


## Exploring City Brand Gestalt Driver: The Case of Bitung City

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> City brand, destination brand, brand gestalt, story, sensescape.</p>	<p>As urban landscapes evolve rapidly and competition among cities intensifies for economic growth and global recognition, the imperative to understand the dynamics of City Brand Gestalt (CBG) has heightened. This study aims to delve into the architecture of CBG by assessing the impact of its four dimensions (namely Story, Sensescape, Servicescape, and Stakeholder) on shaping Bitung City's overall brand gestalt. This research holds significance in formulating development strategies for CBG aimed at improving the economy of Bitung City, particularly in the tourism sector. A quantitative descriptive and causal research design was adopted by distributed and collected 250 self-administered online questionnaires from Bitung City visitors between January and May 2023. Structural Equation Modeling using SmartPLS was employed to determine the significant influence of each dimension on brand gestalt. The results confirmed the significant role of the 4S dimensions namely, story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder in shaping the overall city brand gestalt. In summary, this research underscores significant implications for city marketers and policymakers, emphasizing the necessity of crafting an appealing and positive brand narrative to enhance the image of a city. This, in turn, can bolster the city's economy, particularly in terms of tourism and other sectors.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

The importance of branding for a city or destination cannot be overstated. A strong brand has the power to shape perceptions, attract visitors, drive economic growth and fostering community pride (Ambalao et al., 2022; Mandagi et al., 2021). A city brand represents the unique identity, values, and experiences that make a place distinct and desirable to both residents and tourists (Kowaas et al., 2023). Firstly, a well-crafted brand creates a positive image and personality of a city or destination, highlighting its key attractions, cultural heritage, and offerings (Marhareita et al., 2022). The city's distinctive image and brand personality serve to differentiate it from its competitors, establishing it as a compelling destination that is essential for visitors to explore. profound emotions, ignite curiosity, and engender interest among potential visitors (Walean et al., 2023). Moreover, a strong city brand fosters a sense of pride and belonging among residents. When residents identify with and actively promote their city's brand, it creates a positive atmosphere, enhances community engagement, and encourages local businesses to thrive (Ambalao et al., 2022).

Brand gestalt holds paramount importance in city or destination branding, encapsulating the holistic experience associated with a particular place. The concept arises from the growing recognition of the significance of destination branding in the tourism industry. It encompasses the overall perception, image, and identity of a city or destination in the minds of tourists (Mandagi et al., 2021; Green et al., 2016). The significance of brand gestalt lies in its capacity to create a distinct and positive impression of a city or destination, influencing tourists' decisions to visit, explore, and engage with the place (Walean et al., 2023). A robust brand gestalt establishes a unique identity and competitive advantage, helping the city or destination to stand out in a crowded tourism market (Wulyatiningsih & Mandagi, 2023). Additionally, brand gestalt fosters tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Kainde et al., 2023; Toding et al., 2022; Walean et al., 2023). A positive and memorable experience that aligns with the brand promise creates a sense of attachment and emotional connection, leading to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and advocacy, contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of the city or destination (Langitan et al., 2024; Wantah et al., 2024; Agustini et al., 2022).

This research aims to understand how the 4S dimensions contribute to the formation of a city's brand gestalt. Brand gestalt, comprising elements such as the city's cultural heritage, natural landscapes, infrastructure, hospitality, and overall visitor experience, represents the culmination of these dimensions (Mandagi et al., 2022). Despite extensive research on city branding's impact on tourism, empirical research exploring the interplay of brand gestalt in city branding remains limited (Mandagi et al., 2021). The primary objective of this study is to explore the intricate connections between the 4S dimensions and the overall brand gestalt in a city context. The study aims to understand how each dimension—story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder—shapes the city brand gestalt profoundly. By examining these interrelationships, the research offers valuable insights to destination marketers, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders. The findings can inform strategic decisions on brand positioning, marketing strategies, and initiatives to enhance the overall customer experience, ultimately contributing to the long-term development and success of a city or destination as a sought-after tourist destination.

## METHODS

The method used in research is descriptive. The primary data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire, with all items developed and adapted from the literature review. The measurement for brand gestalt, comprising 19 items, was adapted from Mandagi et al. (2021). The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: the first section investigated respondents' demographic information and background, while the second section, divided into four subsections, measured the items of the constructs for testing the hypotheses.

The study targeted visitors of Bitung City over a period of five months from January to May 2023. The survey link was sent to selected respondents. Initially, the response rate was relatively low, prompting the survey to be sent again to another batch of users. The sample size was determined based on the requirements of the statistical tool used in the analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), with a sample size of 200 deemed acceptable (Hair et al., 2019)

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Variable	Level	n	%
Gender	Male	113	42%
	Female	117	58%
Age	21-30	116	46%
	31-40	113	45%
	41-50	14	6%
	>50	7	3%
Profession	Student	96	38%
	Civil servant	65	26%
	Privet Employee	59	24%
	Other	30	12%

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents in the study. The respondents were almost evenly split between male (113 respondents, 42%) and female (117 respondents, 58%). In terms of age distribution, the majority fell within the age range of 21-30 years old, constituting 46% of the sample (116 respondents), followed closely by the age range of 31-40 years old, making up 45% of the sample (113 respondents). There were smaller proportions of respondents in the age ranges of 41-50 years old (14 respondents, 6%) and above 50 years old (7 respondents, 3%). Regarding profession, the largest occupational group among the respondents was students, comprising 38% of the sample (96 respondents). Civil servants represented 26% of the sample (65 respondents), followed closely by private employees at 24% (59 respondents). The "Other" category, which includes respondents with professions not listed in the table, constituted 12% of the sample (30 respondents).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis conducted in this investigation entails a series of procedural steps within the framework of structural equation modeling (SEM). Initially, the evaluation of convergent validity is conducted by scrutinizing the loading factor values of each indicator vis-à-vis its corresponding variable. Convergent validity is deemed satisfactory if all loading factors exceed the threshold of 0.7. Subsequently, the study proceeds to assess construct discriminant validity employing the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Discriminant validity is deemed achieved when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable surpasses the correlation between disparate variables. Additionally, attention is given to cross-loading values, wherein a robust discriminant validity manifests as higher correlations between a variable and its own indicators in contrast to those of other variables. Construct reliability is evaluated through various metrics including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Extracted Variance (EV). Reliability is confirmed when Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.7, composite reliability surpasses 0.70, and EV exceeds 0.50. Following the assurance of validity and reliability indicators, the study advances to scrutinize the structural model via hypothesis testing, wherein the significance of path coefficients is examined utilizing the PLS Bootstrapping feature within SmartPLS. The assessment of the model's

goodness-of-fit involves a comparative analysis between the theoretical model and the empirical model.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### Descriptive Statistic

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for four variables: Story, Sensescape, Serviscape, and Stakeholder, rated on a 1 to 7 scale. The story dimension, with a mean rating of 6.07, suggests that tourists generally perceive this dimension of their tourism experience as high, with a low standard deviation of 1.23, indicating consistency in perception. Similarly, the Sensescape dimension, with a mean rating of 5.90, reflects a high perception level among tourists, accompanied by a low standard deviation of 1.28, indicating minimal variability in perception. In contrast, the Serviscape dimension scores slightly lower, with a mean of 5.18, while Stakeholder involvement is moderate, with a mean of 5.57. Overall, respondents perceive significant narrative and sensory elements, while service-related aspects and stakeholder involvement show slightly lower presence.

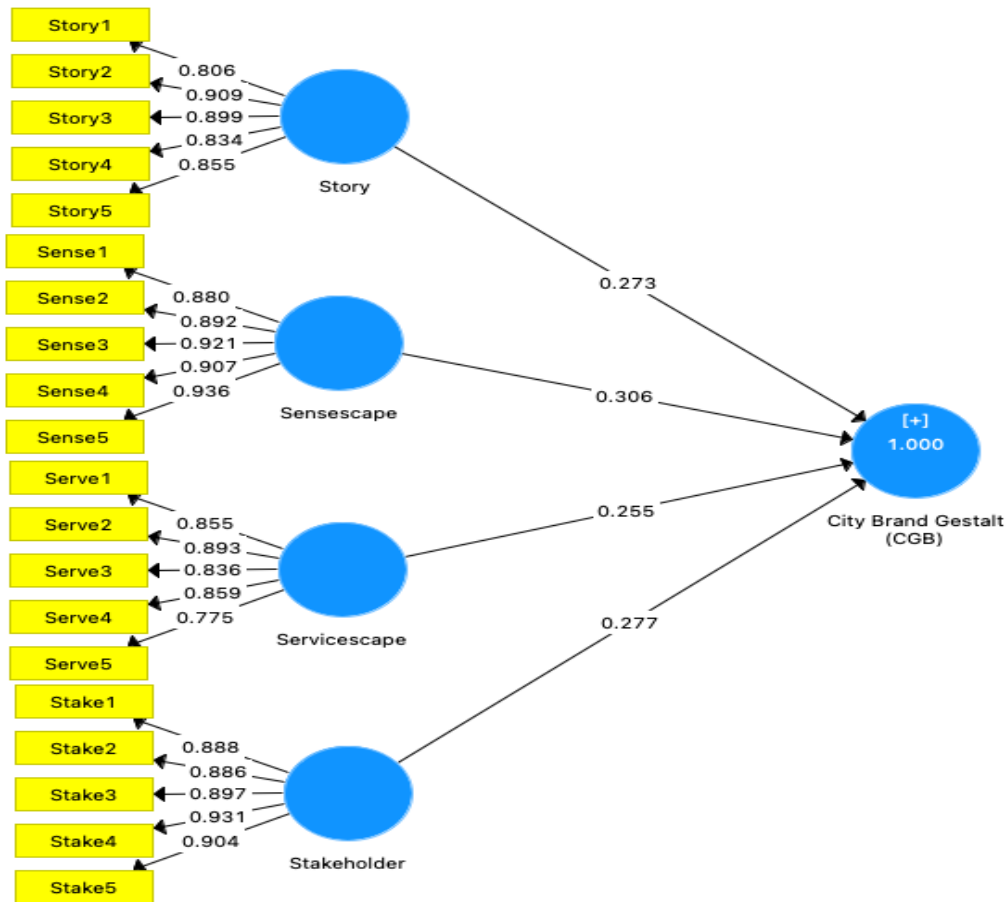
**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistic

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Story	250	1	7	6.07	1.23
Sensescape	250	1	7	5.90	1.28
Serviscape	250	1	7	5.18	1.48
Stakeholder	250	1	7	5.57	1.24

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

### Measurement Model

To ascertain the reliability and validity of the comprehensive measurement scale, an extensive analysis of the measurement model was undertaken using the SmartPLS algorithm feature. Convergent validity was assessed by scrutinizing the factor loading values. The results of the measurement model assessment are depicted in Figure 1 and elaborated upon in Table 3. This process shows that all factor loading values exceed the specified standard threshold of 0.70. indicating a robust level of convergent validity. This reinforces the accuracy of the scale in measuring the designated constructs, thereby bolstering the credibility and resilience of the measurement instrument.



**Figure 1.** Measurement Model

**Table 3.** Measurement Model Test Result (Factor Loading)

Variables	Indicators	Factor Loading
Sensescape	Sense1	0.88
	Sense2	0.89
	Sense3	0.92
	Sense4	0.91
	Sense5	0.94
Servicescape	Serve1	0.86
	Serve2	0.89
	Serve3	0.84
	Serve4	0.86
	Serve5	0.77
Stakeholder	Stake1	0.89
	Stake2	0.89
	Stake3	0.90
	Stake4	0.93
	Stake5	0.90
Story	Story1	0.81

Variables	Indicators	Factor Loading
	Story2	0.91
	Story3	0.90
	Story4	0.83
	Story5	0.86

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

Discriminant validity was evaluated through the application of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, with the findings elaborated in Table 4. The analysis indicates that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, situated along the diagonal in Table 4, exceed the correlations observed between the corresponding variables. This unequivocal result attests to the successful attainment of discriminant validity. This finding unequivocally confirms the achievement of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker 1981).

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
(1) CBG	0.79				
(2) Sensescape	0.93	0.91			
(3) Servicescape	0.9	0.82	0.84		
(4) Stakeholder	0.85	0.68	0.66	0.9	
(5) Story	0.92	0.82	0.76	0.73	0.86

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

Table 5 summarizes reliability result for five variables in this study. Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and AVE were utilized. As shown in Table 5, the reliability of each variable meets the recommended standards, with CA and CR values for all constructs surpassing the recommended thresholds of 0.7 and AVE exceeding the 0.5 threshold indicating strong internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). Brand Gestalt, Sensescape, Servicescape, Stakeholder, and Story. Reliability measures indicate strong performance across all variables. Brand Gestalt scores exceptionally high with CA, rho\_A, and CR values at 0.97. Sensescape and Stakeholder exhibit reliability with CA, rho\_A, and CR values above 0.95. Servicescape displays solid reliability, and Story shows reliable performance, with CA, rho\_A, and CR values exceeding 0.9. All other variables demonstrate substantial internal consistency, affirming the robustness of the measurement instrument.

**Table 5.** Result of the Reliability Testing

Variables	CA	rho_A	CR	AVE
Brand Gestalt	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.63
Sensescape	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.82
Servicescape	0.90	0.90	0.93	0.71
Stakeholder	0.94	0.94	0.96	0.81
Story	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.74

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

Structural Model (Inner Model)

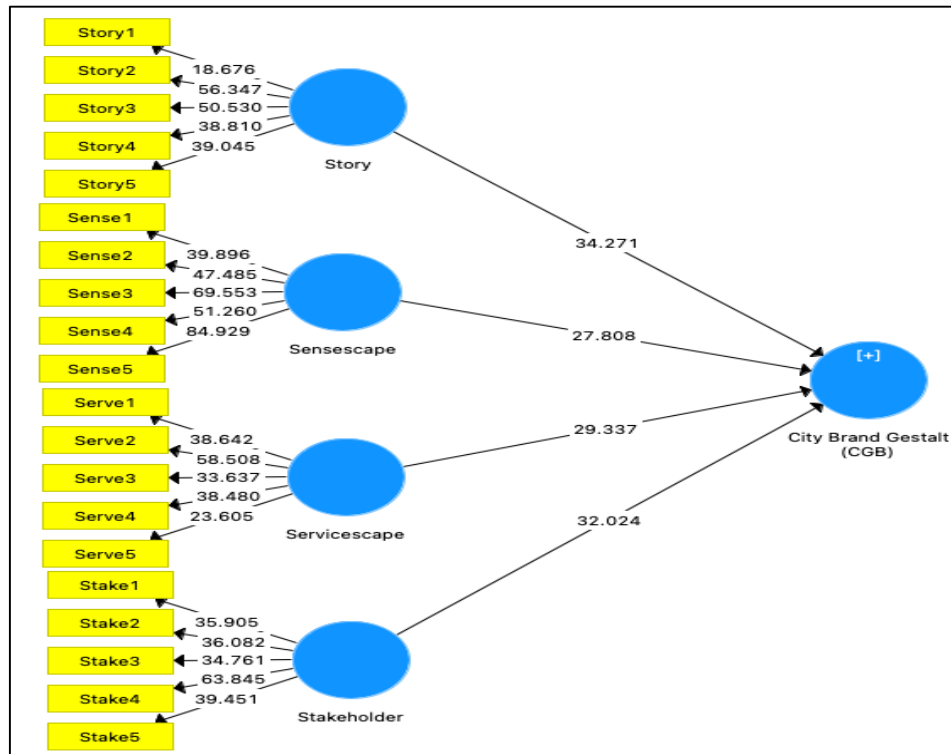


Figure 2. Result of the Structural Models

In the second phase of data analysis, the structural model was estimated using PLS Bootstrapping to scrutinize the research, as depicted in Figure 3. Table 6 presents the findings, particularly regarding the formative effect of the 4S dimensions of brand gestalt (Sensescape, Servicescape, Stakeholder, and Story). Among these dimensions, "Story" emerges as the most influential factor on Brand Gestalt, as indicated by its substantial T statistic of 34.27. This underscores the pivotal role of crafting a compelling brand narrative in shaping overall brand perception. It emphasizes the significance of effectively communicating a brand's story to resonate with and captivate the target audience. Furthermore, both Sensescape and Servicescape dimensions demonstrate significant impacts on Brand Gestalt, underscoring the importance of creating sensory-rich experiences and delivering quality services to enhance brand perception. Managing stakeholders also emerges as crucial, contributing positively to the overall brand gestalt. These findings collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of brand perception and underscore the importance of various strategic elements in shaping it effectively.

Table 6. Formative effect of Brand Gestalt Dimensions

Hypothesis: Path Relations	Sample Mean	T Stat.	P Values
Sensescape -> CBG	0.307	27.808	0.000
Servicescape -> CBG	0.256	29.337	0.000
Stakeholder -> CBG	0.276	32.024	0.000
Story -> CBG	0.274	34.271	0.000

Source : Processed Primary Data 2023

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights several key findings. Firstly, among the 4S dimensions of brand gestalt, the most influential dimension is the brand narrative or "story," emphasizing the profound impact of crafting a compelling brand narrative in shaping overall brand perception. Effectively conveying a brand's narrative is pivotal in resonating with and captivating the target audience (Mandagi & Sondakh, 2022; Priporas et al., 2020). Additionally, the sensescape and servicescape dimensions also significantly influence brand gestalt, emphasizing the importance of curating sensory-rich experiences and delivering top-tier services to elevate brand perception (Mandagi et al., 2021; Mandagi et al., 2022; Walean et al., 2023). Equally crucial is adept stakeholder management, contributing positively to the overall brand gestalt. Stakeholders, including tourists, government bodies, enterprises, and the local community, offer invaluable insights into a city's gestalt (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Rantung et al., 2023). Their active involvement profoundly shapes how the city brand resonates in the tourism market, highlighting the imperative of effectively managing these relationships to align with the desired brand image (Abin et al., 2022; Komaling & Taliwongso, 2023; Warbung et al., 2023; Waworuntu et al., 2022). These findings serve as a reference for policymakers to implement economic development strategies, particularly in the tourism sector. Based on the results, policymakers should focus on improving the quality of tourism services and facilities in Bitung City to ensure tourists leave with a positive impression, ultimately benefiting the city's reputation.

## LIMITATIONS

Despite its notable contributions, the current research is circumscribed by several constraints. Primarily, the findings, rooted in the specific milieu of Bitung city, may suffer from restricted applicability. Consequently, forthcoming investigations will be imperative to encompass diverse cohorts and environments, thereby augmenting the universality of the findings. Furthermore, the study's adoption of a cross-sectional design constrains its capacity to delineate causality or apprehend temporal dynamics. Subsequent inquiries ought to embrace longitudinal frameworks, thereby furnishing a more holistic comprehension of how brand gestalt shapes tourist behavior across distinct stages of the tourist trajectory. Moreover, it would be advantageous for future studies to undertake comparative analyses across assorted tourist destinations or urban locales, elucidating the variations in the influence of brand gestalt and its facets contingent upon destination typology, cultural milieus, or geographic settings.

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