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Signage as a Spatial Wayfinding Element: The Impact on User Circulation at M Bloc Space

Nesya Azhalia Ivanna Putri[1], Mona Anggiani[2]

[1, 2] Departmen of Architecture, Universitas Mercu Buana
[*]Email: nesyaazhalia@gmail.com

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Abstract—This study explores the impact of wayfinding systems on visitor activity distribution at M Bloc Space, located in South Jakarta. M Bloc Space is a creative area that is the result of revitalization, combining retail, culinary, community space, and performance functions in one semi-open area. The complexity of these functions requires an efficient wayfinding system. During M Bloc Design Week, wayfinding is predominantly supported by temporary signage to guide visitors through the event area. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach involving field observations and visual documentation to analyze various wayfinding elements such as signs, circulation, and visual orientation. The findings show that sign design, the presence of visual landmarks, and the legibility of circulation paths significantly impacts visitor movement patterns and activity distribution. Areas with clear visual orientation and consistent directional cues tend to have more visitors and support active social interaction. this research makes a contribution to the planning of commercial public spaces, so that they are more responsive to the navigation needs of users, while also improving the comfort and experience of spaces in urban creative areas such as M Bloc Space.

Keywords: wayfinding; retail; public space; architecture

1. Introduction

Retail and commercial spaces in big cities are no longer solely places for economic transactions, but have evolved into spaces for social interaction and community creativity (Levy & Weitz, 2012). This change can be seen from the emergence of multifunctional areas that combine economic, artistic, cultural, and entertainment activities in one dynamic environment. M Bloc Space represents a notable example of a creative public space situated in the Blok M area of South Jakarta.

M Bloc Space is one of the revitalization of building that formerly belonged to the Indonesian Republic Printing Company (Peruri), which has now been transformed into a creative area with a mixed commercial concept (Figure 1). This area houses various functions such as cafes, creative retail stores, art galleries, and a music performance space within a unified pedestrian area, supported by temporary signage to guide visitors, especially during events. The presence of M Bloc Space is a concrete example of how old buildings can be transformed into productive public spaces that benefit the community.

Figure 1. M Bloc Space
Source: https://travel.kompas.com/

Due to its diverse activities, M Bloc Space has a complex circulation and orientation system. Visitors come for various purposes, such as attending music events, shopping for local products, or simply relaxing in the outdoor area. This situation requires an effective directional signage system so that visitors can move around easily without feeling

confused. Elements such as directional signs, signage layout, and visual orientation design play a crucial role in shaping a comfortable and efficient spatial experience, as they support users' ability to navigate and understand space (Passini, 1996).

According to Mustikawati (Atmodiwirjo and Yatmo, 2018), a good wayfinding system not only aids navigation but also shapes users' behavior and perceptions of space. Within M Bloc Space, visitor movement and activity distribution across different functional zones are shaped by the openness of the space, interconnected pedestrian paths, and the wayfinding system applied. These conditions make M Bloc Space a relevant case for analyzing how wayfinding influences users' spatial behavior and perception (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2018). Due to its open space characteristics, interconnected pedestrian flows, and integration of retail and cultural functions, M Bloc Space is an interesting location to study in terms of the influence of wayfinding systems on the distribution of visitor activities.

Wayfinding is a process that we experience in our daily lives. Wayfinding is an integral part of everyday spatial experience, which may involve simple movement between spaces or more critical navigation processes, such as identifying safe exit routes in emergency situations. Difficulties in wayfinding can result in problems such as wasted time, reduced safety, and increased stress and discomfort (Passini, 1996). To overcome the wayfinding challenges that users may face, it is very important to understand how they are influenced by various elements in the built environment.

There are two main physical factors that influence the task of wayfinding: the layout of the environment and the quality of available information (Passini, 1984). Layout is determined by spatial aspects, form, organizational systems, and circulation. Environmental information includes the architectural and graphic representations necessary to solve wayfinding challenges (Passini, 1984).

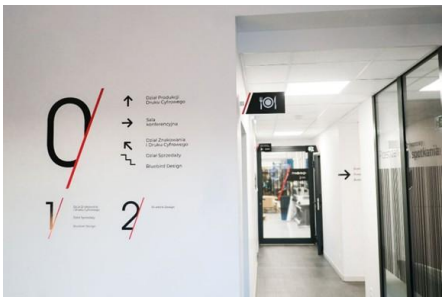

Figure 2. Wayfinding
Source: https://www.designer-daily.com/

Wayfinding is not merely related to finding a route, but also involves understanding environmental cues, selecting appropriate paths, and responding to spatial conditions such as scale, lighting, and the presence of landmarks (Figure 2). These elements make wayfinding a crucial aspect of architectural design, particularly in buildings with high spatial complexity such as hospitals or shopping centers (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2018).

Clear signage, visible paths, and the use of clear orientation points can increase user comfort. For example, in the design of healthcare facilities, a good wayfinding system can minimize confusion for both patients and visitors, as well as speed up the process of reaching the desired destination (Johanes and Yatmo, 2018). Thus, the function of wayfinding is not only as a directional guide, but also an important part of the spatial experience that affects the comfort and safety of users.

An individual's ability to recognize and remember buildings and their locations within an urban environment is shaped by various spatial factors, including building form, crowd density, and the physical characteristics and scale of space itself (Evans, Smith, & Pezdek, 1982). Color also plays a significant role in helping users distinguish spatial elements and different environments. The use of contrasting colors can enhance object recognition; however, excessive brightness or strong contrasts may lead to visual fatigue and confusion if applied excessively (Lang, 1987).

Studies indicate that environments equipped with signage generally result in fewer directional errors compared to spaces without clear navigational aids. Nevertheless, as buildings become increasingly large and complex, effective wayfinding cannot rely on signage alone, but must be supported by circulation patterns that align with how users perceive and understand spatial configurations (O'Neill, 1991). Environmental information can be categorized into three types:

First, Architectural information is a signage integrated or embedded in the built environment, whether users are inside or outside the building. The shape or layout of a building can have a high or low level of legibility. However, even complex buildings contain a wealth of information in their details: stairs, elevators, corridors, doors, and floor markers are all landmarks that help determine the direction to a specific destination (Sims, 1991). (Figure 3).

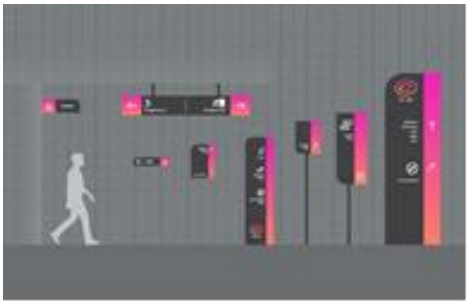

Figure 3. Architectural Information
Source: https://www.vecteezy.com/

Second, Graphic information is an integral component of the signage system, consisting of general tenant information, directional guidance, and destination identification (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Graphic Information
Source: https://.shutterstock.com

Third, Verbal information is part of the wayfinding system and is delivered through auditory channels, including self-service communication systems used by pedestrians, security officers, and residents (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Verbal Information
Source: https://greateasternmall.com.my/

As part of architectural design, retail space serves as a location for economic activities, particularly the exchange of goods and services. In architecture and urban planning, retail space is also understood as a setting that facilitates social interaction within the community, beyond its transactional function. According to (Wardhana and Haryanto 2016), retail space is essentially a space used for buying and selling activities that are integrated with urban development, both at the scale of street corridors and larger shopping centers. The use of retail space is closely related to community activities, causing its spatial character to continuously develop in response to social dynamics. This evolving role of retail space highlights the importance of visual communication and spatial cues in shaping user perception and experience within retail environments.

Yauwerissa and Kusumowidagd (2025) state that environmental graphic design elements in retail interior spaces can strengthen brand image and influence consumer perceptions of comfort and spatial identity. Therefore, retail spaces function not only as places for buying and selling, but also as environments for visual and social experiences, where interior design and graphic design elements play a significant role in creating comfort, spatial image, and emotional connections between visitors and the retail setting. In this context, signage design becomes an essential component that supports spatial orientation, reinforces identity, and enhances overall visitor experience. Retail space typology can generally be classified into modern and traditional retail spaces, reflecting changes in people's attitudes toward business practices and evolving urban spatial needs.

2. Methods

The research was conducted at M Bloc Space, located at Jl. Panglima Polim No. 37, Melawai, Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta, DKI Jakarta. This location was chosen because M Bloc Space is one of the most active commercial and creative areas in South Jakarta, making it an interesting place to study in terms of the wayfinding system that influences visitor orientation and activities within it. This area has a mixed function between retail, culinary, creative spaces, and public areas, resulting in dynamic and diverse visitor movement patterns. (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Location M Bloc Space
Source: Google Maps, 2026

M Bloc Space is also an important part of the city's transportation network due to its strategic location and proximity to the Blok M MRT Station, Blok M Terminal, and the Blok M Plaza area. This position makes it one of the meeting points for

urban traffic flows. The complexity of circulation and activities requires an effective wayfinding system so that users can navigate easily, understand spatial orientation, and find their destinations efficiently.

M Bloc Space has a semi-open space characteristic that is dense with activity, with an organic circulation pattern that connects various spatial functions such as local retail stores, cafes, performance spaces, and outdoor public areas. Its integration with the Blok M area makes it an important hub in the urban activity network in South Jakarta.

The Author conducted observation on November 2, 2025 coinciding with the face revitalization of M Bloc Space and the M Bloc Design Week. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the wayfinding system at M Bloc Space, as well as to identify areas that need improvement in order to enhance visitor comfort and satisfaction. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and analyze the wayfinding system at M Bloc Space, South Jakarta. This approach was chosen because its main focus is on gaining an in-depth understanding of the actual conditions of the existing facilities, as well as the perceptions of visitors and managers regarding the comfort and effectiveness of the navigation system within the commercial space.

In the context of M Bloc Space, the existing wayfinding system needs to be evaluated to ensure that directional information, location indicators, and other visual elements in order to easily understood by visitors from various backgrounds. The selection of this location was based on three main reasons:

1. The density of activities and variety of functions within the space require an effective wayfinding system to enable visitors to navigate easily.
2. The diversity of space functions, such as retail, culinary, community spaces, and performances, which create diverse movement and orientation patterns.
3. Connectivity with other public areas, such as Blok M Plaza, M Bloc Space, and Blok M Terminal, which reinforce the context of M Bloc Space as a hub of urban community activity and interaction.With these characteristics, M Bloc Space is an ideal location to observe how spatial design, visual elements, and wayfinding systems influence user orientation behavior in dynamic and creative commercial public spaces.

In addition, several supporting instruments are used to reinforce the observation results, namely:

Figure 7. Siteplan M Bloc Space
Source: Nesya, 2026

Data collection techniques were carried out through the following stages: First stage is field observation. Researchers conducted direct observations inside and outside M Bloc Space to identify wayfinding elements such as signage, directional maps, circulation routes, and visual orientation. Observations were conducted during operating hours (morning, afternoon, evening) to compare activity patterns and user movement directions at different times.

Second stages is visual documentation. All observed elements, such as directional signs, corridor layouts, and meeting points (nodes), were recorded through photos and videos. This documentation is useful as visual evidence and spatial analysis material. The data was analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis methods, in which the results of observations and documentation were systematically described and linked to theories of wayfinding and spatial behavior.

3. Results and Discussion

Overall, the visitor flow starts from the Main Entrance to the Central Corridor, then spreads to various tenant zones on the right and left sides and public areas in the center. The complexity of orientation occurs due to:

1. Old buildings that have been renovated and therefore do not have modern mall corridors.
2. Very limited directional signage.
3. Heavy foot traffic due to numerous food courts and events.

Finding your way around M Bloc Space relies heavily on architectural information and visual cues such as building facades, corridor paths, and crowds. However, graphic information such as directional signs and formal navigation systems are still lacking, so visitor orientation largely depends on instinct. Preliminary analysis images in the document show that the main circulation path serves as the foundation for movement, while branch points cause some areas to be confusing.

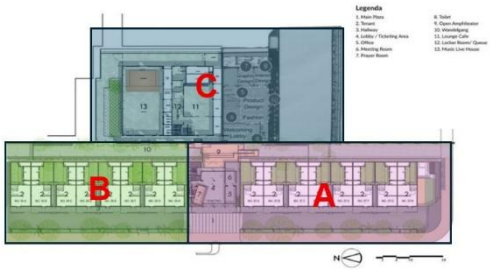

Figure 8. M Bloc Space Zoning
Source: Nesya, 2026

Based on the division in the image, the M Bloc Space area can be divided into three zones for analysis, namely: Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C.

Zone A

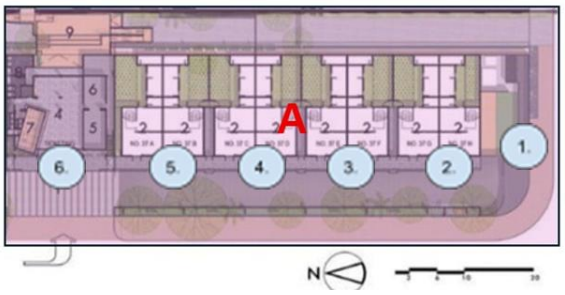

Figure 9. Zone A
Source: Nesya, 2026

Zone A is characterized by a linear retail corridor that accommodates a sequence of small to medium-scale retail units. The side entrance operates as a secondary access point, directly connecting visitors to Zone A through a narrow and linear passage. While this configuration guides movement effectively, it offers limited spatial overview and increases dependence on informal wayfinding.

Figure 10. Side Entrance
Source: Nesya, 2026

Architectural wayfinding is primarily shaped by repetitive building modules, transparent façades, semi-outdoor seating areas, and a continuous pergola structure that reinforces. the corridor as a directional path. Individual retail units act as localized landmarks through storefront design, seating activity, and visual openness. However, these landmarks function independently rather than as part of a coordinated navigational system.

Graphic wayfinding in Zone A is largely limited to individual retail signage and branding, with minimal directional information guiding visitors toward major destinations such as the plaza, lobby, or exhibition spaces. As a result, verbal wayfinding becomes prominent, particularly for visitors entering from the side entrance, who often rely on staff or other visitors for orientation.

Figure 11. Corridor Zone A
Source: Nesya, 2026

The main entrance functions as the primary orientation node and the initial decision-making point for visitors. Its open and permeable architectural character allows visual continuity between the exterior public space and the internal circulation. However, the lack of strong permanent graphic information at this entrance reduces its effectiveness as a clear navigational reference, leading visitors to rely on verbal cues, spatial intuition, or crowd movement.

Figure 12. Main Entrance
Source: Nesya, 2026

Wayfinding Elements – Zone A

- Architectural information: linear corridor, repetitive retail modules, transparent façades, pergola structure (Figure 11)
- Graphic information: individual shop signage, menus, small identity boards (Figure 11)
- Verbal information: interaction with tenants, informal directions from other visitors (Figure 10)

Zone B

Figure 13. Zone B
Nesya, 2026

Zone B functions as a transitional space between the retail corridor and the indoor cultural areas. Spatially, this zone becomes more open and flexible, signaling a shift from commercial to cultural and communal activities. Architectural cues such as changes in spatial proportion and openness indicate its role as a welcoming lobby and outdoor exhibition area.

Figure 14. Retail Zone B
Nesya, 2026

Wayfinding in Zone B is strongly influenced by graphic information in the form of banners, posters, and temporary exhibition signage. These elements effectively communicate ongoing programs and attract attention, yet their temporary nature often overshadows permanent orientation cues. During events, verbal information becomes increasingly important as visitors seek confirmation regarding routes, exhibition access, and movement flow.

Figure 15. Retail Zone B
Nesya, 2026

Wayfinding Elements – Zone B

- Architectural information: widened transitional space, open lobby character, connection between outdoor and indoor zones
- Graphic information: banners, posters, temporary exhibition signage
- Verbal information: guidance from event staff, informal visitor

Zone C

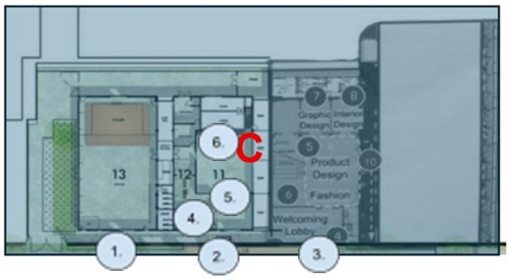

Figure 16. Zone C
Source: Nesya, 2026

Zone C represents the primary indoor transition and activity node within M Bloc Space. This zone includes the lobby corridor indoor and outdoor exhibition areas, and a queue room that accommodates registration and waiting activities. Architecturally, the lobby corridor guides visitors deeper into the building through a linear spatial sequence, while exhibition spaces both indoor and semi-outdoor create focal points of activity and visual attraction. The queue room functions as a controlled space where visitor flow is organized prior to entering exhibitions or event areas.

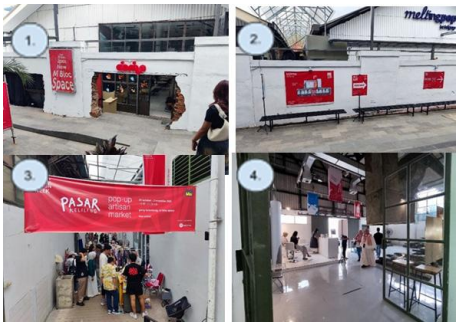

Figure 17. Lobby Corridor, Exhibition Area and Queue Room
Source: Nesya, 2026

Architectural wayfinding in Zone C is reinforced by spatial landmarks such as level changes, stepped seating, wide openings, and distinct interior volumes that signal functional differences between circulation, exhibition, and waiting areas. Graphic wayfinding is more explicit in this zone, including directional signs, exhibition identity boards, and registration-related signage. Verbal information plays a crucial role, particularly in the queue room, where staff provide instructions related to registration, entry sequence, and visitor flow during peak periods.

Wayfinding Elements – Zone C

- Architectural information: lobby corridor as circulation guide, exhibition spaces as landmarks, queue room as controlled node
- Graphic information: directional signage, exhibition identity boards, registration and queue signage

- Verbal information: staff instructions, event guidance, visitor coordination during queues

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the physical conditions of the spaces, wayfinding elements, and visitor movement patterns in Zones A, B, and C at M Bloc Space, it can be concluded that the wayfinding system in this area is not yet fully integrated. In Zone A, the narrow, linear, and repetitive corridor character makes visitor orientation difficult, causing the space to function more as a commercial area rather than as a directional guide. Zone B, as a transition area and welcoming lobby, has a more open and flexible space character; however, the dominance of signage and temporary graphic elements tends to overshadow permanent orientation information. Meanwhile, Zone C shows a relatively clearer wayfinding system through a combination of architectural, graphic, and verbal elements, particularly in the lobby corridor, indoor–outdoor exhibition spaces, and queue and registration areas, although it still relies on event-based information.

Overall, the wayfinding system at M Bloc Space relies more on spatial experience, visual activities, and verbal interactions rather than structured signage and visual cues. Referring to the research question, it can be concluded that the layout of signage and visual cues at M Bloc Space is still less effective in clearly and consistently influencing and directing user circulation paths across zones, which can potentially cause orientation confusion, especially for first-time visitors.

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