

# The Role of the Werkudara Double-Decker Tourist Bus in Strengthening the Tourism Identity of Solo City

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of the Werkudara Double-Decker Tourist Bus in strengthening the tourism identity of Solo City using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. With its distinctive design reflecting local culture and educational narratives delivered by tour guides, the bus serves as a unique mode of tourist transportation in Solo. Through in-depth interviews with five respondents, including tourists, the study reveals that the bus's visual and narrative stimuli positively impact tourists' perceptions of Solo. The striking design and rich cultural storytelling enhance appreciation for the city's history and local culture, thereby reinforcing Solo's image as a cultural tourism destination. As a result, these stimuli elicit positive responses, such as increased interest in visiting other attractions in Solo and a willingness to recommend the city to others. Through its visual and narrative elements, the Werkudara Bus plays a significant role in strengthening Solo's tourism identity

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## 1. Introduction

As an integral part of city branding strategies, effective stimuli play a crucial role in shaping the tourism identity of a region. In the context of Solo City, these stimuli encompass not only tourist attractions or destinations but also elements that influence tourists' perceptions and experiences during their visit. One significant stimulus is the design and characteristics of tourism transportation, such as the Werkudara Double-Decker Bus. As a transportation mode that reflects local culture, this bus serves as an effective tool to introduce and reinforce Solo's image as a cultural tourism destination. This stimulus is both visual, through the unique bus design, and narrative, through the stories conveyed by tour guides during the journey. By offering a structured and informative tourism experience, the Werkudara Bus functions as a powerful promotional medium to enhance the city's appeal and solidify its identity in the eyes of both domestic and international tourists.

Solo City is one of Indonesia's cultural tourism destinations with significant potential to attract domestic and international visitors (Majid, M. L., 2020). Known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, Solo continuously strives to enhance its appeal through the development of tourism destinations and supporting facilities (Rosanto, A., 2020). One notable innovation is the launch of the Werkudara Double-Decker Tourist Bus, inaugurated by President Joko Widodo in 2011 during his tenure as Mayor of Solo.

The function of tourism innovation is to increase the attractiveness of destinations, enrich tourists' experiences, and create added value for the tourism industry. This innovation includes developing new tourism products, applying technology, and diversifying services to meet the

evolving needs of tourists. Additionally, innovation strengthens local cultural identity, enhances destination competitiveness, and drives regional economic growth by increasing tourist visits (Wulandari, A. A., & Husnita, 2022).

The Werkudara Bus is designed as a tourism transportation medium to support tourism activities in Solo City. It is a double-decker bus with a unique design that reflects Solo's characteristics, providing a distinctive tourism experience for visitors. The bus operates every Saturday and Sunday, primarily taking tourists to various iconic destinations in Solo. The route includes historical, cultural, and shopping landmarks such as the Surakarta Palace, Klewer Market, Balekambang Park, Batik Museum, and Ngarsopuro Night Market (Santoso, B., 2019).

The primary function of the Werkudara Bus is to provide a comfortable and structured tourism experience for visitors while promoting Solo City's tourism potential. With its city tour concept, tourists can enjoy cityscapes while gaining information about historical and cultural sites they pass through. This makes the Werkudara Bus not just a transportation mode but also a promotional medium for Solo's tourism identity. Furthermore, the bus offers education on Solo's historical and cultural wealth through narratives delivered by tour guides during the journey. Consequently, tourists can deeply understand Solo's cultural and historical values, creating memorable and meaningful travel experiences.

The presence of the Werkudara Bus also positively impacts the local economy. Destinations on the bus's route, such as Klewer Market and Ngarsopuro Night Market, gain more attention from tourists, thereby increasing economic transactions in these areas. Additionally, the bus encourages the development of other tourism sectors, such as culinary and accommodations, further complementing Solo City's tourism ecosystem. In the context of the stimulus-response theory, the Werkudara Bus can be seen as a stimulus designed to attract tourists' attention. This stimulus includes the iconic bus visualization, the tourism experience it offers, and the information about destinations conveyed during the journey. These stimuli are expected to elicit positive responses from tourists, such as increased interest in exploring Solo's tourism destinations, heightened awareness of Solo's cultural richness, and the formation of a positive image of the city as a premier tourism destination.

According to this theory, the success of a stimulus in generating the desired response depends on its strength and relevance to its audience (Lee, C. S., & Kim, S. Y., 2020). In the case of the Werkudara Bus, the design, route, and experiences offered are crucial elements that determine its effectiveness in building awareness and strengthening Solo's tourism identity. The visual stimulus of the bus design reflecting local culture, combined with the educational narratives delivered during the journey, creates an engaging and memorable experience for tourists (Xie, L., & Xu, W., 2020).

Limited studies, such as Budi Santoso's (2019) work titled "*The Role of the Werkudara Double-Decker Bus for the Development of Solo City Tourism*", discuss the role of the Werkudara Bus in Solo's tourism but do not specifically analyze its effectiveness in strengthening the city's tourism identity. Research on the role of the Werkudara Bus as part of Solo City's tourism branding strategy remains limited. Most studies focus on technical aspects, such as service and customer satisfaction, without delving into how the bus shapes tourists' perceptions of the city's identity.

The study by Halifa Haqqi and Hasna Wijayati (2024), titled "*City Branding of Solo in Enhancing Competitiveness as an International MICE Destination*," focuses on Solo City's general branding strategy without specifically addressing the impact of the Werkudara Bus on tourist interest. Similarly, Anton Rosanto's (2020) research titled "*Icons of Solo City in Branding Solo as a Creative City to Strengthen Solo the Spirit of Java*" discusses city icons in branding but does not specifically examine the relationship between the visual and narrative stimuli of the Werkudara Bus and destination awareness. With these research gaps, this study aims to analyze the role of the Werkudara Bus as a stimulus in strengthening Solo City's tourism identity, addressing the identified gaps in the literature.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the subjective experiences of tourists who use the Werkudara Bus and how the visual and narrative stimuli it offers influence their perceptions and interest in Solo City's tourist destinations. The research was conducted in Solo City, focusing on locations traversed by the Werkudara Bus, such as

the Surakarta Palace, Klewer Market, Balekambang Park, Batik Museum, and Ngarsopuro Night Market.

The study participants consisted of four tourists, both domestic and international, who had used the Werkudara Bus. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria of having direct experience with the bus. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and direct observations, guided by an interview protocol that covered tourists' experiences regarding the bus's design, tour guide narratives, and the impact on their awareness of Solo's tourist destinations. Observations were conducted to document the bus's design elements and interactions during the journey.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, beginning with the transcription of interviews, grouping data into thematic codes, and drawing conclusions on the influence of the Werkudara Bus stimuli on tourists' perceptions. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of the Werkudara Bus in strengthening the tourism identity of Solo City. Results and Discussion.

The closing contains conclusions and suggestions. Conclusions describe the answers to the hypotheses and/or research objectives or findings obtained. The conclusion does not contain a repetition of the results and discussion, but rather a summary of the findings as expected from the goal or hypothesis.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### Stimulus

Based on the interview results, the stimuli received by tourists through Bus Werkudara consist of two main elements: the bus's visual design and the tour guide's narrative. In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, stimuli are external elements that affect an individual's emotions, perceptions, and responses. These stimuli can be visual, verbal, or a combination of both, capable of creating profound experiences and impressions.

The visual design of Bus Werkudara, with its batik patterns, traditional architecture, and vibrant colors, serves as a strong visual stimulus. According to the SOR theory, striking visual elements can attract attention and influence an individual's perception of an object (Lee, C. H., & Chen, C. W. 2021). The respondents mentioned that they were drawn to the unique design of the bus, which they felt reflected the distinctive characteristics of Solo. This supports the theory that aesthetically designed and culturally meaningful visual stimuli can create a positive first impression and build an emotional connection with tourists.

The narrative delivered by the tour guide during the trip acts as a verbal stimulus that reinforces the impression created by the visual stimulus. In the SOR theory, verbal information plays a role in influencing an individual's cognitive aspects, such as understanding and appreciation of an object or experience (Lee, C. S., & Kim, S. Y. 2020). The respondents highlighted that the narrative provided in-depth information about the history and culture of Solo, making their experience more meaningful. This shows that verbal stimuli complement visual stimuli by providing relevant context and enriching the tourist experience.

Both elements of stimulus work synergistically, as described in the SOR theory. The visual design creates initial appeal, while the narrative strengthens this appeal by providing deeper understanding. The respondents' acknowledgment that the visual design reflects Solo's culture and that the narrative added insight into their experience supports the validity of the SOR theory, where stimuli influence the organism (emotions and understanding) that ultimately generates positive responses, such as appreciation for the local culture. The combination of visual and verbal stimuli on Bus Werkudara emphasizes the importance of designing tourism elements that are not only visually appealing but also meaningful in an educational way, in line with the SOR theory's principles of creating an optimal tourism experience.

#### Organism

In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, the Organism refers to the internal processes of the individual, including cognitive and emotional aspects, in responding to the stimuli received. The organism acts as a bridge between external stimuli (such as visuals and narratives) and

the final response (behavior or perception) (Dinanti, W. D., & Bharata, W. 2023). Based on the interviews, tourists expressed feelings of awe and emotional connection with Solo's culture after experiencing the Bus Werkudara tour, demonstrating how the stimuli received influence their internal processes.

The visual design of Bus Werkudara and the educational narrative provided by the tour guide serve as stimuli that trigger both emotional and cognitive responses from the tourists. According to the SOR theory, visual stimuli (such as batik patterns and traditional architecture) evoke aesthetic appeal, which can elicit feelings of admiration (Singh, D., & Verma, A. 2019). This supports the respondents' statements that the bus's design creates a strong first impression of Solo's cultural identity. This impression is then processed by the tourists, resulting in an emotional connection with the local culture.

The verbal stimulus from the tour guide's narrative strengthens the cognitive process of the tourists. The in-depth information shared, such as the history and cultural values of Solo, helps tourists form a better understanding. As explained by some of the respondents, they felt closer to Solo's culture after receiving the narrative. This supports the idea in the SOR theory that verbal stimuli can influence cognitive interpretation, enhancing appreciation for the object or experience being encountered.

According to the SOR theory, stimuli not only influence cognitive aspects but also create deep emotional experiences (Min, Y., & Tan, C. C. 2022). The feelings of awe reported by the respondents show that the visual stimuli created a positive emotional experience. Meanwhile, the tour guide's educational narrative influenced the cognitive process by enriching their understanding of Solo's culture. The combination of emotional and cognitive responses contributes to the formation of a positive image of Solo as a cultural tourism destination.

## Response

In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, Response is the final outcome, which refers to actions, behaviors, or attitude changes that occur after an individual processes stimuli through cognitive and emotional mechanisms (Min, Y., & Tan, C. C. 2022). The response demonstrated by tourists after receiving visual stimuli (bus design) and verbal stimuli (tour guide's narrative) on the Bus Werkudara reflects the effectiveness of these stimuli in influencing tourists' behavior.

The visual stimulus, in the form of the bus design reflecting Solo's culture, creates a strong first impression and emotional appeal for tourists. This makes tourists more attracted to Solo's unique culture, as expressed in the interviews. According to the SOR theory, positive visual appeal can influence affective responses, such as increased interest and attraction to an object or experience (Xie, L., & Xu, W. 2020).

The verbal stimulus from the tour guide's narrative enhances the impact of the visual stimulus by providing deeper cultural context and insight. This information influences the cognitive processes of the tourists, making them better understand and appreciate the cultural values of Solo. In the interviews, respondents mentioned that they felt a greater urge to visit more cultural destinations after the tour, indicating that the verbal stimulus also affected the tourists' intention and exploratory behavior.

The tourists' response, which includes increased interest in exploring Solo further and recommending the city to friends or family, is a concrete example of the effect of the received stimuli. According to the SOR theory, these positive responses occur when stimuli create meaningful experiences, both emotionally and cognitively (Rosanto, A. 2020). A response such as recommending Solo as a tourism destination also indicates that the stimuli successfully built a positive image of the city in the tourists' minds.

The interview results support the SOR theory by showing that the visual and verbal stimuli received by tourists not only influence their perception of Solo's culture but also lead to concrete actions, such as the desire to explore more destinations and promote Solo to others. This aligns with the SOR theory's view that responses are the final outcome of the interaction between stimuli and the organism.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, it can be concluded that Bus Werkudara is effective in strengthening the tourism identity of Solo City through the visual and narrative stimuli it offers. The bus design, which reflects the local culture, such as batik patterns and traditional architecture, along with the narrative provided by the tour guide, has proven to capture the attention of tourists. This visual stimulus creates a strong first impression and provides an in-depth introduction to Solo's cultural identity.

Furthermore, tourists respond to these stimuli with feelings of admiration and emotional connection to Solo's culture, indicating that the stimuli received can influence both the cognitive and emotional aspects of tourists. In this case, the stimuli reinforce tourists' understanding of the city's historical and cultural values. The response resulting from this interaction with the stimuli is an increased interest in visiting more tourist destinations in Solo, as well as the intention to introduce the city to others as an attractive tourist destination.

Thus, this study shows that Bus Werkudara functions not only as a mode of transportation but also as an effective medium in shaping a positive image and enhancing the tourist appeal of Solo City. The presence of this bus plays a significant role in introducing and strengthening the city's tourism identity through its profound visual and narrative elements.

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