

Yogyakarta and Its Special Fascination: Iconic Landmarks, Memories, Hopes, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

An abstract is often presented separate from the article, so it must be able to This study discusses the Tugu Pal Putih as a symbol of cultural identity and branding of the city of Yogyakarta through visual elements, expressions, and discussions on Instagram social media. The research was carried out qualitatively with a netnography approach and visual analysis of Instagram content related to this cultural landmark. The analysis is done through a thematic coding process to identify dominant themes and patterns reflecting public perceptions. The study results show that Tugu Pal Putih is not just a physical landmark but also a symbol of pride that forms a collective memory and emotional connection to Yogyakarta's atmosphere. Themes such as longing, ideal city, and pride reflect strong public attachment. Despite its distinctiveness, issues like hot weather and traffic congestion present challenges that require adaptive strategies. The integration of cultural, visual, and emotional elements enhances city identity and supports effective city branding. These findings offer insight for branding management to maintain the uniqueness of Yogyakarta as a cultural place.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Yogyakarta is a cultural city rich in tradition and history, with Tugu Pal Putih as its icon [1] [2]. As Yogyakarta's icon with a distinctive character that is rich in historical, traditional, and cultural values, Tugu Pal Putih has become a symbol of identity and pride for Yogyakarta's people [2] [3] [4] [5] which not only represents physical aesthetics but also has deep philosophical value and plays its contribution in presenting a memorable and meaningful atmosphere of the environment. Concerning the design of urban spaces, the physical shape and presence of Tugu Pal Putih as a landmark, as well as the philosophical value it contains, have enriched the visual and emotional experience that forms the community's collective memory of Yogyakarta [4] [6].

The development of social media has also contributed to elevating Tugu Pal Putih as an icon that often appears and sparks discussions and conversations on social media, strengthening the collective memory of the place [7]. This implies that the more prominent Tugu Pal Putih is an iconic digital-age city landmark, in photos, discussions, and various other expressions, discussions, and various other expressions. It further strengthens Yogyakarta's branding [8] as a place that has the power to be remembered and lived. Social media, especially Instagram, has become a space for people to share their personal stories and experiences related to Tugu Pal Putih. Instagram is a social media platform that often shares photos of the Tugu Pal Putih in various aspects of its aesthetics and atmosphere. In line with the view of the contribution of social media in evoking the emotional

aspect of a place that evokes collective memory [9]. Comments and discussions on social media show Tugu Pal Putih as a visual object that evokes the emotional, cultural, and historical connection of the people with Yogyakarta through online community discussions.



Figure 1. The Tugu Pal Putih, (a) morning atmosphere, sunny; (b) afternoon atmosphere, rainy (source: author 2022; 2025)

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze Tugu Pal Putih's contribution as a symbol of Yogyakarta's identity and pride in building city branding through visual and narrative elements in discussions on Instagram social media. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze Tugu Pal Putih's contribution as a symbol of identity and pride that brands Yogyakarta through collective memory, which develops through visual analysis and discussion on Instagram social media. Related to the purpose of the research, this research seeks to answer the question: how does Tugu Pal Putih contribute as a symbol of Yogyakarta's identity in shaping public perception, collective memory, and city branding through digital visualization and discussion on Instagram social media.

2. METHOD

The research was conducted qualitatively by combining netnography methods and visual content analysis. The research idea was inspired by a discussion on social media Instagram involving photos of Tugu Pal Putih as a conversation starter about about the city of Yogyakarta. The selection of these photos remembers the contribution of Tugu Pal Putih as an essential element of the city's philosophical axis and icon that represents cultural values through its visual attraction that attracts many people [2]. In connection with this contribution and attraction, this study is designed to answer research questions about the contribution of Tugu Pal Putih as a symbol of identity and pride that supports Yogyakarta's branding.

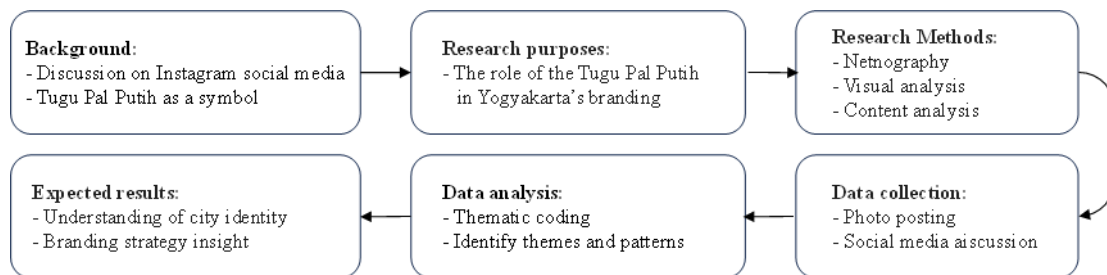


Figure 2. The Research conceptual framework (source: author)

In the world of social media, various Instagram accounts present information about Yogyakarta. This study analyzes one of the accounts that often displays photos of Tugu Pal Putih, a Yogyakarta's icon, consistently as its main attraction, which also illustrates its contribution as an important element of the city.

Table 1. The position of the selected Instagram account among similar accounts

Information	Relevant Content	Data Suitability
Instagram accounts analyzed	Often displays photos of Tugu Pal Putih as Yogyakarta's icon	Meet the criteria for analysis
Other Instagram accounts	Displaying inconsistent content related to Tugu Pal Putih	Not selected for analysis

Source: author (2024). Update data December 15, 2024

The data analyzed were words that appeared in conversations evoked by photo posts of Tugu Pal Putih in ten different moods in an online community on Instagram. Data was collected from online community discussions on Instagram from August 19 to December 11, 2024. The data includes visual data in the form of photos of the Tugu Pal Putih in various atmospheres, text embedded in the pictures, photo descriptions, and conversations that occurred.

The thematic coding structure in this study was built inductively, developing gradually through direct experience and reflection during the qualitative data exploration process [10] [11]. Themes were developed from repeated readings of photos, texts, and online discussions on Instagram, with a systematic approach that, step by step, progressed gradually through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to formulate patterns of meaning that emerged through deep engagement with the data, organized into a conceptual model that explains research findings [11], as a reflection of users' expressive situations in the digital space under study. To optimize data management effectiveness, the data is managed using NVivo software version 12 and processed into a thematic coding system for further analysis [12]. The results can reveal the relationship between visual elements and expressions formed in the public's view of Tugu Pal Putih as a symbol of Yogyakarta and identify the dominant patterns of discussion related to city branding.

The ethical aspect is a limitation of this study. The objects in the photo are public city landmarks, Instagram accounts, and conversations researched in the public domain, which anyone can access, follow, share, and comment on freely. The photo of the object in the article is the researcher's documentation, does not come from any social media account, and the identity of the recorded individual's face has been disguised. The content of the conversation does not involve sensitive elements; the profiles of the participants of the discussion are also anonymously disguised. Thus, the study is free from ethical risks and does not require special permission from the participants [13]. Instagram was chosen because it supports visual-based research, fits the city's branding theme, and has many active users who spark cultural discussions through public content. Researchers are not directly involved in maintaining the neutrality, privacy, and authenticity of data according to the netnography method.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Yogyakarta is the right location for research because of its distinctive cultural richness [4]. Furthermore, Tugu Pal Putih is the main focus of the data collection process because of its visual form and contribution as a prominent identity symbol in representing the uniqueness of Yogyakarta's culture. This can be seen from the most dominant and most expressed identified themes in online discussions, which include symbols of pride, longing for the atmosphere, and the ideal city. The themes identified reflect Yogyakarta's position as a city with strong attraction, rooted in cultural identity in the north-south line of city 'philosophical axis' [14] [15]. The emphasis on this identity is linked to dominant themes: symbols of pride, longing for the atmosphere, and the city of dreams, so the research remains focused on its central theme. The results show that the dominant elements of the identified themes are summarized and appear as a central theme, namely the 'Yogyakarta's special fascination.' The process of assessing the identified themes helps to deepen the understanding that Yogyakarta is a city rich in cultural heritage and full of emotions and hopes.

3.1. Word patterns and theme visualization

The data coding results showed dominant words and themes that reflected various significant aspects of the individual experience and were interrelated to the identity and Yogyakarta's attractiveness. The frequency of these words and themes indicates that the name of Yogyakarta carries a strong identity along with deep emotional and spiritual values. The emotional aspect is represented by word processing: missing, longing, and unique, while the spiritual aspect can be seen from the appearance of the words again and wait. The combination of these words strengthens Yogyakarta's image as a meaningful and unique city.

Eight words and synonyms dominate the conversation, with the photo of Tugu Pal Putih being the lighter. Of the eight dominant words and their synonyms, one word leads to negative sentiment, namely the word "hot," which represents the sub-theme of weather challenges. Table 2 shows the dominant words, their number of occurrences, and their meanings.

Table 2. Dominant words, number of occurrences, and the meanings (source: author. Results of data analysis in NVivo)

No.	Word	Number of Occurrences (times)	Meaning
1	jogja, yogyakarta, #yogyakarta, @yogyakarta	1047	The word "Yogyakarta" appears in several variations: jogja, yogyakarta, #yogyakarta, and @yogyakarta. The dominance of the conversation on these variations in various discussions on social media reflects Yogyakarta's position as an interesting center of attention to discuss, both as a place that evokes memories, a strong cultural identity, and as a source of inspiration and aspirations.
2	missing / kangen	363	The word "missing" describes the strong emotional connection between individuals and Yogyakarta. The high number of occurrences shows that the word "kangen" indicates a deep sense of longing related to personal experiences and memories. "Kangen" shows the emotional bond of the community to certain atmospheres, places, and moments in Yogyakarta.
3	longing / rindu	207	The word "longing" has a similar meaning, which describes a strong emotional bond. However, "longing" tends to be used in more in-depth discussions, and tends to be related to memory or hope to return to the city of Yogyakarta.
4	special / istimewa	198	The word "special" strengthens Yogyakarta's image as a unique city with a distinctive fascination. The number of appearances shows how people associate the city of Yogyakarta with extraordinary things, both physically and emotionally. The word "Special" also emphasizes Yogyakarta's branding aspect as an unusual and meaningful place.
5	aamiin	173	The appearance of the word "aamiin" indicates the spiritual aspect or prayer that is often said when there is a discussion about Yogyakarta. This illustrates the hope of the community, both to return, improve their lives and achieve happiness by living in Yogyakarta.
6	wait / tunggu	156	The word "wait" reflects hope and patience, often associated with plans to return or visit Yogyakarta, or looking forward to a specific moment related to the city of Yogyakarta. This word indicates positive hope with respect to the upcoming experience.
7	patience / sabar	122	The word "patience" describes a strong desire to visit, return home, or return to Yogyakarta. These desires tend to be individual and related to the opportunities that each individual has. The word "patience" holds a deep meaning that emotionally strengthens the feeling of longing or longing for Yogyakarta.
8	hot / panas	116	The word "hot" refers to the situation that is often expressed by the public or tourists about the weather conditions in Yogyakarta. The number of occurrences of the word "hot" is not too high, but it can still reflect a significant negative sentiment, even if it does not reduce the overall attractiveness of Yogyakarta as a coveted city.

Based on the results of data coding, as many as 19 sub-themes can be identified and grouped into nine themes. The identified themes illustrate people's perceptions and emotional relationships with the city, as well as individual experiences, perceptions, and relationships with Yogyakarta. The nine themes that were successfully identified in the coding process include:

- 1) Travel activities include various experiences while in the city, both routine trips and tourist trips.
- 2) Physical and landscape aspects, which highlight the city's visual elements, such as historical buildings and open spaces, and the overall environmental condition.
- 3) The aspect of the meaning of place, which is related to symbolism and values inherent in specific locations in Yogyakarta.
- 4) The psychological aspect reflects the emotions, perceptions, and deep impressions individuals feel in this city.
- 5) Aspirations for Yogyakarta involve the community's hopes, dreams, and views regarding its future.
- 6) Impressions and feelings describe how people internalize their experiences in Yogyakarta and how these experiences shape their emotional connection with the city.
- 7) The commitment to return shows a person's attachment to Yogyakarta, so the intention to visit or even settle in this city arises.
- 8) Personal experiences, which include unique individual stories and how those experiences influenced their view of the city.
- 9) Challenges identify issues or obstacles faced by residents and visitors, such as infrastructure, weather, or other social aspects issues.

These dominant themes are an important foundation for understanding how each element of the city complements each other and presents a special experience that each individual feels. Figure 3 visualizes individual experiences, perceptions, and relationships with Yogyakarta.

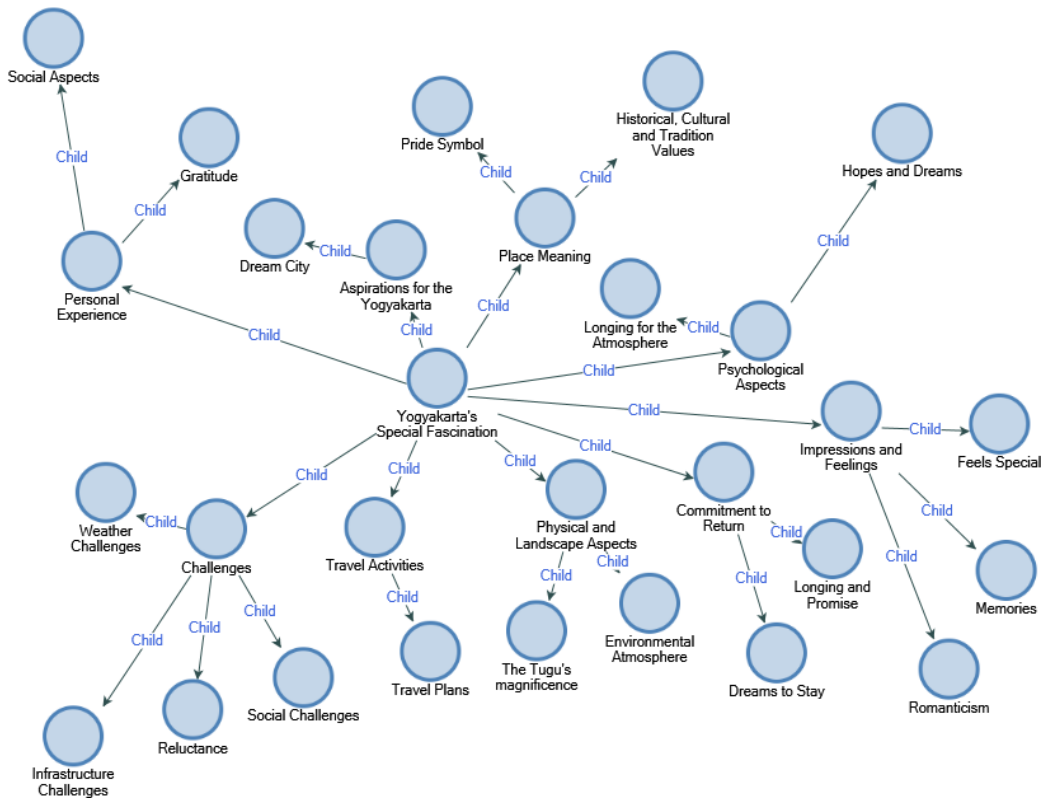


Figure 3. Visualization of themes and sub-themes rooted in individual experiences, perceptions, and relationships with Yogyakarta

Remarks: the closer the sub-theme is to the center, the more related it is to the main theme, and vice versa

3.2. Yogyakarta's special fascination

Tugu Pal Putih is the main focus of the research. This monument is a combination of physical symbols and cultural identity of Yogyakarta that is able to bridge local traditions and culture with modern life. This role can be seen in a dynamic discussion on Instagram social media when the figure of Tugu Pal Putih is present as a conversation starter. Furthermore, the results show that Yogyakarta's attractiveness is derived from its traditional and cultural values and strengthened by the emotional elements built from these values and felt by the community. This special fascination is illustrated by the results of the selective coding analysis conducted in this study, where the central theme 'Yogyakarta's Special Fascination' emerged as a summary of the themes that emerged, incredibly dominant themes such as symbols of pride, longing for the atmosphere, and cultural values and traditions that are deeply rooted in Yogyakarta.

Yogyakarta has rich cultural values that are reflected in its philosophical axis [14] [15] as the city's identity [5], with The Tugu Pal Putih being an essential part of it and also serving as one of the city's iconic symbols [2]. The study shows that the location of the study had a strong emotional attraction, making Yogyakarta a unique and special place. The special fascination is manifested from the combination of local values discussed on Instagram, including the longing for the atmosphere, dream city, a symbol of pride, gratitude, hope, and dreams, weather challenges, feeling special, longing and promise, and their memories. The study results also show that Tugu Pal Putih plays a role in shaping the image of a cultural city. It evokes deep emotional experiences that mesmerize people through its unique philosophical values, strengthening their connection with Yogyakarta. Of all the themes that have been successfully identified, seven themes stand out. They can attract the attention of many people and evoke emotional connections that form the community's collective memory towards Tugu Pal Putih and Yogyakarta. These themes can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The prominent themes rank emerged from discussions related to Tugu Pal Putih pictures (source: author. Note: Texts with bold letters are the dominant theme/sub-theme)

Theme	Sub theme	Number of quotes	Theme	Sub theme	Number of quotes
Psychological Aspects	Longing for the atmosphere	398	Challenge	Weather Challenges	156

Aspirations for Yogyakarta	Dream City	245	Impressions and Feelings	Feels Special	151
Aspects of the Meaning of Place	Pride Symbol	196	Commitment to Return	Longing and Promise	106
Personal Experience	Gratitude	172	Impressions and Feelings	Memories	104
Psychological Aspects	Hopes and Dreams	163	Physical Aspects and Landscapes	Environmental Atmosphere	86

Table 2 shows the theme and sub-themes that are essential elements that contribute to forming the central theme. In the table, two dominant themes are marked by their appearance twice: psychological aspects, impressions, and feelings. In contrast, the dominant sub-themes are the top three sub-themes with a total of about 200 citations or more, namely sub-themes longing for the atmosphere, dream city, and symbol of pride. Combining this dominant theme and sub-theme forms an integrated relationship that strengthens each other in formulating the central theme with the support of different themes and sub-themes. The process of formulating the central theme can be seen in Figure 3.

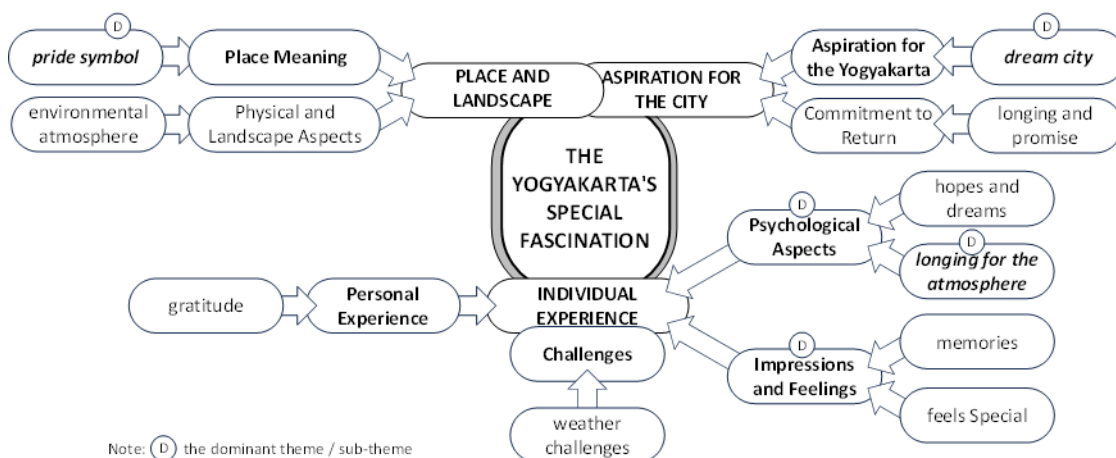


Figure 4. Dominant theme and sub-theme relationships in the process of forming the main theme (source: author. Data analysis)

The pattern of relationships between themes in Figure 3 shows the process of formulating themes and sub-themes as the main themes. The image shows the central theme through three binding elements: aspirations for the city, places and landscapes, and individual experiences. The three binding elements combine the dominant theme and sub-theme with the support of other themes and sub-themes, forming the central theme, 'Yogyakarta's Special Fascination.' Furthermore, the three most dominant sub-themes, longing for the atmosphere, the dream city, and the symbol of pride, became the main foundation and formed a strong flow in realizing the central theme of "Yogyakarta's Special Fascination."

The subthemes illustrate the sense of pride, hope, and emotional connection between people and Yogyakarta, which is established through their aspirations for the cityscape and their personal experiences. The substantial aspect of longing shows their desire to re-experience Yogyakarta's unique and special situation. At the same time, the dream city reflects the ideal image of the community towards Yogyakarta as a place to live. The symbol of pride emphasizes the deep meaning of Tugu Pal Putih as an icon of the city that is felt to represent Yogyakarta as a whole. These three elements reinforce each other and provide a solid foundation for the presence of a sense of awe. Fascinated has a meaning that is commensurate with being fascinated. Being amazed or fascinated often involves an element of surprise or unexpected uniqueness that triggers an individual's strong sense of emotion [16]. The study results show that the research locus, Yogyakarta, has an extraordinary uniqueness. This exceptional condition is something special [17].

Based on the combination of the dominant theme and subtheme, the phrase "special fascination" can be raised as the core of the central theme. Yogyakarta was related to the research locus, and then the core of the theme was developed into the central theme, 'Yogyakarta's Special Fascination.' The fascination reflects how people's emotional relationships, aspirations, and experiences are integrated into their view of Yogyakarta. As the central theme, the 'Yogyakarta's Special Fascination' also illustrates how the city's identity is rooted in integrating cultural, social, and visual elements that complement each other. The study results show that this central theme consistently retrieved in various community interactions through social media. 'Yogyakarta's

'Special Fascination' is present in terms of physicality and also in the stories that are revealed in the conversation, showing the existence of social values reflected in people's daily lives. The friendliness and simplicity of the people, as shown in the photo descriptions and transcripts of online conversations, reinforce Yogyakarta's image as a comfortable and meaningful city.

The presence of Tugu Pal Putih as a backdrop in various celebrations and essential moments further emphasizes the monument's contribution as a symbol of community pride. This situation shows that Yogyakarta has strong emotional, social, and spiritual values, reflected in its physical form, reflected in its physical form. By understanding these elements, Yogyakarta can continue to maintain and develop its image as a city that is not only culturally special but also emotionally special for all who visit it.

3.3. The challenges behind Yogyakarta's fascination

The study results show that negative sentiments can obscure the unique fascination of Yogyakarta. The most frequently discussed negative sentiment is the word "hot," one of the eight dominant words in the conversation, found in Table 2. The word "hot" describes Yogyakarta's weather conditions, which is a lowland at an altitude of +113 meters above sea level [18] in the tropics [19]. This hot weather is a challenge for city managers, who must develop adaptive strategies to present a more comfortable and friendly environment to reduce negative perceptions of people's views of Yogyakarta. An overview of the challenge can be seen in Figure 4, which links aspects of the challenge to the individual's experience.

Other negative sentiments are reluctance, social challenges, and infrastructure challenges. Reluctance arises from unpleasant experiences that individuals have felt, for example, in the expression, "Jogja is beautiful but not with memories." This shows a gap between high expectations for Yogyakarta and the perceived reality. Social challenges include overcrowding of cities due to tourists, damage to public facilities, concerns about security content such as "klitih," and poor waste management. This situation can reduce the social comfort and Yogyakarta's attractiveness. Meanwhile, infrastructure challenges focus on worsening traffic congestion and inadequate public facilities. This shows the imbalance between the city's attractiveness and the adequacy of its physical facilities, which leads to an uncomfortable spatial experience. The combination of negative themes can create negative perceptions that can reduce Yogyakarta's attractiveness as a unique cultural city.

4. CONCLUSION

This research succeeded in showing the contribution of Tugu Pal Putih as a cultural icon that strengthens the identity of Yogyakarta through emotional interaction, collective memory, and conversations in digital media. Some of the key findings of the study are:




- 1) The Tugu Pal Putih contribution as Yogyakarta's Identity
As Yogyakarta's landmark, Tugu Pal Putih's presence mirrors the traditional, cultural, and philosophical values that colour the city. As a physical icon of the city, this monument plays a role in reviving memories and building hope and gratitude in the community, a combination that further strengthens Yogyakarta's attractiveness as a special city.
- 2) Social Media Interaction and Collective Memory
The results of data analysis from Instagram show that Tugu Pal Putih acts as a discussion trigger that evokes an individual's emotional sense of place involving themes such as longing, dream city, and symbol of pride. This conversation on social media strengthens the branding and Yogyakarta's position as a cultural city with a unique attraction.
- 3) Yogyakarta's Special Fascination
This research produced the main findings of "Yogyakarta's Special Fascination," which was formed through a combination of dominant themes representing values such as pride symbols, longing for the atmosphere, and the ideal city. These values are a weave of individual visual, emotional, and spiritual experiences that are collected and form the community's collective memory of Yogyakarta.
- 4) Challenges Faced
Yogyakarta has extraordinary cultural value but faces challenges in the form of hot weather, traffic congestion, and poor management of public facilities, which can lead to negative perceptions in the community. Therefore, an adaptive city management strategy is needed to maintain a sense of peace and pride to maintain the city's attractiveness.

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