



Crafting urban identities: Local cuisine and city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar

Thazin Htet^{1*}, Muhammad Fahd Diyar Husni², Fadila Dwi Apriliani²

¹ Japanese Construction Academy, Yangon, Myanmar;

² University of 17 Agustus 1945 (UNTAG) Semarang, 50133, Indonesia.

*Correspondence: thazinh tet1880@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: This comparative study examines the significant role of local cuisine in shaping urban identities and enhancing city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar. With a rich tapestry of culinary traditions, these Southeast Asian nations offer unique insights into how food culture can be leveraged as a strategic asset in urban planning. The research delves into integrating local cuisine in city branding initiatives, highlighting successful examples from major cities in both countries. **Methods:** This study uses a comparative case study approach to investigate the role of local cuisine in shaping urban identity and enhancing city image in Indonesia and Myanmar. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and document analysis from various sources. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify key themes and comparative analysis to highlight differences and similarities between the two countries. This approach allows the study to develop practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers. **Findings:** The findings reveal that incorporating local cuisine into urban planning not only preserves culinary heritage but also enhances the distinctive character of cities, making them more appealing to both residents and visitors. Furthermore, the research discusses the challenges and opportunities urban planners and policymakers face in promoting local cuisine while balancing modernization and cultural preservation. **Conclusion:** Through a comparative lens, the study provides practical recommendations for cities aiming to integrate culinary elements into their branding strategies. The insights gained from Indonesia and Myanmar's experiences can serve as a valuable reference for other cities globally, seeking to enrich their urban identities through the celebration of local cuisine. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** The development of a comprehensive model for integrating local cuisine into a city's branding strategy provides practical and measurable guidance for city planners to leverage culinary heritage to enhance city attractiveness, identity, and local economic empowerment while maintaining the authenticity and sustainability of culinary traditions.

KEYWORDS: city branding; Indonesia; local cuisine; Myanmar; urban planning.

1. Introduction

Urban identity and authenticity have become pivotal elements in the strategic branding and planning of cities in an increasingly globalized world. As urban areas strive to distinguish themselves amidst the cultural homogenization brought about by globalization, local cuisine has emerged as a powerful tool for reinforcing unique urban identities. This paper explores the integration of local cuisine in city branding efforts in Indonesia and Myanmar, offering a comparative analysis that highlights the broader implications for urban planning and the promotion of authenticity. City branding is a multifaceted process that significantly influences the identity and authenticity of urban areas, impacting residents'

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perceptions, tourism, and economic development. Successful city branding encompasses a blend of tangible and intangible elements, including social bonding, a strong brand personality, business creativity, and the emphasis on core values to underscore a place's unique identity (Braun et al., 2013; Boisen et al., 2018; Yesiana, 2023; Vahabian et al., 2021).

Urban branding extends beyond mere marketing and promotion; it intertwines with urban governance, policy, and development, serving as a framework to highlight a city's identity and values (Boisen et al., 2018). Through investments in city branding, regions can strategically position themselves, differentiate from competitors, and cultivate a compelling, positive image to attract visitors and investors (Yesiana, 2023; Vahabian et al., 2021). Moreover, urban branding is not solely about establishing a visual identity but also about nurturing a sense of belonging and shared identity among residents (Belabas et al., 2020). It involves leveraging cultural and historical assets, urban icons, and emotional design to enhance the city's value and distinctiveness (Poyan & Jiang, 2022; Zhou, 2023; Wang & Gu, 2020).

City branding is a strategic response to the escalating competition among cities, where those with appealing brands can flourish economically, while others may encounter challenges (Dmitrievna, 2021; Lu et al., 2017). It serves as a tool for urban planning, concentrating on constructing a distinct brand identity, positioning, and image for a city (Dinardi, 2016). Urban identity and authenticity are pivotal components of city branding, shaping how cities are perceived, experienced, and valued. By effectively leveraging these aspects, cities can establish a robust brand presence, allure stakeholders, and propel sustainable urban development.

Indonesia and Myanmar are particularly compelling case studies due to their rich and diverse culinary traditions, which are deeply embedded in their cultural identities. Indonesia, known for its vibrant street food culture and regional specialties like Nasi Goreng, Rendang, and Satay, has effectively leveraged its culinary heritage in various aspects of urban life, from food festivals to tourism campaigns. In contrast, Myanmar, renowned for distinctive dishes such as Mohinga, Shan Noodles, and Tea Leaf Salad, is in the process of revitalizing its culinary traditions amid rapid urbanization and socio-economic transformations.

This study aims to examine how these nations utilize their gastronomic heritage to shape urban identities and enhance city branding. It addresses key questions such as: How does local cuisine contribute to urban identity? What specific strategies are employed in Indonesia and Myanmar? What are the implications for urban planning and the promotion of authenticity? By answering these questions, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for urban planners, policymakers, and scholars interested in the intersection of food culture and urban development. By exploring the role of local cuisine in city branding and urban identity, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on urban authenticity and the sustainable development of cities in a globalized context.

Understanding the evolution of definitions and theories surrounding urban identity and authenticity is essential for comprehending how cities can effectively leverage local cuisine in their branding strategies. Over the decades, scholars and urban planners have developed various frameworks and concepts to address the dynamic nature of urban identity and the quest for authenticity in city environments. These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for analyzing how local culinary traditions can be integrated into urban planning and branding efforts, contributing to a city's unique identity and appeal.

From early 20th-century ideas that emphasized the physical form and functionality of urban spaces to contemporary theories that focus on relational and hybridized urban experiences, the conceptual landscape of urban identity and authenticity has continually evolved. The historical development of these definitions and theories reflects changing societal values, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. By examining this progression, we can gain a deeper insight into the underlying principles that guide current practices in urban planning and city branding.

Table 1. History of definitions and theories of urban identity and authenticity

Time Period	Key Theorists/Scholars	Definitions and Theories of Urban Identity	Definitions and Theories of Authenticity
Early 20th Century	Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes	Urban identity linked to the physical form and functionality of cities, emphasizing the importance of green spaces and community-oriented urban planning - Garden City Movement (Howard et al., 2013).	Authenticity related to the genuine and original character of urban spaces, focusing on preserving historical and cultural landmarks (Meller, 2005).
Mid 20th Century	Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs	Urban identity shaped by the legibility and imageability of city environments, with a focus on how people perceive and navigate urban spaces - The Image of the City (Lynch, 1964).	Authenticity involves the preservation of diverse, vibrant, and human-scale neighborhoods, resisting homogenization and over-regulation - The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1961).
Late 20th Century	David Harvey, Edward Soja	Urban identity influenced by socio-economic processes, power dynamics, and spatial practices, emphasizing the role of social justice and equity in shaping urban environments - Spatial Justice Theory (Harvey, 2018).	Authenticity seen as a construct influenced by cultural, economic, and political factors, questioning whose authenticity is being preserved and for what purpose Postmodern Urbanism (Soja, 1989).
Early 21st Century	Sharon Zukin, Richard Florida	Urban identity increasingly associated with cultural consumption, creative industries, and the branding of cities as hubs of innovation and diversity - Creative City Theory (Zukin, 2009).	Authenticity involves the negotiation between preserving cultural heritage and embracing contemporary cultural expressions, with a focus on maintaining local distinctiveness - Cultural Capital (Florida, 2005).
Recent Developments	Tim Cresswell, Ash Amin.	Urban identity seen as dynamic and relational, shaped by the interactions between place, people, and practices, emphasizing the fluid and contested nature of urban spaces - Relational Urbanism (Cresswell, 2009)	Authenticity redefined in the context of globalization and digitalization, focusing on the hybridization of cultures and the creation of new, authentic urban experiences Global-Local Nexus (Amin, 2002).

Table 1 illustrates the historical evolution of definitions and theories related to urban identity and authenticity, highlighting key contributions from notable scholars across different periods. Each era reflects a shift in focus and methodology, from the early emphasis on physical form and functionality to the contemporary understanding of urban spaces as dynamic and relational entities. This progression underscores the complexity of urban identity and the multifaceted nature of authenticity in the context of urban development.

The transition from early 20th-century ideas to recent developments reveals an expanding scope of considerations, incorporating social, economic, and cultural dimensions

into the conceptualization of urban identity. As cities continue to navigate the challenges of globalization and modernization, these evolving theories provide a valuable framework for urban planners and policymakers. By integrating insights from various theoretical perspectives, cities can develop more holistic and adaptive strategies that honor their unique heritage while embracing innovation and diversity.

The examination of these definitions and theories is crucial for understanding how local cuisine can be strategically utilized in city branding and urban planning. The rich culinary traditions of Indonesia and Myanmar, for example, can be viewed through these theoretical lenses to better appreciate their role in shaping urban identities. As cities seek to enhance their authenticity and distinctiveness, the insights gained from this historical perspective can guide more effective and culturally sensitive planning efforts.

1.1 Urban identity and authenticity

The concept of urban identity and authenticity is a complex and multifaceted one, influenced by a range of factors including cultural heritage, public perceptions, and sustainable urban form. Ivanovic (2014) and Liu et al. (2019) both explore the role of cultural heritage in shaping urban identity, with Ivanovic focusing on the perceived authenticity of iconic heritage sites and Liu et al. examining public perceptions of authenticity in urban heritage. Ibrahim et al. (2014) and Keith (1995) delve into the relationship between authenticity and urban form, with Ibrahim et al. discussing the influence of urban identity on sustainable urban form and Keith exploring the spatial tensions in urban identity. Wesener (2015) and Zukin (2009) both consider the experiential aspect of authenticity, with Wesener examining experiences of authenticity in the urban built environment and Zukin discussing the role of authenticity in the development of global urbanism. Lastly, Torabi & Sima (2013) and Martínez (2017) both propose new frameworks for understanding urban identity and authenticity, with Torabi & Sima focusing on the basic elements of urban identity and Martínez developing a value-based assessment of urban heritage authenticity.

The concept of urban identity and authenticity is complex and multifaceted, with various disciplines contributing to its understanding. Ouf (2001) and Cheshmehzangi (2012) both emphasize the role of urban designers in shaping historical and authentic urban identities, with the latter highlighting the influence of public spaces. Mohammad (2009) and Wesener (2015) further explore the relationship between identity and the urban landscape, with the former introducing the concept of "Urban Landscape Identity" and the latter discussing the experience of authenticity in the built environment. Ozerina & Timofeeva (2020) provides a comprehensive overview of the different terms and approaches used to study urban identity, while Lalli (1992) and Martínez (2017) offer theoretical and practical frameworks for understanding and assessing urban-related identity and authenticity.

The significance of urban identity and authenticity in urban planning and development is a complex and multifaceted issue. It is influenced by a range of factors, including the interplay between traditional and modern urban quarters (Ibrahim et al., 2014), the socio-spatial process of urban regeneration (Furlan et al., 2019), the role of urban sculpture in shaping identity (Shahhosseini, 2015), and the establishment of local identity in waterfront development (Liu et al., 2019). The concept of authenticity is also explored in the context of city marketing and urban design (Erickson & Roberts, 1997), the creation of a sense of place in urban conservation (Ouf, 2001), and the public perception of urban heritage (Liu et al., 2019). These studies collectively highlight the importance of preserving and promoting urban identity and authenticity in the face of globalization and urban development.

1.2 City branding

City branding is a complex and multi-disciplinary concept that aims to create a unique and attractive identity for a city (Akturan, 2016). It involves various dimensions, including

tourist attraction, security, public services, and government-community coordination (Zahrah, 2023). Key strategies for city branding include introducing cultural and culinary diversity, promoting natural wealth, and building a mascot (Zahrah, 2023). The concept of image-reality consistency is crucial, and flagship developments play a significant role in branding and urban regeneration (Prilenska, 2012). The use of grounded theory and participatory planning is recommended for designing city branding (Torres-Zamudio et al., 2021). Urban branding is also seen as an effective sustainability tool in urban development (Rehan, 2014). Engaging key stakeholders in the development and implementation of a city brand strategy is essential for its effectiveness (Gelder, 2011). The role of communication strategy in place marketing and the importance of destination self-congruity in creating a tourist-destination brand relationship is also highlighted (Azevedo, 2005).

In the realm of city branding, several key concepts and strategies are employed to create a unique and compelling urban identity that attracts tourists, residents, and investors. One fundamental concept is the idea of "place identity," which refers to the distinctive characteristics and experiences that define a city. This includes its history, architecture, cultural traditions, and natural environment. Effective city branding harnesses these unique attributes to craft a memorable and appealing image of the city.

Strategies for city branding often involve the development of a coherent and consistent narrative that communicates the city's identity to both internal and external audiences. This narrative is usually centered around a core theme or set of themes that encapsulate the city's essence. For instance, a city might brand itself as a hub of innovation and creativity, a cultural melting pot, or a destination for natural beauty and outdoor activities. Marketing campaigns, promotional materials, and events are then designed to reinforce this narrative and build a strong, recognizable brand.

Another key strategy is stakeholder engagement, which involves collaborating with local residents, businesses, and community organizations to ensure that the branding efforts resonate with the people who live and work in the city. This bottom-up approach helps to create a sense of ownership and pride among residents, making the brand more authentic and sustainable. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms and social media has become increasingly important in modern city branding, allowing for broader reach and more interactive engagement with the target audience.

Culture plays a crucial role in city branding, serving as a key strategy for economic, social, and environmental development (Özer, 2017). However, the use of cultural elements in city branding can be a double-edged sword, as it can both enhance and undermine local culture (Riza, 2015). The commodification of culture in city branding can create tensions between different stakeholders (Dinardi, 2016). Despite these challenges, cultural elements can be effectively used in city branding, as seen in the case of Hydra Island (Dilaveri et al., 2020). The relationship between city branding and event content is also important, as it can influence the city's identity and brand (Lim, 2021). Visual elements, such as logos and taglines, can also play a significant role in representing cultural identification in city branding (Zinaida et al., 2020). Finally, culture can be used to create authenticity and uniqueness in urban regeneration processes, contributing to a city's global competitiveness (Ulldemolins, 2014).

Cultural elements play a pivotal role in the branding of cities, serving as powerful symbols that encapsulate the essence of urban identity. These elements include local cuisine, festivals, traditional arts and crafts, historical landmarks, and everyday cultural practices. By highlighting and celebrating these aspects, cities can differentiate themselves from other destinations and create a unique, authentic image that appeals to visitors and residents alike.

Local cuisine, for example, is a particularly effective cultural element in city branding. Food is not only a fundamental part of daily life but also a deeply ingrained aspect of cultural heritage. Showcasing local dishes, culinary traditions, and food-related events can attract culinary tourists and food enthusiasts, thereby boosting the city's appeal and economic vitality. This strategy is evident in cities like Yogyakarta and Bali in Indonesia, where street food and regional specialties are integral to the urban experience.

Festivals and cultural events also serve as significant branding tools. They provide opportunities to showcase the city's traditions, creativity, and community spirit. Events such as the Dragon Dance Festival in Myanmar or the Bali Arts Festival in Indonesia draw visitors from around the world, enhancing the city's reputation and fostering cultural exchange. These events not only highlight the unique cultural heritage of the city but also create memorable experiences for attendees, reinforcing the city's brand identity.

Furthermore, historical landmarks and traditional arts and crafts offer tangible connections to the past, adding depth and richness to the city's brand. Preserving and promoting these cultural assets helps to maintain a sense of continuity and authenticity, which is crucial for building a credible and attractive city brand. By integrating cultural elements into their branding strategies, cities can create a more holistic and resonant image that honors their heritage while appealing to contemporary audiences.

1.3 Local cuisine in city branding

Local cuisine plays a significant role in city branding, serving as a key element in the promotion of a city's identity and heritage (Tellström et al., 2006; Bessière, 1998). This is particularly evident in the case of George Town, Penang, where the local dish Nasi Kandar has contributed to the city's branding as a "City of Gastronomy" (Khoo & Badarulzaman, 2014). UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy initiative further underscores the potential of local cuisine in enhancing a city's brand image (Pearson & Pearson, 2016). However, the full potential of local cuisines in destination marketing is not always realized, as seen in the case of Jinan, Qingdao, and Qufu in Shandong, China (Okumus et al., 2018). Despite this, the use of local cuisines in place promotion continues to evolve, with a focus on creating narratives that meet the needs of both destinations and consumers (Everett, 2015).

A range of studies have explored the role of food in shaping urban identity and city branding. Zhang et al. (2022) and Okumus et al. (2018) both highlight the potential of local cuisine to enhance city brand identity, with Zhang et al. specifically emphasizing the role of food experience. Tellström et al. (2006) and Bessière (1998) further delve into the use of local and regional food culture in branding, with Bessière emphasizing the role of culinary heritage in local development (Bessière, 1998). Purnomo et al. (2023) challenges the notion of food locality, suggesting that socialized foods can also play a significant role in urban tourism. Stalmirska (2020) and Gulisova (2022) both explore the influence of cultural globalization on the use of food in urban destination marketing, with Stalmirska discussing the impact on the conceptualization of the 'local', 'global', and 'glocal'. Lastly, Dobernig & Stagl (2015) highlights the role of urban food cultivation in shaping urban identity and lifestyle politics.

2. Methods

This study employed a comparative case study approach to investigate the role of local cuisine in shaping urban identities and enhancing city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar. The comparative case study design was chosen to provide a detailed and contextual analysis of the similarities and differences between the two countries. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the unique strategies and challenges each country faced in integrating local cuisine into their urban planning and branding efforts. By comparing these two contexts, the study aimed to draw broader conclusions about the potential of local cuisine to contribute to urban identity and authenticity.

Data collection was conducted using a combination of primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including urban planners, policymakers, and local business owners in both Indonesia and Myanmar. These interviews provided firsthand insights into the practical applications and impacts of incorporating local cuisine into city branding initiatives. Secondary data were obtained from an extensive review of

city branding campaigns, policy documents, academic literature, and other relevant sources. This document analysis offered a robust contextual background and supported the findings from the primary data.

For data analysis, thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns within the collected data. This method involved systematically coding and categorizing the data to uncover recurring themes related to local cuisine and city branding. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to highlight the differences and similarities between the two case studies. This comparative approach facilitated the identification of unique strategies and common challenges faced by both countries, providing a nuanced understanding of how local cuisine contributes to urban identity and city branding. The insights gained from this analysis were used to formulate practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Case studies

Urban identity and authenticity have become crucial components in the strategic branding and planning of cities, particularly in the context of globalization and cultural homogenization. As cities strive to distinguish themselves and attract tourists, residents, and investments, local cuisine has emerged as a powerful tool for reinforcing unique urban identities. This study explores the integration of local cuisine in city branding efforts in Indonesia and Myanmar, two Southeast Asian countries with rich culinary traditions. By examining how these nations leverage their gastronomic heritage, we gain insights into the broader implications for urban planning and the promotion of authenticity in urban environments.

Indonesia and Myanmar present intriguing case studies due to their diverse cultures and distinct approaches to city branding. Both countries utilize their culinary heritage as a central element in shaping urban identities, but they face unique challenges and opportunities. Indonesia, with its vibrant street food culture and regional specialties, has effectively incorporated food into various aspects of city life, from festivals to tourism campaigns. Myanmar, on the other hand, is in the process of revitalizing its culinary traditions amid rapid urbanization and socio-economic changes. Understanding these dynamics offers valuable lessons for urban planners and policymakers worldwide.

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Tabel 2. Comparing case studies on urban identity and local cuisine

Aspect	Indonesia	Myanmar
Urban Identity	Strong emphasis on preserving cultural heritage. Cities like Yogyakarta and Bali are known for their distinct cultural identities.	Focus on cultural revival and integration of diverse ethnic traditions. Yangon and Mandalay showcase unique urban identities.
Local Cuisine	Rich culinary heritage with diverse regional specialties such as Nasi Goreng, Rendang, and Satay.	Known for its distinctive dishes like Mohinga, Shan Noodles, and Tea Leaf Salad.
City Branding Strategies	Use of local cuisine in festivals, food tours, and culinary tourism to enhance city appeal.	Incorporation of traditional food in cultural events and tourism campaigns to attract visitors.
Economic Impact	Culinary tourism significantly contributes to the local economy, with numerous food-related businesses thriving.	Growing interest in culinary tourism, with increasing numbers of restaurants and food markets.
Community Engagement	Strong community involvement in preserving and promoting local cuisine through markets, festivals, and education.	Community efforts to preserve culinary traditions, with support from local NGOs and government initiatives.
Challenges	Balancing modernization with cultural preservation, managing urbanization's impact on traditional food practices.	Addressing socio-economic disparities and ensuring inclusive growth while preserving culinary heritage.
Opportunities	Leveraging digital platforms for promoting local cuisine globally, fostering sustainable culinary practices.	Potential for expanding culinary tourism, promoting food heritage as a key component of national identity.

However, the table also underscores the challenges faced by both nations in balancing modernization with the preservation of cultural heritage. Indonesia's rapid urbanization and Myanmar's socio-economic disparities present significant hurdles that need to be addressed through thoughtful urban planning and policy-making. Community engagement emerges as a vital element in these efforts, with residents playing a crucial role in sustaining and promoting culinary traditions. The opportunities identified in the table suggest promising directions for future development. Digital platforms offer new avenues for promoting local cuisine on a global scale, while sustainable culinary practices can ensure the long-term viability of food heritage. By learning from the experiences of Indonesia and Myanmar, other cities can explore innovative strategies to integrate local cuisine into their branding and urban planning initiatives, fostering a sense of authenticity and cultural pride.

3.1.1 Indonesia

Urban identity and local cuisine in Indonesia are intricately linked with the country's diverse cultural landscape. Indonesia's motto of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) reflects the nation's efforts to foster a cohesive national identity amidst its rich ethnic tapestry (Perkasa et al., 2022). The urban kampungs, traditional neighborhoods in cities like Surabaya, have historically played a role in embodying this concept of unity in diversity, despite official discourses often overlooking their significance (Perkasa et al., 2022). This underscores how everyday urban life in Indonesia contributes to the broader narrative of national identity.

Local cuisine in Indonesia serves as a cultural marker, reflecting the country's culinary diversity and societal perceptions. Research on stereotype-based judgments related to the cuisines consumed in Indonesia sheds light on how food choices can be linked to ethnic identities and social perceptions (Suroyo & Putra, 2023). Moreover, the association of certain dishes with specific ethnic groups underscores the complex interplay between food, identity, and societal attitudes in Indonesia.

The culinary landscape in Indonesia is characterized by a wide array of flavors and ingredients, showcasing the country's cultural heritage and regional diversity. Indonesian local cuisines offer a vast variety of tastes and ingredients, highlighting the richness of the country's culinary traditions (Verónica & Kusdibyo, 2021). The emphasis on rice-based, spicy, and flavorful dishes, often fried and seasoned with aromatic spices, reflects the unique blend of flavors that define Indonesian cuisine (Utomo & Kamal, 2022). Additionally, the association of certain dishes with specific regions or communities further reinforces the cultural significance of food in Indonesia. Urban identity and local cuisine in Indonesia are deeply intertwined with the country's diverse cultural heritage and societal dynamics. The promotion of national unity amidst diversity, the role of traditional neighborhoods in shaping urban life, and the cultural significance of local cuisines all contribute to the multifaceted tapestry of Indonesian identity.

3.1.1.1 The role of local cuisine in shaping urban identity and boosting city branding in Indonesia

Indonesia's urban identity is deeply intertwined with its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary traditions. The archipelago's cities, such as Yogyakarta and Bali, are renowned for their vibrant street food scenes and regional specialties. Indonesian cuisine, with dishes like Nasi Goreng (fried rice), Rendang (slow-cooked beef), and Satay (grilled skewers), reflects the nation's complex history of trade, migration, and cultural exchange. The distinctive flavors and cooking methods of Indonesian food play a crucial role in defining the urban character and daily life of its cities. Indonesian cuisine, with its distinctive flavors and cooking methods, plays a central role in defining the identity of urban spaces across the archipelago.

A notable example of successful city branding in Indonesia is the "Wonderful Indonesia" campaign, which places a strong emphasis on the country's culinary diversity as a central attraction. This initiative highlights regional dishes and food festivals, positioning Indonesia as a premier destination for culinary tourism. Similarly, Yogyakarta has embraced its role as a cultural and culinary hub by hosting events such as the Yogyakarta Culinary Festival, drawing food enthusiasts from around the world. These initiatives not only promote local cuisine but also strengthen the cultural identity and appeal of the cities.

The incorporation of local cuisine into city branding has significantly benefited tourism, community engagement, and the economy in Indonesia. Culinary tourism has grown into a major attraction, with visitors seeking out authentic Indonesian food in its native context. This has led to economic growth, particularly for street vendors, restaurants, and food-related businesses, while also fostering a sense of pride and community involvement among locals. The success of these efforts highlights the powerful role that local cuisine plays in shaping urban identity and boosting economic vitality.

3.1.2 Myanmar

Urban identity and local cuisine in Myanmar are intricately intertwined, reflecting a blend of tradition and modernity. Mandalay, known as a bastion of Burmese tradition, embodies this tension between preserving heritage and embracing contemporary influences (Puttilli, 2020). The city's multi-ethnic heritage challenges simplistic definitions of urban identity, emphasizing the complexity of cultural heritage in shaping Mandalay's identity (Shwin, 2024). Moreover, rural-urban disparities impact factors like depressive symptoms among older adults in different regions of Myanmar, highlighting the need for tailored interventions based on local characteristics (Sasaki et al., 2021).

In Myanmar, the culinary landscape is rich and diverse, with local cuisines often reflecting cultural traditions and values. Phlebopus portentosus, a prized mushroom in Myanmar, is a testament to the significance of local ingredients in traditional dishes (Mortimer et al., 2012). Additionally, the health benefits of local vegetables in Myanmar

markets underscore the importance of traditional knowledge in promoting well-being through daily cuisine practices (Zhang et al., 2020). The integration of nutritious and culturally significant foods into local diets not only sustains livelihoods but also preserves culinary heritage.

The geopolitical context of Myanmar has also influenced urban identities, with historical events shaping perceptions of belonging and identity in cities like Yangon (Rhoads, 2020). The imposition of "Burmanization" policies by past regimes underscores the complexities of urban identity formation, especially concerning the suppression of ethnic minorities (Bennett & Faxon, 2021). Such dynamics have contributed to the diverse urban fabric of Myanmar, where different communities negotiate their identities within the broader societal framework.

Furthermore, the Rohingya genocide has had lasting effects on cultural identity, with refugees facing challenges of assimilation and loss of group identity in host countries like Malaysia (O'Brien & Hoffstaedter, 2020). The resilience and resistance of stateless Rohingya refugees reflect the complexities of refugeehood and statelessness, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of their experiences and struggles (Kaveri & Rajan, 2023). The urban identity and local cuisine of Myanmar are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. The interplay between tradition and modernity, the preservation of cultural heritage through cuisine, and the impact of geopolitical forces on urban identities all contribute to the rich tapestry of Myanmar's societal fabric.

3.1.2.1 Culinary heritage as a catalyst for city branding and economic growth in Myanmar

Myanmar's urban identity is deeply shaped by its rich ethnic cultures and diverse culinary traditions. Cities such as Yangon and Mandalay provide a window into the country's heritage through bustling food markets and street vendors. Iconic dishes like Mohinga (fish noodle soup), Shan Noodles, and Tea Leaf Salad represent the unique flavors of Myanmar's various regions. These culinary traditions are not only an essential part of daily life but also a reflection of the cultural identity in Myanmar's urban centers.

In recent years, Myanmar has embraced its culinary heritage as a key element in city branding efforts. For example, the "Myanmar Cuisine Promotion" initiative aims to introduce Burmese food culture to international audiences. Events like the Yangon Food Festival celebrate the diversity of Burmese dishes and cooking techniques, attracting both locals and tourists. Myanmar's tea culture, especially its famous tea leaf salad, has also gained international attention, helping to solidify the country's emerging reputation as a culinary destination.

The focus on local cuisine in Myanmar's city branding has had a positive impact on tourism, community engagement, and economic growth. Culinary tourism is flourishing, with visitors drawn to explore Myanmar's distinctive food culture. This has opened up new economic opportunities for local businesses, from small street vendors to upscale restaurants. Moreover, promoting culinary traditions has strengthened community ties, as residents take pride in their food heritage and participate in events celebrating their cultural identity. These efforts highlight how local cuisine can drive urban development and enrich the cultural fabric of Myanmar's cities.

3.2 Findings

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that local cuisine plays in shaping urban identity and enhancing city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar. The comparative analysis reveals several key themes and patterns that illustrate how culinary traditions contribute to the unique character and appeal of urban areas in these countries. Community engagement plays a vital role in the preservation and promotion of local cuisine, significantly contributing to urban identity and cultural heritage. Through various food-related events and festivals, cities can actively involve residents and visitors in celebrating

their culinary traditions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. These events not only highlight the unique flavors and cooking techniques specific to the region but also provide opportunities for social interaction and economic activity.

In Indonesia and Myanmar, community-driven culinary events have become integral to city branding efforts. They serve as platforms for showcasing the rich gastronomic heritage of these nations, attracting both local participants and international tourists. The images in Fig. 1 illustrate two prominent examples of community engagement through food festivals: the Yogyakarta Food Festival in Indonesia and the Traditional Sticky Rice Festival in Yangon, Myanmar. These events exemplify how culinary traditions can bring communities together, enhance urban identity, and contribute to the local economy, see Fig.1 below.



Fig 1. Community engagement: a) Yogyakarta Food Festival. Photo by Maya Aulia Aprilianti; b) Traditional sticky rice festival in Yangon. Photo by, Myo Kyaw Soe

3.2.1 Contribution of local cuisine to urban identity

Local cuisine plays a multifaceted role in shaping urban identity, serving as a cornerstone for cultural preservation, community engagement, and economic development. In the context of Indonesia and Myanmar, the rich culinary traditions not only define the character of their cities but also drive tourism and foster a sense of pride among residents. By integrating local cuisine into city branding and urban planning strategies, these countries have leveraged their gastronomic heritage to create unique, appealing urban identities.

The following table 3 below, provides a detailed comparison of how local cuisine contributes to various aspects of urban identity in Indonesia and Myanmar. The comparison highlights the similarities and differences in their approaches, illustrating the broad impact of culinary traditions on urban life. These insights underscore the potential for local cuisine to enhance urban identity, foster social cohesion, and stimulate economic growth, providing valuable lessons for other cities seeking to capitalize on their culinary heritage.

Table 3. Contribution of Local Cuisine to Urban Identity		
Aspect	Indonesia	Myanmar
Cultural Heritage Preservation	Local cuisine serves as a living testament to Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage, with dishes reflecting historical trade routes and regional influences.	Burmese cuisine reflects the country's multi-ethnic composition, preserving traditional recipes and cooking methods unique to each ethnic group.
Community Engagement	Culinary events and festivals, such as the Yogyakarta Culinary Festival, foster community participation and pride in local traditions.	Community-driven food markets and festivals, like the Yangon Food Festival, engage locals in celebrating and promoting their culinary heritage.
Economic Impact	Culinary tourism significantly boosts the local economy, supporting street vendors, restaurants, and food-related businesses.	The rise of culinary tourism has created economic opportunities for small-scale vendors and local food enterprises, stimulating urban economies.

Tourism Attraction	Indonesia's diverse and flavorful cuisine attracts international tourists, enhancing the country's reputation as a culinary destination.	Myanmar's unique dishes, such as Mohinga and Tea Leaf Salad, draw culinary tourists, contributing to the growth of the tourism sector.
Urban Branding and Identity	Cities like Yogyakarta and Bali use local cuisine to brand themselves as cultural and culinary hubs, reinforcing their urban identity.	Yangon and Mandalay utilize their rich culinary traditions to differentiate themselves from other cities, strengthening their unique urban identities.
Social Cohesion	Food-centered activities and communal dining experiences promote social interactions and cohesion among residents.	Traditional communal meals and food-sharing practices in Myanmar foster a sense of unity and belonging among urban communities.
Sustainability and Innovation	Efforts to promote sustainable food practices and innovation in traditional recipes contribute to a dynamic and evolving urban food culture.	Initiatives to incorporate sustainable practices in food production and presentation preserve culinary heritage while adapting to contemporary tastes and needs.
Cultural Exchange	Culinary diversity in urban areas facilitates cultural exchange and understanding among different ethnic and regional groups within Indonesia.	The blend of various ethnic cuisines in Myanmar's urban centers promotes cultural exchange and mutual appreciation among diverse communities.
Educational Value	Culinary schools and food tours educate locals and tourists about the historical and cultural significance of Indonesian dishes.	Food tours and culinary workshops in Myanmar provide educational insights into the cultural and historical contexts of traditional Burmese cuisine.
Innovation and Modernization	The fusion of traditional and modern culinary techniques in urban centers showcases Indonesia's ability to innovate while preserving its cultural roots.	Urban restaurants and food entrepreneurs in Myanmar are blending traditional flavors with modern culinary trends, highlighting the adaptability and creativity of Burmese cuisine.

Table 3 above, clearly illustrates the extensive contributions of local cuisine to urban identity in Indonesia and Myanmar, spanning cultural, economic, and social dimensions. In both countries, local food traditions are not only preserved but also actively promoted through various initiatives, enhancing the cities' unique identities and appeal. The cultural heritage embedded in the local cuisine serves as a powerful tool for city branding, attracting tourists, and fostering a sense of pride and community among residents.

The economic impact of culinary tourism is significant, providing livelihoods for street vendors, restaurateurs, and food-related businesses. This economic boost is accompanied by efforts to ensure sustainability and innovation, adapting traditional recipes to modern tastes while maintaining cultural authenticity. Furthermore, local cuisine facilitates cultural exchange and social cohesion, bringing together diverse communities and promoting mutual understanding. The educational value of local cuisine cannot be overstated. Through culinary schools, food tours, and workshops, both locals and tourists gain deeper insights into the historical and cultural contexts of traditional dishes. This educational aspect further strengthens the connection between food and urban identity, highlighting the importance of preserving and promoting culinary heritage in an ever-globalizing world.

The case studies of Indonesia and Myanmar demonstrate that local cuisine is a vital component of urban identity. It enriches the cultural landscape, supports economic development, and fosters social cohesion, making cities more vibrant, attractive, and authentic. These findings offer valuable lessons for other cities seeking to leverage their culinary heritage to enhance their urban identity and brand.

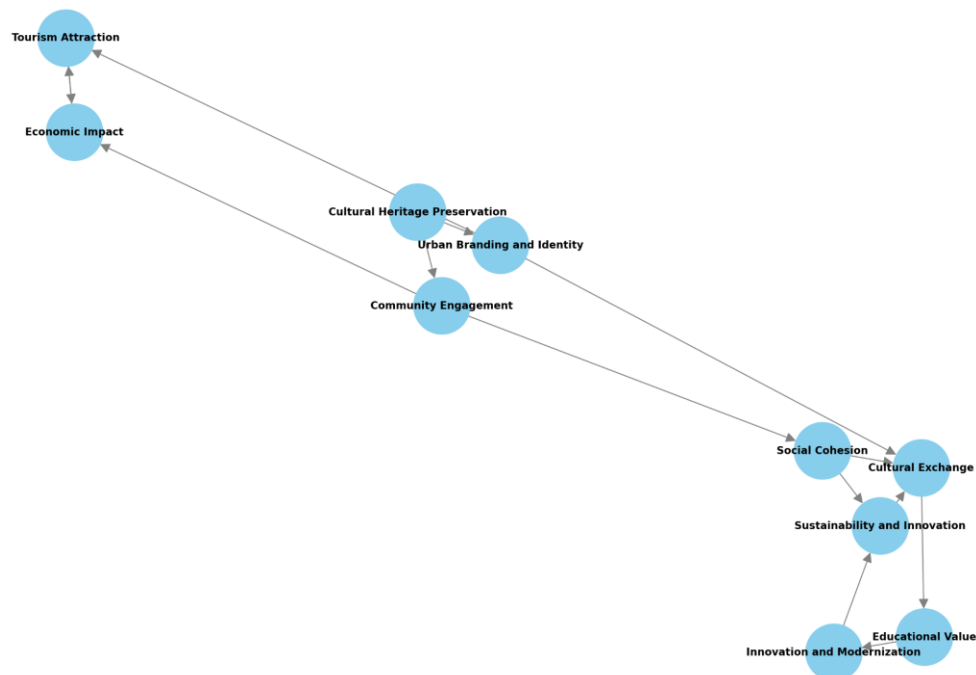


Fig. 2. Relationship between contributions of local cuisine to urban identity

Fig. 2 above, highlights how these aspects are interconnected, demonstrating that the promotion and preservation of local cuisine extend beyond mere cultural significance. For instance, the economic impact of culinary tourism not only supports local businesses but also reinforces cultural heritage preservation by providing the financial means to sustain traditional practices. Similarly, community engagement in food-related events and festivals fosters social cohesion and enhances the sense of belonging among residents, which in turn strengthens urban identity.

The diagram also shows how sustainability and innovation in local cuisine practices can lead to a dynamic and evolving urban food culture, attracting tourists and boosting the city's economic prospects. Educational initiatives surrounding local cuisine provide valuable insights into cultural and historical contexts, further enriching the urban identity. By understanding these complex relationships, urban planners and policymakers can better strategize on leveraging local cuisine to enhance city branding and foster a more authentic and vibrant urban environment.

3.2.1.1 Visual representation of relationships

The diagram Fig. 2 above illustrates the relationships between the various contributions of local cuisine to urban identity in Indonesia and Myanmar. The nodes represent the different aspects, while the arrows indicate the influence or connection between these aspects. Cultural heritage preservation serves as the foundation for a strong urban identity, influencing community engagement and branding. Increased community involvement promotes economic impact and social cohesion, while economic growth and tourism attraction reinforce each other.

Urban branding and identity connect to both tourism and cultural exchange, fostering a vibrant community. Social cohesion supports cultural exchange and sustainability, while innovation and modernization contribute to both cultural exchange and sustainability. Cultural exchange is essential for educational value, which in turn fosters innovation and modernization, creating a cycle of positive influence on sustainability. This network diagram shows how interconnected the various contributions of local cuisine are in shaping the urban identity, demonstrating the complex interplay between cultural, social, economic, and educational factors.

3.2.2 Strategies for integrating cuisine into city branding

3.2.2.1 Best practices and innovative approaches

Integrating local cuisine into city branding involves a combination of best practices and innovative approaches designed to highlight culinary heritage, attract tourists, and foster community pride. One effective practice is organizing food festivals that celebrate regional specialties and traditional cooking methods. These festivals not only draw tourists but also engage residents, creating a shared sense of cultural pride. For instance, the Yogyakarta Food Festival in Indonesia and the Traditional Sticky Rice Festival in Yangon, Myanmar, are exemplary events that showcase local cuisine while promoting cultural heritage.

Another innovative approach is the creation of culinary tours and food trails that guide visitors through a city's gastronomic hotspots. These tours can highlight iconic dishes, historical food markets, and traditional eateries, providing an immersive culinary experience. In Indonesia, cities like Bali and Jakarta have successfully implemented food tours that attract food enthusiasts from around the world. Similarly, Myanmar is developing food trails in cities like Mandalay and Yangon, which highlight the rich diversity of Burmese cuisine. Additionally, incorporating local cuisine into digital marketing campaigns can significantly enhance city branding efforts. Leveraging social media platforms, food blogs, and culinary travel websites allows cities to reach a broader audience and create a buzz around their unique food offerings. Online campaigns can feature engaging content such as cooking demonstrations, chef interviews, and behind-the-scenes looks at local food production, helping to build a strong and appealing culinary brand.

3.2.2.2 Role of policymakers and urban planners

Policymakers and urban planners play a crucial role in integrating local cuisine into city branding strategies. Their support and active involvement are essential for the successful implementation of culinary initiatives that promote urban identity and economic development. One of the key roles of policymakers is to create a conducive environment for culinary tourism by providing necessary infrastructure and regulatory support. This includes the development of food markets, festival venues, and public spaces where culinary events can be held.

Urban planners can also contribute by ensuring that local food vendors and traditional eateries are included in urban development plans. This involves zoning regulations that support street food vendors and protect traditional markets from being displaced by modern commercial developments. By preserving these culinary spaces, urban planners help maintain the cultural fabric of the city and provide tourists with authentic dining experiences.

Furthermore, policymakers can facilitate partnerships between local businesses, tourism boards, and cultural organizations to promote culinary heritage. These partnerships can result in collaborative marketing efforts, joint events, and funding opportunities for culinary entrepreneurs. For example, providing grants or subsidies to small-scale food producers and vendors can encourage the preservation and innovation of traditional recipes.

Lastly, education and training programs supported by policymakers can enhance the skills and knowledge of local chefs and food entrepreneurs. By offering workshops on traditional cooking techniques, food safety, and sustainable practices, cities can ensure that their culinary heritage is preserved and adapted to modern standards. These educational initiatives not only improve the quality of local cuisine but also empower the community to actively participate in the city's branding efforts. The integration of local cuisine into city branding requires a strategic and collaborative approach that involves best practices, innovative marketing, and the active participation of policymakers and urban planners. By leveraging these strategies, cities can effectively highlight their culinary heritage, attract tourists, and foster a strong sense of community identity.

3.2.3 Challenges and opportunities

One of the significant challenges faced by both Indonesia and Myanmar is finding a balance between modernization and the preservation of cultural heritage. As urbanization and economic growth accelerate, traditional culinary practices often come under threat. To address this, urban planners and policymakers need to create strategies that protect and promote local cuisine while still accommodating modern development. This includes supporting sustainable food practices and fostering innovation in culinary traditions to ensure their survival amid changing urban landscapes.

Community involvement plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting local cuisine. Both countries have successfully engaged local communities through food festivals and markets, creating spaces to celebrate culinary heritage. However, these initiatives must be inclusive and ensure that marginalized groups also benefit. Policies should focus on creating equitable opportunities for all residents to participate in and profit from culinary tourism and related economic activities, ensuring widespread community engagement and economic growth.

In the digital age, leveraging online platforms presents a powerful tool for promoting local cuisine globally. Social media, food blogs, and culinary travel websites allow cities in Indonesia and Myanmar to reach wider audiences and attract more tourists. These platforms not only enhance city branding efforts but also offer educational opportunities to inform tourists and locals about the historical and cultural significance of traditional dishes, further promoting cultural preservation.

The integration of local cuisine into urban planning carries important implications for land use, sustainability, and food security. As discussed by Nichol (2003) and Cabannes & Marocchino (2018), balancing the needs of local food businesses with planning regulations is key. Kowalczyk & Kubal-Czerwińska (2020) and Marat-Mendes (2019) also highlight the transformative potential of traditional cuisine in shaping urban spaces, emphasizing how food systems can reshape urban fabrics while preserving cultural identity. This interplay between local food and urban planning offers unique opportunities for sustainable development.

3.3 Discussion

3.3.1 Integrating local cuisine into urban planning: balancing cultural preservation, economic growth, and city branding

The integration of local cuisine into urban planning has significant implications for land use, sustainability, and food security. Nichol (2003) and Cabannes & Marocchino (2018) both highlight the challenges and opportunities in this area, with the former emphasizing the need for a balance between local food businesses and planning regulations, while the latter underscores the importance of global knowledge in local food planning. Kowalczyk & Kubal-Czerwińska (2020) and Marat-Mendes (2019) further explore the potential of traditional and regional cuisine in urban spaces, with Marat-Mendes placing particular emphasis on the transformative role of food systems in urban development. Together, these perspectives underline the critical role of urban planners in incorporating culinary heritage into sustainable city growth.

To achieve this integration, several strategies are necessary. First, policymakers should designate culinary districts within cities where local food vendors, markets, and eateries can thrive, serving as cultural hubs that attract both tourists and residents. These districts offer concentrated experiences of the city's culinary heritage and contribute to its unique urban identity. Second, safeguarding traditional food markets and street vendors from the pressures of modernization requires zoning regulations that protect these essential elements of local culture. Legal and infrastructural support will ensure these culinary traditions continue to enrich the urban fabric. Third, to foster a vibrant culinary scene, policymakers should encourage the organization of regular food festivals

and culinary events, supporting them with public funding and logistical assistance. These events not only celebrate local cuisine but also strengthen the city's appeal to tourists. Fourth, the development of official food trails and culinary tours can enhance tourism by offering visitors curated experiences that highlight the cultural and historical significance of local dishes. Finally, educational programs that teach traditional cooking techniques and the history of local cuisine are vital for preserving culinary heritage for future generations.

In enhancing city branding, authenticity is key, especially when leveraging local cuisine. Policymakers should emphasize genuine local experiences in marketing campaigns, avoiding overly commercialized representations that can diminish the connection between tourists and the local community. Engaging local communities in the branding process ensures that the culinary identity being promoted accurately reflects the traditions and experiences of residents. Additionally, preserving historical and cultural landmarks related to food, such as traditional markets and historic restaurants, is essential for maintaining tangible connections to the city's culinary past. Finally, showcasing the diversity within local cuisine highlights the multicultural heritage of a city, attracting a broader range of tourists and enriching the city's identity.

Looking forward, further research is needed to explore the relationship between local cuisine and urban identity in greater depth. Potential areas of investigation include the impact of globalization on local culinary traditions, the role of technology in promoting local cuisine, the economic benefits of culinary tourism, and how food-centered activities contribute to social cohesion. For instance, examining how global food trends challenge the preservation of local traditions, while investigating the effectiveness of digital platforms in promoting these cuisines, could provide valuable insights. Additionally, understanding the economic benefits of culinary tourism can highlight its impact on local businesses and urban development, while exploring the role of food in fostering community and social cohesion.

Comparative studies with other regions could also yield valuable lessons. By analyzing how cities in Southeast Asia, Europe, or Latin America integrate local cuisine into their urban identity, researchers can identify best practices and common challenges. Exploring how cities with diverse ethnic populations balance cultural preservation with modernization could offer insights into maintaining authenticity while promoting growth. Studies on sustainable food practices in urban areas could also reveal the role of local cuisine in promoting environmental sustainability. Finally, comparing the impact of culinary tourism on urban planning and development across different cities can highlight the broader economic and cultural benefits, informing strategies that integrate local cuisine into sustainable urban growth.

4. Conclusions

This comparative study has demonstrated the significant role that local cuisine plays in shaping urban identities and enhancing city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar. Through an in-depth analysis of these two culturally rich countries, the research highlights how local food traditions can serve as a strategic asset in urban planning and development. Indonesia's vibrant street food culture and Myanmar's distinctive culinary heritage both contribute to a unique sense of place and community, which are crucial for attracting tourism and fostering local pride.

The findings reveal that the integration of local cuisine into city branding efforts not only preserves culinary heritage but also enhances the distinctive character of cities, making them more appealing to both residents and visitors. In Indonesia, cities like Yogyakarta and Bali have successfully incorporated their rich food culture into various aspects of city life, from festivals to tourism campaigns, significantly boosting their urban identity and economic vitality. Similarly, Myanmar's efforts in cities like Yangon and Mandalay showcase the potential for culinary traditions to contribute to cultural revival and tourism growth, even amid rapid urbanization and socio-economic transformations.

However, the study also underscores several challenges that both nations face in balancing modernization with cultural preservation. Indonesia's rapid urbanization and Myanmar's socio-economic disparities present significant hurdles that require thoughtful urban planning and policy-making. Effective community engagement emerges as a vital element in these efforts, with residents playing a crucial role in sustaining and promoting culinary traditions. By addressing these challenges through inclusive and culturally sensitive policies, urban planners and policymakers can ensure that local cuisine continues to enhance urban identity and authenticity.

The experiences of Indonesia and Myanmar offer valuable lessons for other cities globally seeking to enrich their urban identities through the celebration of local cuisine. The successful integration of culinary heritage into city branding can foster a sense of authenticity and cultural pride, driving sustainable urban development. Future research should continue to explore the dynamic relationship between food culture and urban identity, considering the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by globalization and modernization. By leveraging the power of local cuisine, cities can craft unique and authentic urban identities that resonate with both residents and visitors alike.

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Author Contribution

This study was collaboratively conducted by T, H., H, M. F. D., and A, F. D. T, H., and A, F. D. was responsible for the research design, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript, while H, M. F. D. contributed to data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript revision.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Biographies of Authors

Thazin Htet, Japanese Construction Academy, Yangon, Myanmar.

- Email: thazinhtet1880@gmail.com
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A

Muhammad Fahd Diyar Husni, University of 17 Agustus 1945 (UNTAG) Semarang, 50133, Indonesia.

- Email: dyarhusni@untagsmg.ac.id
- ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2920-603X>
- Web of Science ResearcherID: <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/ACA-0746-2022>
- Scopus Author ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=36518754200>
- Homepage: <https://sinta.kemdikbud.go.id/authors/profile/6750947>

Fadila Dwi Apriliani, University of 17 Agustus 1945 (UNTAG) Semarang, 50133, Indonesia.

- Email: aprilianifadilaa@gmail.com
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A