakeholder response to frequent city rebranding is neutral, indicating acceptance but low involvement. Nevertheless, frequent rebranding has led to a blurred city identity. The government must adopt a more strategic and cohesive approach to strengthen collaboration and involvement from each stakeholder in developing the city, thereby ensuring long-term growth and development.

This study has two limitations. Firstly, it focuses on a single city and cannot be generalized across others due to differences in culture and leadership, which may lead to varied interpretations of rebranding. Secondly, researchers were unable to access key informants, such as the Mayor of Madiun, to gain deeper insight into city rebranding and its values. Therefore, future research should adopt a comparative approach, accommodating the unique characteristics of different cities.

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