COMMUNICATING URBAN HERITAGE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEGAL CITY

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Abstract

Urban heritage plays an important role in shaping city identity and collective memory. In the digital era, social media has become a key platform for communicating cultural values and representing urban heritage to the public. This study examines how urban heritage is communicated through official social media accounts of Tegal City and explores audience preferences toward heritage-related digital content. Using a mixed qualitative approach, this research combines content analysis of social media posts with a survey of 104 respondents to identify dominant communication patterns, content types, and audience expectations. The findings indicate that social media communication in Tegal City is predominantly informational and promotional, with limited use of historical narratives and heritage-based storytelling. Meanwhile, audience preferences show a strong interest in clear narratives, consistent visual identity, and content that highlights historical and cultural values. The gap between current communication practices and audience expectations suggests that urban heritage has not yet been optimally positioned as a core element of the city's digital representation. This study contributes to cultural and social science discussions by highlighting the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of urban heritage and city identity, particularly in medium-sized cities. The results underscore the importance of aligning digital communication practices with audience preferences to strengthen heritage-based urban representation.

Keywords: audience preferences; digital communication; social media; urban heritage; city identity

INTRODUCTION

Urban heritage is increasingly recognized as a communicative resource through which cities articulate identity, memory, and cultural meaning. Beyond its material presence, heritage functions as a symbolic medium that conveys narratives about the past while shaping contemporary interpretations of place. In social and cultural studies, heritage is understood not only as a legacy to be preserved, but also as a form of representation that gains meaning through communication processes involving institutions, media, and audiences (Nursanty et al., 2024).

In recent decades, the transformation of urban communication has been strongly influenced by digital media, particularly social media platforms. Cities now rely on social media to disseminate information, construct public narratives, and engage with citizens in real time. As a result, social media has become a central arena

where urban identities are produced, circulated, and negotiated (Kavaratzis, 2018). This shift has significant implications for how urban heritage is presented to the public, as historical values and cultural symbols are increasingly mediated through digital visuals, captions, and interaction patterns rather than through physical experience alone.

Previous studies suggest that digital representations play a decisive role in shaping public perception of heritage and place identity. Heritage communicated through fragmented or purely promotional content risks being reduced to surface-level information, detached from its historical and cultural context (Kendra, 2024). Conversely, when heritage is articulated through coherent narratives and consistent visual strategies, it can foster deeper public engagement and strengthen collective memory. This highlights the importance of understanding not only what aspects of heritage are communicated, but also how they are communicated in digital environments.

Within this context, audience perception emerges as a critical dimension of urban heritage communication. Social media users actively interpret, respond to, and evaluate content based on their expectations, interests, and cultural knowledge. Research on digital place communication indicates that audiences tend to favor content that combines historical storytelling, visual coherence, and meaningful cultural references (Huertas et al., 2017). When official communication practices fail to align with these preferences, audience engagement may remain superficial, limiting the role of heritage as a shared cultural resource.

In Indonesia, many cities possess colonial era heritage that reflects complex historical processes of trade, governance, and urban formation. While several major cities have incorporated colonial heritage into their public narratives, heritage communication remains uneven across regions. Despite existing legal frameworks for cultural heritage protection, many historic assets lack sustained visibility in public discourse, particularly in digital media (Sinaga & Subiyanto, 2023). This condition suggests that challenges in heritage preservation are not solely material or regulatory, but also communicative.

Tegal City represents a relevant case for examining these dynamics. As a medium sized coastal city on the northern coast of Java, Tegal played a strategic role in colonial transportation and trade networks, particularly in relation to port activities and sugar distribution (Kharisma Putri & Ardiyanto, 2023). Although remnants of this historical role still exist, colonial heritage has not become a prominent element in the city's digital representation. Official social media platforms tend to emphasize contemporary themes such as local events, maritime identity, and culinary culture, while historical narratives receive comparatively limited attention.

This pattern indicates a gap between the historical significance of urban heritage and its representation in digital communication. The marginal presence of heritage related content suggests that social media has not yet been fully utilized as a

medium for communicating historical identity in Tegal City. At the same time, existing audience engagement with social media content points to an opportunity to reassess how heritage narratives could be communicated more effectively within digital spaces.

In the digital era, social media has become a primary medium for urban communication and public representation. Beyond functioning as a tool for information dissemination, social media operates as a cultural space where meanings about place and identity are produced, circulated, and negotiated. The ways in which local governments curate narratives, visuals, and messages on social media significantly influence how urban heritage and identity are understood by the public. When heritage related content is communicated in a fragmented or purely informational manner, its potential to function as a core element of urban identity becomes diminished.

Scholarly discussions on heritage and urban representation emphasize that digital media can function as a bridge between historical assets and contemporary audiences. Prinzleve demonstrates that heritage narratives, when strategically communicated, contribute to the formation of collective memory and urban identity (Prinzleve, 2023). Similarly, studies on multimodal heritage communication highlight the role of digital platforms in integrating visual, textual, and interactive elements to enhance public understanding of cultural heritage (Vasta & Manzella, 2024) These perspectives underscore the need to examine not only heritage assets themselves, but also the communication practices that frame them.

Despite the growing body of research on heritage communication and digital media, studies focusing on audience preferences in medium sized Indonesian cities remain limited. Existing research has predominantly addressed physical conservation or tourism oriented promotion, leaving the communicative and perceptual dimensions of heritage underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how urban heritage is communicated through the official social media accounts of Tegal City and to examine audience preferences toward heritage related digital content. By focusing on communication practices and audience perspectives, this research contributes to social and cultural studies by illuminating the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of urban heritage and city identity in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach supported by descriptive quantitative data to examine urban heritage communication through social media and audience preferences toward heritage related content. This approach is chosen because the research focuses on meaning making, representation, and perception formed through digital communication, rather than on testing causal relationships or statistical hypotheses.

The object of this study is the communication of urban heritage conveyed through the official Instagram account of Tegal City. Instagram is selected as the primary platform due to its strong visual orientation, interactive features, and its role as an active public communication channel used by local governments to construct and disseminate urban representations. The platform enables simultaneous analysis of visual elements, textual narratives, and audience engagement.

Data collection is conducted through two main techniques: Instagram content analysis and an audience preference survey. Instagram content analysis is used to identify communication patterns in posts published by the official account of Tegal City, particularly those related to cultural and historical heritage. The collected data include visual posts, captions, thematic content categories, and message characteristics within a defined period of observation. This analysis aims to understand how urban heritage is represented visually and narratively on Instagram, as well as to identify dominant content types.

An audience preference survey is conducted to complement the content analysis by incorporating the perspective of message recipients. The survey involves 104 respondents who are active Instagram users and have been exposed to content from Tegal City's official Instagram account. Respondents are selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria that they have viewed or interacted with the city's Instagram content. The survey instrument is developed based on indicators of urban and digital communication, including content type preference, narrative clarity, visual consistency, and audience interest in heritage and history based content.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained from the results of Instagram content analysis and the audience preference questionnaire. Secondary data are collected through a literature review of academic journals, research reports, and policy documents related to cultural heritage communication, social media, and urban identity. These secondary sources provide the theoretical foundation for data interpretation and discussion.

The data analyzed in this research include qualitative and descriptive quantitative data. Qualitative data comprise visual characteristics, narrative styles, and communication patterns found in Instagram posts. Descriptive quantitative data are derived from survey results and presented in the form of percentages and response trends. The integration of these data types allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital communication practices and audience perception.

Data analysis is conducted in several stages. The first stage involves Instagram content analysis by categorizing posts according to themes, content types, and visual and narrative characteristics. This stage aims to assess the extent to which urban heritage is communicated through Instagram content. The second stage involves analyzing audience survey results to identify audience preferences regarding

heritage related content on Instagram. The findings from both analyses are then compared to examine alignment or gaps between official communication practices and audience expectations. The final stage involves interpreting the findings using a cultural communication and urban representation framework to understand the role of Instagram as a medium for urban heritage communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
1. Overview of Content on Tegal City's Official Instagram Account

The analysis of Tegal City's official Instagram account indicates that the platform is actively utilized by the local government as a public communication medium. Posts are published on a regular basis using various content formats, including single images, carousel posts, and short videos. However, in terms of thematic focus, the content is predominantly oriented toward general information and activity promotion rather than content that specifically highlights urban heritage and the city's historical background.

Based on content categorization, Instagram posts from Tegal City can be grouped into several main themes, including information on events and activities, governmental information, tourism promotion, culinary content, and heritage related content. Among these categories, posts related to social activities, official events, and general public information constitute the most dominant portion of the content. In contrast, posts that explicitly present historical narratives or urban heritage appear in relatively limited numbers.

These findings indicate that Instagram is primarily used as an informational and promotional platform rather than as a medium for communicating Tegal City's historical identity. Heritage elements that appear in the posts often function merely as visual backdrops without adequate historical explanation. As a result, urban heritage has not yet emerged as a central theme in the city's digital representation.

Table 1. Characteristics of Content and Communication on Tegal City's Official Instagram Account

No.	Analytical Aspect	Findings on Tegal City's Instagram Account
1.	Logo and Profile Identity	The Instagram profile does not use a specific city logo as a primary identity. The profile image consists of general visual imagery without a distinctive heritage based logo.
2	Visual Color Scheme	No consistent color palette is applied across Instagram posts. Visual appearance varies between posts

		without a standardized color system.
3	Visual Consistency	Partial visual consistency is found through the recurring use of institutional logos, including the Tegal City Government logo, *Amazing Tegal*, and *Wonderful Indonesia* in several posts.
4	Typography	No consistent typographic system is identified across posts. Different typefaces and compositions are used, although some heritage related posts show relatively more aligned typography.
5	Slogan / Tagline Usage	The *Amazing Tegal* slogan is not consistently communicated through narrative text but appears visually in small logo elements in selected posts. Some older posts still use previous slogan variations.
6	Storytelling and Narrative	Storytelling related to historical places relies more on visual elements than on captions. Text embedded in images functions as an introductory narrative, while captions provide brief and light contextual explanations.
7	Hashtag Strategy	Hashtags are used consistently across posts, including #tegaltourism, #sinoksitongkotategal, #pariwisatategal, #visitjateng, #jelajahjatengsekarang, and #kotategal.
8	Language Style	The language style ranges from semi formal to informal, using direct address and persuasive expressions to create closeness with audiences, while formal language is reserved for ceremonial information.
9	Content Types	Among the last 40 posts, 24 posts contain general information, 5 posts promote tourism and culinary content, 6 posts relate to historical places and culinary heritage, and 5 posts provide

		event information.
10	Audience Engagement	The account has 2,144 followers, an engagement rate of 1.65%, average engagement per post of 30 interactions, average likes of 30, average comments of 2, and average views of 897 per post.
11	Posting Frequency	Within a one month period (November), the account published 11 posts with irregular weekly frequency, ranging from one to four posts per week.

Source: Instagram Content Analysis of Tegal City Official Account, 2026

As summarized in Table 1, the Instagram account of Tegal City demonstrates an active use of visual communication; however, the absence of a consistent visual identity and narrative structure indicates that heritage communication has not yet been systematically integrated into the city's digital representation.

2. Representation of Urban Heritage in Instagram Content

The analysis shows that urban heritage is represented in a limited and fragmented manner within Tegal City's official Instagram content. Heritage related posts mainly consist of photographs of historical buildings or old urban areas, while captions provide only brief and surface level information, such as location or current function. Historical context, chronology, and cultural significance are rarely elaborated.

Visual elements play a more dominant role than textual narratives in conveying heritage related messages. Text embedded in images is occasionally used as an introductory statement, but captions generally function as short descriptions rather than as storytelling tools. As a result, heritage content tends to emphasize visual appearance over historical meaning, reducing urban heritage to an aesthetic background rather than a communicative representation of city identity.

Furthermore, heritage related posts do not follow a consistent visual or narrative pattern that distinguishes them from other types of content. The absence of a dedicated visual identity or storytelling structure makes heritage communication sporadic and less recognizable within the overall Instagram feed. This condition limits the potential of Instagram as a medium for systematically communicating Tegal City's historical identity.

3. Audience Preferences Based on Survey Results

The audience preference survey was conducted to examine how users perceive and evaluate heritage related communication on Tegal City's official Instagram account. A total of 104 respondents participated in the survey, all of whom are active Instagram users and have been exposed to the city's official Instagram

content. The survey results indicate that audience preferences are strongly oriented toward clarity of information, consistency of visual and verbal identity, and interactive communication styles.

Table 2. Audience Preferences toward Heritage Related Content on Instagram

No.	Aspect	Survey Results
1.	Visual Identity	A majority of respondents agreed (44.7%) and strongly agreed (41.7%) that a specifically designed city logo is easier to remember than a profile displaying only the city name.
2	Visual Color Consistency	Most respondents disagreed (37.9%) and strongly disagreed (8.7%) with the statement that color inconsistency is not a problem, indicating that visual color consistency is considered important.
3	Visual Elements Consistency	The majority agreed (52.4%) and strongly agreed (31.1%) that repeated visual elements help audiences recognize tourism related accounts.
4	Visual Readability	Most respondents agreed (47.6%) and strongly agreed (21.4%) that well structured text layout improves visual comfort.
5	Verbal Identity	A large proportion of respondents agreed (48.5%) and strongly agreed (41.7%) that consistent slogans or taglines help audiences recognize account identity.
6	Narrative Clarity	Most respondents agreed (46.6%) and strongly agreed (49.5%) that concise and clear narratives facilitate better understanding of information.
7	Hashtag Usage	Very high agreement was observed, with 48.5% strongly agreeing and 43.7% agreeing that hashtags play an important role in information distribution.
8	Communication Style	The majority strongly agreed (50.5%) and agreed (47.6%) that a friendly language style increases interest in

		interaction.
9	Content Types	Respondents tended to prefer experience based content, with 38.8% strongly agreeing and 36.9% agreeing that such content is more engaging.
10	Interaction	Most respondents strongly agreed (46.6%) and agreed (41.7%) that two way interaction increases audience interest.
11	Posting Consistency	Survey results show that 47.1% of respondents agreed and 41.3% strongly agreed that consistent posting frequency helps maintain audience interest.

Source: Author's Survey Data, 2025 (n = 104)

As summarized in Table 2, the audience demonstrates a strong preference for heritage related Instagram content that combines clear narratives, consistent visual and verbal identity, and interactive communication. These findings suggest that audience engagement with heritage content is closely linked to communication quality rather than content theme alone. The results reinforce the notion that the limited visibility and impact of heritage content on Tegal City's Instagram account are not caused by a lack of audience interest, but by the absence of a structured and audience oriented communication approach.

Analysis/Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the communication of urban heritage on Tegal City's official Instagram account has not yet been structured as part of a comprehensive city branding strategy. Although the platform is actively used to disseminate public information, heritagerelated content remains fragmented and lacks a clear visual and narrative framework. This condition limits the role of social media as a medium for communicating the city's historical identity.

According to city branding theory, the communication of place identity relies on the integration of visual elements, verbal messages, and behavioral representations (Florek et al., 2006). In the case of Tegal City, the absence of a consistent logo, color palette, and typographic system weakens the visual identity of heritage related content. Visual symbols function as primary markers that help audiences recognize and remember place identity(Henderson & Cote, 1998). Without consistent visual cues, heritage content becomes difficult to distinguish from general informational posts.

The analysis also reveals that storytelling within heritage related posts remains limited. Historical narratives are often condensed into a single visual frame,

while captions provide only brief descriptive information. Storytelling plays a crucial role in forming emotional connections and conveying meaning in place communication(Lund et al., 2018). When narratives are not developed progressively, heritage content loses its potential to communicate historical continuity and cultural significance.

Audience preference data further clarify this issue. The survey results indicate that audiences value clear narratives, consistent visual and verbal identity, and friendly communication styles. These findings correspond with studies showing that verbal tone and language consistency contribute significantly to brand character and audience engagement(Foroudi, 2019). In addition, respondents demonstrate stronger interest in experience based content, suggesting that heritage communication should emphasize lived experiences rather than static information.

Content type and engagement analysis reinforce this interpretation. Research on destination communication shows that variations in content types such as cultural narratives, events, and experiential storytelling shape audience perception and interaction (Huertas et al., 2017). Moreover, engagement metrics serve as indicators of communication effectiveness, reflecting how audiences respond to the messages conveyed through social media (Mariani et al., 2016). In the case of Tegal City, higher engagement levels are driven mainly by general social content, while heritage related posts generate comparatively lower interaction.

Hashtag usage also plays a role in shaping digital visibility. Hashtags function as tools to organize content and expand its reach within digital platforms, contributing to destination image formation(Yu et al., 2020). However, the absence of heritage specific and consistently applied hashtags limits the discoverability of heritage content and reduces its communicative impact.

Overall, the findings indicate a misalignment between the existing communication practices on Instagram and audience expectations. While the platform is utilized efficiently for information dissemination, it has not yet been optimized as a space for communicating urban heritage. Without a strategic integration of visual identity, storytelling, and audience oriented communication, the potential of social media as a tool for strengthening city identity remains underutilized.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that urban heritage has not yet been optimally communicated through Tegal City's official Instagram account. Heritage related content remains limited in narrative development and visual consistency, resulting in its marginal role within the city's digital representation. Instagram is predominantly used as an informational platform rather than as a medium for conveying historical identity.

Audience preferences indicate a strong demand for clear storytelling, consistent visual and verbal identity, and experience based content. The gap between existing communication practices and audience expectations suggests that the limited impact of heritage content is not caused by low public interest, but by the absence of a strategic communication framework. This study contributes to social and cultural studies by emphasizing the importance of structured digital communication in activating urban heritage as part of city identity.

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