

VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND BRANDING STRATEGIES OF HERITAGE SHOP BUILDINGS FROM THE 1930s DUTCH EAST INDIES ERA IN BANDUNG CITY

 **Soni Sadono**¹,  **Donny Trihanondo**^{1,2*}

¹Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

²Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract. This study focuses on the heritage zone along Braga Street, Bandung, where many heritage shop buildings from the 1930s employ modern marketing techniques. However, these historical shops possess significant values tied to the characteristics and identity of the original visual merchandising and branding from that era. This often results in inappropriate storefront designs, lighting and promotional elements that compromise their architectural character and identity. Thus, the objectives of this study are to: (1) trace the history of visual merchandising and branding in Dutch East Indies-era shops, (2) analyze current branding practices in still-operating heritage buildings and (3) propose design strategies that respect historical values. This study employs a qualitative method and a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) approach. The results of this research provide guidelines for business owners, designers and other stakeholders to develop heritage-sensitive marketing strategies. Furthermore, the authors recommend continuing investigations into authentic retail experiences as a marketing tool.

Keywords: *Visual merchandising, branding, design strategy, heritage.*

Corresponding Author: Donny Trihanondo, Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia,
Tel.: +6281234566182, e-mail: donnytri@telkomuniversity.ac.id

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1. Introduction

Visual merchandising and store branding are two key elements in attracting tourists to shop (Bist & Mehta, 2023). Visual merchandising involves the arrangement of products and store decor in a visually appealing manner, while store branding focuses on creating a strong identity and image for the shop (Davies & Ward, 2005). In heritage areas, the application of these elements must be carried out carefully to avoid violating existing regulations. Sometimes, signage and visual themes designed by designers disrupt the harmony of the heritage environment (Agus & Nasril, 2023). In response to such challenges, countries like Japan have developed specific guidelines to be followed when designing signage, for example. As a result, it is common to find fast-food restaurant logos that have been altered in color to comply with regulations in a particular area. Indonesia, with its rich architectural heritage, similarly needs well-defined design guidelines for branding and visual merchandising in heritage areas to ensure the integrity and visual harmony of these culturally significant zones are properly maintained.

Meanwhile, many shops operating in heritage buildings have undergone significant changes in terms of branding and visual merchandising. Modern commercial strategies are often implemented without regard for the historical value or original aesthetics of the buildings. As part of Branding and Visual Merchandising, the use of oversized signage,

inappropriate lighting and storefront modifications that clash with the architectural character has diminished the authenticity of these historic shops.

The tension between commercial appeal and cultural preservation calls for a thoughtful design strategy, one that not only enhances brand visibility but also respects the historical value of the space. Design strategy plays a crucial role in shaping how brands communicate their identity and engage with consumers, especially within culturally rich environments like heritage shops (Roggeveen *et al.*, 2020). To ensure that design decisions are both grounded and targeted, analytical tools such as HIA, SWOT analysis and Brand Positioning Mapping are highly appropriate for this study. Therefore, this research tries to develop a strategy mainly with HIA approach, which integrates these tools as a strategic foundation for effective Visual Merchandising and Branding, particularly in the context of heritage shops. Furthermore, this study also tries to align internal capabilities and market positioning with design decisions that enhance consumer experience and brand differentiation, as proposed by Nyarku and Agyapong (2011) and Oghojafor *et al.* (2011).

Heritage shop buildings hold substantial historical and architectural value, notably as markers of economic, social and cultural development through time. One example that reflects the history of retail in Indonesia is the commercial buildings that flourished during the Dutch East Indies era, particularly in the 1930s (Kartika & Arifin, 2021). At that time, shops served not only as places of commerce but also as symbols of social status and urban economic progress. The visual character of shops from this era marked by design elements such as Art Deco or Neoclassical façades, interior layouts that emphasized customer experience and elegant, proportionally arranged window displays. These features reflect the branding and visual merchandising practices of the period which are part of the authenticity and integrity of the heritage zone.

The current imbalance between modernization and heritage preservation illustrates the urgent need for design approaches that adapt to both objectives. When branding strategies ignore the historical context, they contribute to the erosion of cultural value. This study therefore aims to formulate visual merchandising and branding strategies that concern the integrity of heritage while adapting to contemporary commercial needs. By examining retail history during the Dutch colonial period and studying existing heritage shops, this research tries to develop contextually proper design strategies which balance business goals with heritage preservation.

Problem Statement

This study addresses the following problems:

1. The lack of comprehensive understanding and identification of the authentic history of visual merchandising and branding practices in shops during the Dutch East Indies period.
2. The absence of critical analysis on how branding and visual merchandising are currently implemented in heritage shop buildings that continue to operate today, including the frequent occurrence of inappropriate design interventions identified through Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA).
3. The need for developing strategies and guidelines for visual merchandising and branding that are more sensitive and responsive to the historical values and authenticity of heritage shop buildings.

Research Questions (RQs)

1. How visual merchandising and branding were implemented in historical shops during the 1930s Dutch East Indies period?
2. How branding and visual merchandising are currently applied in heritage shop buildings that remain in operation today and how they comply with HIA approach?
3. What strategies can be implemented to ensure that visual merchandising and branding in heritage shops preserve their historical values without diminishing their commercial appeal?

2. Literature Review

Related literature highlights the critical role of visual merchandising and branding in preserving the historical value of cultural heritage shops while maintaining their commercial appeal. Scholars such as He and Zhang (2022) and Aaker (1991) emphasize the importance of identifying unique cultural values, developing creative and relevant products and employing clear brand positioning that connects traditional heritage with modern consumer expectations. Key branding principles (such as brand equity, brand awareness, perceived quality and consumer loyalty) serve as foundational concepts in establishing a strong identity for heritage-based retail businesses. Moreover, according to Yang and Wu (2023) this kind of cultural commodification could be beneficial rather than seen as exploitation.

From a design perspective, visual merchandising is shown to significantly influence consumer behaviour by enhancing product visibility, accessibility and emotional connection (Ebster & Garaus, 2011). Effective merchandising strategies not only facilitate a pleasant shopping experience but also support storytelling and cultural immersion, especially when applied thoughtfully within historical contexts. Additionally, Yang and Wu (2023) also stressed the importance of emic that respect how the community interprets their own culture rather than designing products according to mainstream market perspectives.

Furthermore, several studies underline the tensions and challenges in applying these strategies to cultural heritage buildings. Issues include maintaining authenticity, avoiding stereotyping, ensuring community involvement and adapting to technological advancements and competitive tourism trends. Scholars advocate for approaches such as adaptive reuse, interactive experiences and authentic narratives, which help adapt heritage preservation with commercial demands. Ultimately, a strategic and context-sensitive approach to branding and merchandising can foster both cultural sustainability and economic vitality in heritage retail environments.

The table 1 below compiles insights from Ebster and Garaus (2011) regarding the role of visual merchandising in shaping customer experience and influencing buying behavior and also from He et al. (2024) which underscore the importance of visual merchandising in captivating consumer attention, crafting an appealing brand image and ultimately stimulating sales He et al. (2024). According to Jakhar et al. (2020), creating engaging and informative environments that boost online retail performance plays a pivotal role. Moreover, Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2021) argue the future use of CAD innovation and AR/VR to enhance in-store and e-commerce shopping experiences. Ebster and Garaus (2011) also highlights three main strategies, which are visibility of products, tactile accessibility and offering choice without overwhelming the customer. These strategies, when adapted to heritage contexts, must be mindful of spatial

authenticity and consumer emotional engagement. Kerfoot et al. (2003) suggest that the themes that linked most strongly to purchase intention were: merchandise colors, presentation style, awareness of fixtures, path finding, sensory qualities of materials and lighting. The goal is to balance historical ambiance with modern functionality in retail design.

Table 1. Literature Matrix Showing Studies on Visual Merchandising

Themes	Authors	Key Concepts
Store Design and Visual Merchandising	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Visual Merchandising Shapes Customer Experience: Effective product presentation influences perception, interest and purchase decisions.
		- Customer Engagement through Visual Appeal: Artistic arrangements (e.g., pyramid-shaped fruit displays) can evoke emotional responses and curiosity, enhancing first impressions and encouraging exploration.
Make Merchandise Visible	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Product Visibility is Key: If customers can't see the product, they won't buy it.
		- Strategic Placement: Avoid obstructive displays and ensure optimal product positioning to increase discoverability and sales opportunities.
Make Merchandise Tangible and Accessible	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Touch Enhances Emotional Connection: Allowing customers to physically engage with products boosts emotional attachment and purchase likelihood.
		- Balancing Security and Accessibility: Especially important for high-value items like jewelry; overly restricted access can diminish customer experience.
Give Shoppers Good Choices	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Empowering Customer Choice: Shoppers want autonomy in decision-making.
		- Scarcity and Urgency: Limited editions and time-sensitive offers can create exclusivity.
		- Avoid Overwhelm: Offering too many options may confuse customers, balance variety with simplicity for a smoother shopping experience.
Impact of Visual Merchandising on Loyalty	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Enhanced Shopping Experience: A well-implemented visual merchandising strategy improves comfort and convenience, leading to stronger brand loyalty and increased sales.
Visual Assessment of Fashion Merchandising Based on Scene Saliency	He et al. (2024)	- Underscore the importance of Captivating consumer attention, crafting an appealing brand image and ultimately stimulating sales.
Themes and Purchase Intention	Kerfoot et al. (2003)	- Themes that linked most strongly to purchase intention were: merchandise colours, presentation style, awareness of fixtures, path finding, sensory qualities of materials and lighting.
Dimensions of visual merchandising	Jakhar et al. (2020)	- Enhances the shopping experience: making it vital for creating effective online store designs.
		- Engaging and well-designed: online stores improve customer interaction and drive higher sales.
		- Prioritizing visual elements: helps fashion retailers craft more appealing and informative shopping environments.
Self-Service Merchandising	Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2021)	- Emerging Focus: Initially used in-store, visual merchandising has recently gained academic attention.
		- Technological Integration: Adoption of tools like CAD in supply chain management highlights innovation.
		- Future Trends: Virtual and augmented reality are expected to redefine visual merchandising in e-commerce, enhancing customer engagement.

The Table 2 below outlines key theories and strategies related to branding in heritage retail settings. It draws from works by He and Zhang (2022), Aaker (1991), Mayasari et al. (2020), Yang and Wu (2023), Davies and Ward (2005) and Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2021). Emphasizing the importance of identifying unique cultural values, developing creative products and clearly positioning the brand in a contemporary market. The authors stress the need for technological integration, community involvement and

brand equity dimensions (awareness, association, perceived quality and loyalty) to create meaningful, culturally respectful branding that also meets modern commercial demands.

Table 2. Literature Matrix Showing Studies on Branding

Themes	Authors	Key Concepts
Branding Strategies for Cultural Heritage Shops	He & Zhang (2022)	- Identification of Unique Values: Recognizing the distinctive features of cultural heritage, such as traditions, craftsmanship and historical narratives.
		- Creative Product Development: Innovating culturally rooted products to meet modern public needs.
		- Clear Brand Positioning: Aligning cultural heritage with contemporary values and storytelling.
		- Use of Technology: Utilizing digital platforms and social media for wider market reach and engagement.
		- Community Involvement: Encouraging collaboration among government, industry, and local communities to support cultural preservation and brand development.
Definition and Principles of Branding	Aaker (1991)	- Brand Equity Model: A brand's equity is linked to its history and image, adding value to products/services.
		- Point of Difference: Brands must have a unique advantage that sets them apart.
		- Emotional and Rational Connection: Branding should create memorable experiences by addressing both emotional and rational consumer needs.
Dimensions of Brand Equity	Aaker (1991)	- Brand Awareness: The extent to which consumers recognize or recall a brand.
		- Brand Association: Attributes, benefits and imagery consumers connect to a brand.
		- Perceived Quality: Consumer judgment on the quality of products or services.
		- Brand Loyalty: Continued consumer preference and repeat purchases.
Emotional Experience in Branding	Mayasari et al. (2020)	- Brand Identity and Emotional Connection: Strong brand imagery builds consumer trust and recognition.
		- Branding should foster emotional attachment and rational trust to influence consumer behavior and loyalty.
Design Thinking and Intangible Culture	Yang & Wu (2023)	- Cultural commodification could be beneficial rather than seen as exploitation. - Important to respect how the community interprets their own culture rather than designing a product according to mainstream market perspectives.
Visual Merchandising and Retail Branding	Davies & Ward (2005)	- Store branding creates strong identity through consistent visuals, unique experiences and seamless online-offline alignment.
Self-Service Merchandising	Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2021)	Builds emotional attachment and loyalty. Enhances perceived product value and influences consumer behavior.

Other studies address aspects of multidisciplinary perspectives on the complexity of branding and visual merchandising of heritage buildings and HIA approach as can be seen from Table 3 below, referencing Kriswandhono & Pradana (2014), Darvill (1995), Ardhanariswari et al. (2025), Lee et al. (2024), Widiastuti and Aprilia (2025), Ebster and Garaus (2011), Yang and Wu (2023) and Bazzazadeh et al. (2022). It discusses related areas between preservation and commercialization, the importance of objective historical research, the role of public education on the importance of heritage shops and consumer perception on heritage branding. The literature also explores adaptive reuse and nostalgic design as effective tools for retaining authenticity while ensuring economic viability.

Table 3. Literature Matrix Showing Studies on Branding Heritage and HIA

Themes	Authors	Key Concepts
Challenges in Branding Cultural Heritage Buildings	Kriswandhono & Pradana (2014)	- Branding heritage buildings requires balancing historical preservation with economic and social value creation. - Cultural heritage plays a role in identity, education and tourism, but faces management challenges, especially in maintaining historical authenticity while maximizing economic benefits.
Management of Cultural Resources	Darvill (1995; 2005)	- Cultural resource management includes archaeological research, creative arts, education, recreation, tourism, aesthetics, social identity and cohesion. - Utilization of heritage must go beyond academic value and incorporate strategic economic approaches, such as tourism-oriented heritage district development (e.g., Kota Lama Semarang).
Public Awareness and Strategic Branding Approaches	Ardhanariswari et al. (2025)	- Low public and governmental awareness of historical artifacts is a key challenge. - Strategic branding and public education are essential to enhance understanding of cultural and economic value of heritage. - Scholarly writing and public education play a vital role in this integration.
Authentic Experiences in Heritage Tourism	Lee et al. (2024)	- Tourists seek emotional, interactive and authentic experiences, not just visual displays. - Branding should include storytelling, local community narratives and immersive experiences. - Direct engagement leaves a deeper impression than passive information consumption.
Visual Merchandising in Heritage Shops	Widiastuti & Aprilia (2025)	- Combines marketing strategies with architectural and cultural values. - Adaptive reuse and nostalgic design help maintain authenticity while appealing to consumers. - Visual merchandising adapted to historical context enhances customer experience and supports heritage preservation.
Authenticity vs. Stereotypes in Visual Merchandising	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Designers must consider the role of original vs. stereotyped elements (furniture, art and decor) in crafting “authentic” experiences. - Some customer value objective authenticity, others value enjoyable experiences regardless of historical accuracy. - Effective design depends on customer background: familiar customers require authentic elements; unfamiliar ones may accept or prefer stereotypes.
Contextual Design and Audience Alignment	Ebster & Garaus (2011)	- Store design success hinges on the relevance of themes to the target audience. Example: Authentic Paris-themed stores appeal to culturally informed customers, while stylized environments (e.g., Rainforest Cafe) work for general audiences. - The key is tailoring the store’s visual identity to the customer’s expectations while preserving core historical values.
Design Thinking and Intangible Culture	Yang & Wu (2023)	- UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as “living heritage” that adapts to change while preserving identity and continuity. - Designers should respect insider’s cultural perspectives rather than impose mainstream market views. - Avoids stereotypes and biases against “primitive others”. - Cultural commodification thoughtful design can also be beneficial, not exploiting the culture.

Heritage Attributes	Bazazzadeh et al. (2022)	- Heritage impact assessments (HIA) method seeks the holistic assessments of heritage sites based on field research and historical archive. - Impact assessment is a key to register heritage building as listed building. - The assessment is done based on impact values, such as existence value, optional value and usage value. - Importance value related to historical, scientific/technological, spiritual and cultural. - Impact Values and their attributes should be assessed according to its importance: Special, Important, Medium, Normal or Negative/Intrusive
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This research is important because it addresses the pressing need to balance cultural heritage preservation with the economic and aesthetic demands of contemporary retail in historic urban environments. As visual merchandising and branding increasingly shape consumer perceptions and experiences, it becomes essential to develop strategies that respect historical authenticity while remaining commercially viable. Focusing on the heritage zone along Braga Street in Bandung (was awarded best colonial city by CIAM) this study aims to: (1) trace the history of visual merchandising and branding in Dutch East Indies-era shops, (2) analyze current branding practices in still-operating heritage buildings and (3) propose design strategies that respect historical values. By doing so, this research contributes to more thoughtful and sustainable heritage management, supporting both cultural identity and economic development.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative method with a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) approach to examine the evolution and current practices of visual merchandising and branding in heritage shop buildings along Braga Street, Bandung. The HIA method is widely used in heritage conservation to evaluate the potential effects of proposed interventions on the cultural significance of a place (ICOMOS, 2011). In this study, it serves as a tool to assess how contemporary branding strategies impact the historical and cultural integrity of heritage commercial spaces.

The research integrates historical research methods to trace the evolution of branding and merchandising practices in the Dutch East Indies, particularly in the 1930s. This includes archival analysis, investigation of historical photographs, maps, advertisements and other period documents to reconstruct how colonial-era shops utilized visual identity. As Tosh (2015) emphasizes, historical research enables a critical understanding of the past, which is essential for informed preservation practices in the present.

In parallel, the study adopts a design research perspective, focusing on the spatial, material and experiential aspects of visual merchandising within heritage contexts. As Laurel (2003) suggests, design research explores how people interact with designed environments, making it relevant for assessing user experience and aesthetic coherence in heritage shop fronts. Concepts such as adaptive reuse, nostalgic design and authenticity vs. simulation (Ebster & Garaus, 2011; Widiastuti & Aprilia, 2025) are explored to evaluate how visual strategies resonate with both the historical character of buildings and the expectations of contemporary consumers.

Data is collected through:

1. Field observations of shop fronts and interior layouts to document current branding and visual merchandising practices, then assess the heritage impact and importance.

2. In-depth interviews with shop owners, local designers, heritage area managers and relevant stakeholders to understand motivations, challenges and awareness of heritage regulations.

3. Policy and document analysis, focusing on regulations related to HIA, cultural heritage conservation, tourism development and urban planning in Bandung and Indonesia in general (Kriswandhono & Pradana, 2014; Ardhanariswari *et al.*, 2025).

By combining these approaches, the study aims to identify current tensions and opportunities in branding heritage retail spaces and to formulate visual strategies that are historically grounded, commercially viable and culturally sustainable (Figure 1). This methodological approach is crucial to balancing conservation goals with the socio-economic realities of heritage site development (Darvill, 1995; Lee *et al.*, 2024).

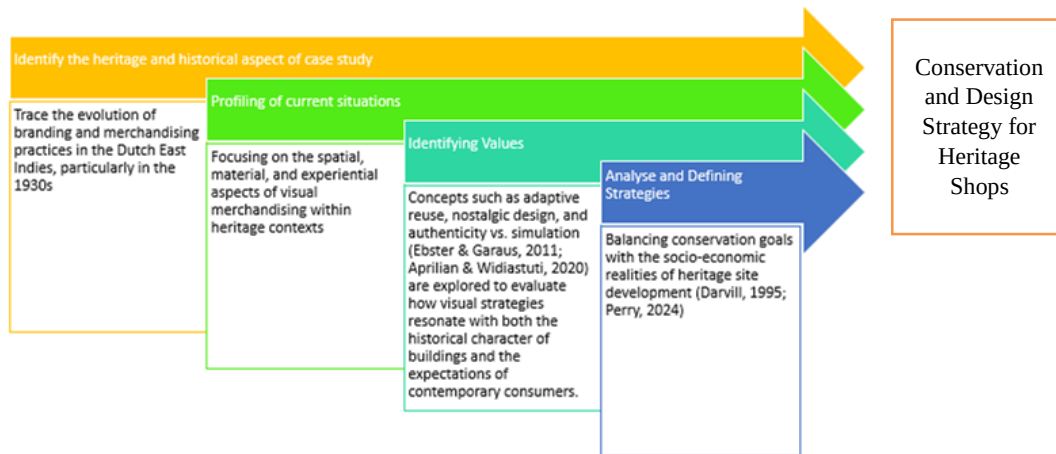


Figure 1. HIA Research Strategy and Tactics

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Onderling Belang (Sarinah Braga) as Historical Case of HIA

In 1930, the Onderling Belang (OB) store on Braga Street, Bandung, was one of the modern shopping centers that reflected the European colonial lifestyle. The building was designed in the Art Deco architectural style, characterized by bold geometric lines, minimalist ornamentation and large glass display windows showcasing Amsterdam-style fashion collections. As a branch of its parent store in the Netherlands, OB became a symbol of European fashion in the Dutch East Indies, with an interior layout prioritizing customer comfort, such as a spacious showroom on the ground floor to display clothing and luxury goods.

Founded around 1910, OB expanded significantly along with the economic growth of the Dutch East Indies before World War II. These stores in the Dutch East Indies were branches of central stores in the Netherlands. In the Indies, the central and largest branch was located in Pasar Besar, Surabaya. OB eventually opened branches in several major cities, including Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Malang and Bandung. During the 1950s nationalization of Dutch companies, OB stores were renamed Obor Baru, maintaining

the OB initials. In 1963, Obor Baru was merged with other nationalized retail stores to form Sarinah, as part of Indonesia's modernization effort. The main Sarinah store and headquarters was built on MH Thamrin Road, Jakarta, by using Japanese war reparations credit. To this day, Sarinah Bandung still occupies the former OB location at Braga Street No. 10, next to the former Denis building (De Eerste Nederlandsch Indisch Spaarbank), now BJB Bank.

Today, the former OB building in Braga remains a historical retail site but has undergone major transformation. While the historic Art Deco facade is preserved, the interior has been replaced by a 15-story hotel, managed under a BOT scheme by Artotel Group and Wika BG. The design adapts to its context, drawing from nearby architecture and shifting its interior style to emphasize Indonesian elements, detaching it from its colonial retail past. Based on Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) on the current Sarinah Braga building, these are main findings:

1. Historical Significance

Sarinah Braga, originally established as Onderling Belang (OB), represents a key milestone in the commercial history of the Dutch East Indies. As one of the earliest department store chains in the region, OB pioneered modern retailing practices, with multiple branches spread across Java. Its operations were directly connected to its headquarters in Amsterdam, facilitating a significant flow of European fashion and consumer goods into the East Indies, which in turn shaped colonial and local consumer culture. Following Indonesian independence, the store underwent phases of nationalization (renamed Obor Baru) and was later rebranded as Sarinah in the 1960s, aligning with national narratives and marking its continuity in Indonesia's post-colonial retail evolution.

2. Architectural Significance

The building's location on Braga Street situates it within the core of Bandung's historic urban fabric. During the 1930s, Bandung was developed as a modern colonial city intended to succeed Batavia, receiving international recognition from CIAM as the "Best Planned Colonial City". The architecture of Sarinah Braga contributes to this heritage, with its surviving 1930s façade exemplifying the Art Deco style that defines much of Bandung's historic streetscape. The retention of the original façade provides an authentic architectural element that is critical for conservation efforts, especially in restoring the street's period character. Additionally, the Sarinah branding on the façade holds symbolic value, derived from President Sukarno's handwriting for a book he wrote, which serves as a memoir dedicated to Sarinah, his nanny, thus connecting the building to broader national identity narratives.

3. Social and Cultural Significance

Braga Street was historically the social and cultural heart of Bandung, renowned as a premier tourism and leisure destination during the colonial period. The OB store played a prominent role as a gathering place for the colonial elite and local society, reinforcing the street's status as a prominent place. Today, the cultural significance of Sarinah Braga continues, with potential for the building to serve as a catalyst for heritage-led urban revitalization, enhancing the tourism appeal of Braga Street while reasserting its historical role.

4. Level of Importance and Recommendations for Conservation

From an HIA perspective, the surviving original façade holds *high heritage significance* and should be preserved and maintained as a priority. Restoration of altered or lost features, such as the original shop front window displays (now converted into a

café), is recommended to reinforce the authenticity of the building and revive the original commercial atmosphere. Rehabilitation of the internal and external elements in line with historical evidence would contribute to reestablishing the building's role within the historical streetscape and its associative values connected to Bandung's colonial and national history.

4.2. HIA of Sarinah Bandung's Current Visual Merchandising and Branding

1. Inconsistency with Onderling Belang's Historical Identity

Currently, there is a significant lack of historical context in Sarinah Bandung's branding especially compared to its chronological counterparts in Dutch East Indies such as Warenhuis Medan (Figure 2). To address this, mobile and flexible interpretive displays can be employed to reintroduce factual historical narratives throughout the retail space.



Figure 2. Chronological Comparison of Warenhuis Medan Interior (1930s)
Source: Zerkowitz Archive

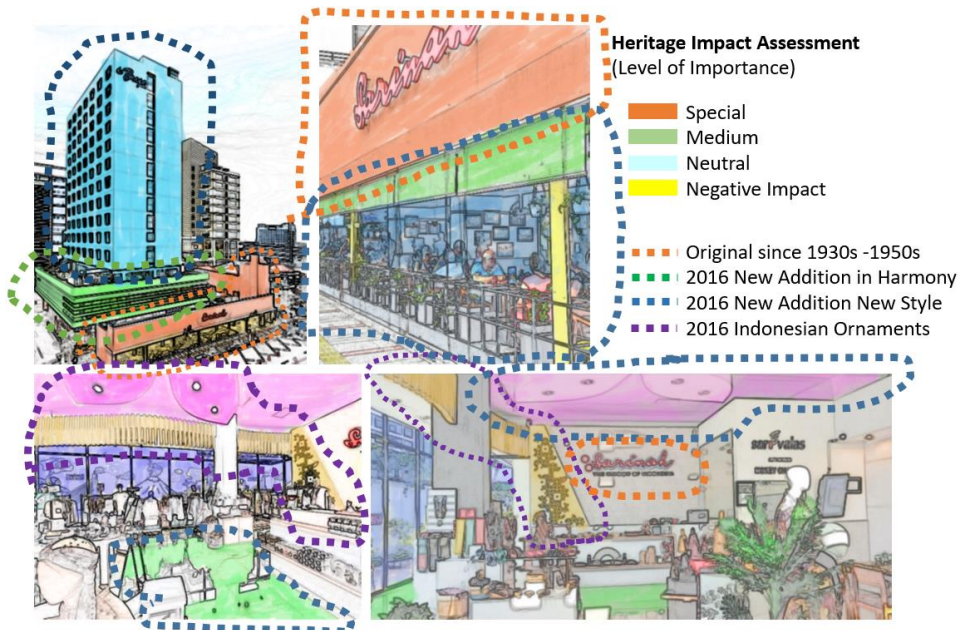


Figure 3. Heritage Impact Assessment of Sarinah Braga at Present Time

1. Modern Function vs. Historical Interior Character

The present interior design (Figure 3) overly aligns with contemporary retail needs, compromising its historical character. A mixed approach combining reconstruction and contemporary design contrast would better support both retail and heritage objectives.

2. Façade Modifications and Historical Integrity

Although the façade is partially preserved, the repurposing of the front area into a café (Figure 3) detracts from its original function as a display window. Relocating such commercial activities to less prominent areas would restore the façade's historical role as a merchandise showcase, enhancing both visitor experience and brand authenticity.

Strategic Alignment of Visual Merchandising with Heritage Store Characteristics

Heritage retail stores must retain distinctive features that evoke their historical identity. Archival images reveal that early department stores often featured expansive glass façades, large windows for natural lighting and skylights. These architectural elements were central to their visual merchandising strategies.

Window displays typically highlighted contemporary fashion, as clothing items played a central role in attracting customers, even in department stores like Onderling Belang that offered diverse goods. Although Indonesia lacks four seasons, festive periods such as Eid or Christmas function similarly, generating seasonal shopping trends.

Interior visual merchandising also emphasized natural materials (wooden tables, vintage mannequins and traditional displays) which reinforced exclusivity and nostalgia. Shop attendants, often uniformed, contributed to the store's refined image and functioned both as service personnel and guardians of luxury goods. Modern practices, including automation and online retailing, have diminished these roles, yet the experiential value of offline shopping remains irreplaceable.

A hybrid strategy that leverages both digital platforms and in-store heritage experiences can foster deeper consumer engagement. Online channels can serve not only for e-commerce but also to educate the public on the store's history using visual archives and interactive storytelling (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Interior and Façade Design Approaches for Heritage Contexts

Any restoration or revitalization of heritage retail spaces must be grounded in comprehensive historical research, including archival documentation, architectural drawings and photographic records (Figure 4). This process should be conducted in collaboration with cultural heritage professionals (such as conservation architects, historians and heritage planners) to ensure that the intervention is historically accurate and contextually appropriate. A multidisciplinary approach can help reconcile commercial objectives with preservation ethics.

The core principle guiding such interventions is minimal intervention, which emphasizes preserving as much of the original material, structure and character as possible (Jokilehto, 2017). Instead of replacing elements that appear outdated or damaged, efforts should focus on conservation, repair or adaptive reuse. For example, original woodwork or tiling should be restored rather than removed or covered with contemporary finishes. This principle ensures the authenticity of the site remains intact and recognizable.



Figure 4. Old Interior of Onderling Belang Braga in 1930
Source: Jubileum Bandoeng 1906-1931

Where modern technologies or amenities must be introduced (such as HVAC systems, lighting or digital displays) they should be designed as reversible and non-destructive modifications. This means that any added installations should be easily removable without damaging the original fabric of the building. Examples include modular display units, suspended lighting fixtures and plug-in climate control systems that do not require wall demolition or intrusive drilling. By doing so, future generations maintain the option to return the space to its previous condition, should conservation goals evolve.

Historic department stores and retail buildings (such as Onderling Belang) were often architecturally advanced for their time, incorporating features such as tall ceilings, clerestory windows, skylights and natural ventilation systems. These passive design strategies not only reduced dependence on mechanical systems but also enhanced the shopping experience by creating open, naturally lit spaces. Rather than replacing these features with modern equivalents, revitalization efforts should aim to reactivate and celebrate them. For instance, original skylights may be reopened or enhanced with subtle modern glazing to improve insulation while preserving the original intent.

Moreover, modular installations and temporary partitions can be used to redefine interior spatial layouts without altering structural elements. This approach allows heritage buildings to meet the functional demands of contemporary retail operations while respecting the original floor plan and architectural rhythm. It also provides flexibility, enabling the space to host a variety of functions (such as pop-up exhibitions, fashion shows or community events) without permanent modifications.

In terms of façade treatment, care must be taken not to obscure or detract from distinctive architectural details, such as cornices, columns, pediments or ornamental carvings. The façade serves as a visual landmark and often conveys the building's historical and cultural significance. Any necessary upgrades (such as signage, lighting or accessibility features) should be executed with sensitivity. For example, signage should use typography and materials that harmonize with the building's original style, avoiding neon or backlit acrylics in favor of painted wood or metal.

Transparency and openness (both literal and metaphorical) are key. Where historic façades once showcased goods through large display windows, these should be

reactivated as narrative spaces, combining product presentation with interpretive displays about the building's history. This not only attracts customers but educates them, reinforcing the heritage value of the space.

Finally, landscape elements surrounding the building (such as sidewalks, planters, benches or street furniture) should also be considered as part of the heritage context. The relationship between the building and its urban environment often reflects historical patterns of commerce and public life. Enhancing this setting through sensitive urban design can amplify the heritage experience and strengthen the site's identity as a cultural and commercial destination.

Comparative Case Studies of International Heritage Stores

Across the globe, iconic heritage department stores serve not only as commercial spaces but also as living monuments of urban and cultural history. These stores (such as Le Bon Marché in Paris, Harrods in London and GUM in Moscow) have successfully preserved key architectural and interior elements, allowing them to function as both retail environments and heritage destinations. Their continued popularity demonstrates the commercial and cultural value of historic preservation in retail contexts.

Le Bon Marché, often regarded as the world's first modern department store, has retained its cast-iron staircases, sky lit atriums and symmetrical layouts that reflect its 19th-century origins. The integration of contemporary luxury branding with classic architectural features creates an immersive retail experience rooted in history. Similarly, Harrods preserves its Edwardian façades, mosaic ceilings and Egyptian Hall, blending opulence with tradition. Meanwhile, GUM, located on Moscow's Red Square, showcases arcaded galleries, glass-vaulted roofs and neoclassical detailing, elements that have been meticulously conserved even through periods of political and economic upheaval.

These examples illustrate a shared strategy: rather than fully modernizing interiors or overwriting historic character, these retailers reinforce their brand identities by amplifying architectural legacy. They offer lessons in how heritage can be used not as a constraint but as a strategic asset in retail differentiation and place-making.

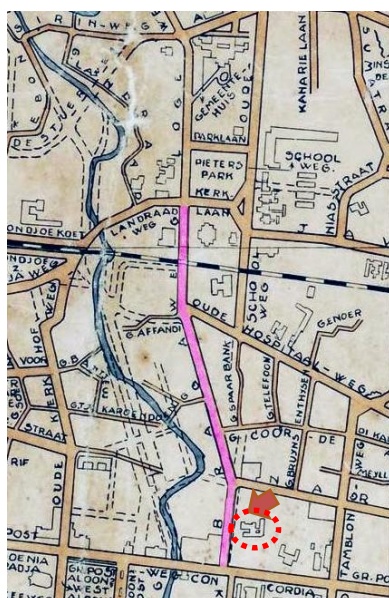


Figure 5. Sarinah Braga (Ex-Onderling Belang) on 1930 Map
Source: Oldmapsonline

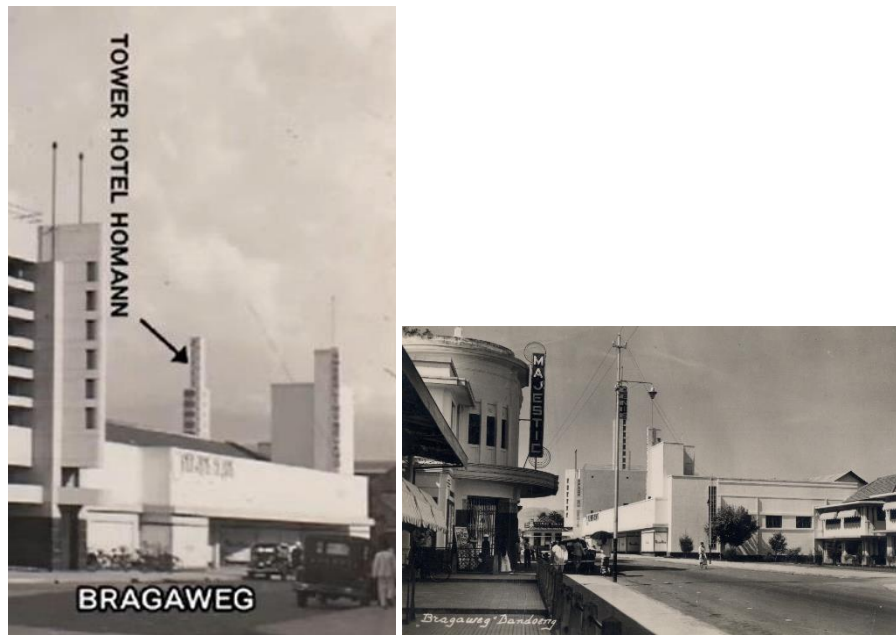


Figure 6. Onderling Belang (now Sarinah Braga) on 1939
Source: Jubileum Bandoeng 1906-1931

In contrast, Sarinah Bandung (Figures 5 and 6) (once linked to the colonial-era Onderling Belang) has faced significant historical and political transformations that disrupted the continuity of its architectural and commercial identity. Much of the original interior detailing, spatial configurations and fixtures have been lost due to successive renovations and a lack of heritage-based management frameworks. This loss is compounded by the scarcity of archival materials (photographs, floor plans or descriptive records) that could serve as references for accurate restoration.

Given these challenges, attempting a full historical reconstruction of the original interior may risk creating inauthentic or speculative interpretations. Instead, a blended approach is recommended, one that combines reconstructed elements (based on available documentation and oral history) with consciously modern interventions that are stylistically distinct yet complementary. This aligns with international best practices, such as those outlined by ICOMOS (2013), which emphasize the importance of distinguishability and reversibility in contemporary additions to heritage buildings.

Moreover, alternative interpretive strategies can be employed to convey the building's historical narrative without physically altering its architectural fabric. These include:

1. Informative signage explaining the building's original function, key architectural features and social history.
2. Archival photographic displays, digitally reproduced and exhibited in key locations within the building.
3. A mini-museum or heritage gallery integrated into the retail space, offering a curated experience of the site's transformation over time.
4. Interactive media installations, such as augmented reality or touchscreen timelines, which engage visitors in a multisensory exploration of the site's past.

These interpretive strategies are especially effective in postcolonial contexts, where historic buildings often carry layered meanings and contested memories. By

acknowledging both the colonial origins and the nationalist rebranding efforts of spaces like Sarinah, such approaches can foster critical reflection while enhancing the site's contemporary cultural relevance.

Ultimately, heritage retail revitalization does not demand architectural purism but rather a thoughtful, contextualized balance between preservation, innovation and storytelling. Sarinah Bandung has the potential to become not only a retail anchor but also a cultural node, reconnecting with its architectural lineage while evolving into a future-ready heritage destination.

Compliance with Heritage Preservation Regulations

Indonesia's commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage is formally established through national and local regulations, most notably Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. This law outlines mechanisms for identification, registration, protection and utilization of heritage assets, including buildings, structures and sites of historical significance. At the regional level, municipal governments (such as that of Bandung) maintain local heritage lists (Cagar Budaya Kota) and zoning provisions designed to regulate interventions on protected properties.

Despite the existence of this legal framework, enforcement and public compliance remain inconsistent. Many heritage buildings in urban centers face threats from commercial redevelopment, neglect or unauthorized alterations. This gap between regulation and practice is often attributed to a lack of awareness among property owners, limited technical capacity within heritage agencies and insufficient incentive mechanisms to support conservation over redevelopment (Persadaningrum, 2020). Without proactive policies and sustained public engagement, heritage status alone may be insufficient to guarantee preservation outcomes.

In the case of Sarinah Bandung revitalization by Atelier UNA (Figure 7), while much of the original interior spatial character and detailing have been lost through decades of renovation and functional shifts, the façade (recognized as part of Bandung's protected heritage architecture) remains a vital element of the building's historical identity. As the most visible and enduring remnant of its colonial past (as the former Onderling Belang store), the façade should not only be preserved structurally but also leveraged strategically for both interpretive and commercial purposes.



Figure 7. Sarinah Braga Revitalization by Atelier Una (Adapted as Hotel)
Source: Atelier Una

For example, the façade can serve as a narrative surface, using architectural lighting, plaques, QR-coded information panels or projection mapping to convey its

layered history to the public. This aligns with global best practices in heritage interpretation, which emphasize the use of non-invasive storytelling tools that add cultural value without altering physical fabric (Mason, 2006; ICOMOS, 2013). Visually, the historic façade can also function as a branding asset, connecting Sarinah's present identity with its legacy and enhancing its uniqueness in Bandung's retail landscape.

However, designation without consistent oversight poses risks. Even listed heritage buildings may undergo inappropriate renovations, suffer from poor maintenance or be partially demolished if regulatory authorities do not conduct regular monitoring or enforce penalties for violations. Thus, local governments must strengthen inspection protocols, expand their heritage officer workforce and develop public-private partnerships that encourage owners to preserve heritage assets through subsidies, tax reliefs or adaptive reuse grants.

Additionally, capacity-building programs for architects, developers and business owners are essential to improve understanding of heritage conservation principles. Workshops, design guidelines and certification schemes can ensure that future interventions on heritage buildings (such as Sarinah Bandung) adhere not only to legal requirements but also to international conservation ethics, including minimal intervention, reversibility and authenticity.

In conclusion, legal compliance must be supported by systemic incentives, active stewardship and educational outreach. Only through a collaborative and sustained approach can Indonesia's heritage buildings (especially those embedded in evolving urban and commercial contexts) be preserved meaningfully for future generations.

Recommendations for a Sustainable Heritage Retail Strategy

1. Branding Strategy Anchored in Historical Value

Develop compelling historical narratives and incorporate them into all brand touch points, like packaging, signage and digital media. Visual identity elements (e.g., logos, colors, typography) should align with the architectural character of the heritage building, enhancing brand authenticity and distinctiveness (Avrami *et al.*, 2019). Emphasizing heritage-driven exclusivity can differentiate the store in a competitive market, especially when harmonized with the surrounding historic urban fabric (UNESCO, 2011). These are steps that can be taken:

- Develop strong historical narratives and integrate them into packaging, signage and digital platforms.
- Align visual identity (logos, typography and color schemes) with the building's architectural style.
- Emphasize authenticity and exclusivity as unique selling points.
- Ensure harmony with the surrounding historical district.

2. Heritage-Sensitive Visual Merchandising

Capitalize on original architectural features (such as columns, windows and cornices) as focal points for display. Storefronts should tell stories rather than merely advertise products. Use warm, period-appropriate lighting and materials (e.g., wood, wrought iron, vintage furnishings) to evoke historical atmosphere while avoiding visual clutter or obstructions to key spatial features (Tiesdell *et al.*, 1996). The steps are:

- Utilize architectural features like columns and windows as visual displays.
- Transform storefronts into narrative-driven showcases.
- Apply warm, historically appropriate lighting.

- Respect spatial composition, do not obstruct original architectural elements.
- Use materials such as wood, wrought iron and vintage props to reinforce heritage themes.

3. Interior Design Integration

Apply conservation principles of **minimal intervention**, **reversibility** and **design flexibility** when adapting interiors for modern retail use (Jokilehto, 2017). Avoid over-commercialization that risks diluting the historical ambiance. Instead, use modular fittings and subtle interventions to preserve spatial integrity while accommodating changing functions.

4. Cultural Preservation-Oriented Retail Management

Establish partnerships with cultural institutions to ensure commercial strategies align with long-term preservation goals. Transforming the retail space into a cultural destination (through exhibitions, guided tours or mini-museums) offers not only educational value but also a distinctive experiential offering for customers (ICOMOS, 2013; Mason, 2006). This hybrid model promotes sustainable use while reinforcing the building's cultural significance.

5. Conclusion

This study has identified and captured the history of visual merchandising and branding strategies in historical retail stores during the Dutch East Indies period, particularly in 1930s buildings such as Keller, Au Bon Marché and Onderling Belang. These stores were not merely commercial spaces but also symbols of social status and luxury, employing integrated visual approaches, including large display windows, navigable interiors and distinctive typographic signage. These elements demonstrate that visual merchandising strategies had already been used to shape customer experiences and strengthen brand identity, even in the colonial era.

The analysis of heritage stores that are still in operation, such as Sarinah Bandung (formerly Onderling Belang), reveals ongoing efforts to preserve historical value through functional adaptation. However, much of the original interior has been lost due to time and limited documentation. Nevertheless, the building's façade and historical significance can still be optimized as part of an authentic branding strategy.

Based on these findings, a more historically sensitive approach to visual merchandising and branding can be proposed. This strategy emphasizes the importance of preserving visual character, integrating historical narratives into brand identity and adopting adaptive, reversible design interventions that respect the building's original features. Such an approach not only supports modern commercial functions but also revives cultural heritage as a platform for storytelling and sustainable experiential marketing.

To support the sustainable revitalization of heritage retail buildings, stakeholders should adopt an adaptive conservation approach, preserving key visual elements based on HIA assessment while accommodating new, relevant uses. Integrating historical narratives into branding can enhance emotional engagement and market appeal. Effective revitalization also requires cross-sector collaboration among governments, academics, creative industries and heritage communities to ensure holistic outcomes. Lastly, systematic documentation and education on historical visual merchandising practices are

essential to guide future preservation efforts and maintain the unique visual identity of historic commercial architecture. For further research, the authors recommend continuing investigations into authentic retail experiences as a marketing tool.

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