

Visual Branding and the Strengthening of Organizational Image Through Uniforms in the Era of Digital Communication: A Study of Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama

Ahmad Arifulin Nuha¹, Ela Fanuristiya², Roudotul Jannah³
Universitas Islam Syarifuddin Lumajang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia.
Email: a.arifulinnuha@gmail.com

Saiful Ridho⁴
PT Kelumajang Siber Media, Lumajang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia.
Email: saifulridho680@gmail.com

Abstract

Uniforms represent symbols that play a crucial role in visual branding. In an organization, visual branding is an essential element in constructing identity and shaping public image, which aligns with the primary function of public relations. One such organization is Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The Muslimat NU uniform functions not only as a visual identity but also as a reflection of the organization's values and principles. With its distinctive design, the uniform symbolizes unity and collective identity among its members. This study aims to explore and analyze public responses to the visual branding of the Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) uniform in Bago, Pasirian, Lumajang, using George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism theory. Employing a qualitative approach and library research method, this study examines public perceptions, views, and evaluations of the visual elements of the uniform and their impact on the organization's image. The findings indicate that: (1) the Muslimat NU uniform is easily recognized by the public through visual appearance alone; (2) the uniform effectively attracts public interest to join the organization; (3) it fosters a sense of pride among members; and (4) it distinguishes Muslimat NU from other Muslim organizations. In the context of digital communication, the visual representation of the uniform also strengthens organizational branding through media exposure and online dissemination, reinforcing its image in the broader public sphere.

Keywords : *Visual Branding, Muslimat NU Uniform, Symbolic Interactionism, Digital Communication.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication has significantly transformed the landscape of organizational communication practices over the past two decades. This transformation has affected not only corporations and business institutions but also religious and community-based organizations in Indonesia. Within this context, Muslimat NU, the

women's autonomous body under the auspices of Nahdlatul Ulama, encounters both challenges and opportunities in managing its identity, image, and public relations in the digital era. The digitalization of communication provides new spaces for organizations to establish their presence through social media, websites, video-sharing platforms, and instant messaging applications that enable rapid and extensive two-way interaction. Consequently, organizational communication strategies—including visual branding and public relations, have become increasingly relevant within the framework of digital communication.

Muslimat NU was established in 1946 with the objective of improving women's welfare in religious, educational, social, and economic sectors. Since its inception, the organization has played an active role in women's empowerment through educational programs, social services, and public policy advocacy related to women's and children's rights. As an integral part of Nahdlatul Ulama, Muslimat NU upholds the foundational principles of its parent organization, namely *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice). These values function not only as ideological foundations but also as symbolic identities communicated to the public through various channels, including digital media.

In the context of digital communication, organizational identity is no longer shaped solely through face-to-face interaction or offline activities but also through visual representations and narratives circulating in digital spaces. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube enable Muslimat NU to document activities, disseminate organizational messages, and build engagement with members and the broader public. At this point, visual branding assumes a strategic role. Visual branding refers to the practice of using visual elements—such as logos, colors, typography, and graphic design—to create a consistent and recognizable identity (Adnas & Veren, 2023). In a fast-paced and highly competitive digital ecosystem, visual consistency becomes essential for maintaining audience attention and strengthening brand recognition.

One distinctive form of visual branding within Muslimat NU is the official uniform worn during organizational activities. Although seemingly simple, the uniform carries strong symbolic meaning. It functions not only as a visual identity marker but also as a representation of organizational values, history, and solidarity. In the digital communication era, the uniform exists not merely in physical spaces but also in visual documentation disseminated through digital platforms. Photographs and videos featuring standardized attributes become part of an image-building strategy that reinforces Muslimat NU's brand identity in the public sphere.

Each women's autonomous body within Nahdlatul Ulama, such as IPPNU and Fatayat, possesses distinctive uniform characteristics. This differentiation demonstrates how visual branding is employed to assert the identity of each organization, even under the same umbrella institution. From a digital communication perspective, such visual differentiation is crucial to prevent identity ambiguity within highly open online environments. A strong visual identity enables audiences to quickly recognize organizational content while navigating social media or other digital platforms.

The relationship between visual branding and public relations becomes increasingly intertwined in the digital context. Public relations is no longer confined to managing relationships with conventional media outlets but also encompasses digital content management, online crisis communication, and direct interaction with audiences through comments and private messages. The primary functions of public relations—media relations,

event management, crisis management, community relations, and internal communications—have adapted to digital formats. For example, media relations now include collaborations with influencers or community account administrators; event management involves webinars and live streaming; and crisis management requires rapid responses to issues that go viral on social media.

Within Muslimat NU, visual branding through uniforms and organizational attributes serves as an important instrument in supporting these public relations functions. Consistent documentation of activities featuring organizational symbols can strengthen perceptions of professionalism, cohesion, and credibility. When disseminated through digital media, these visual symbols operate as effective nonverbal communication tools. They convey messages regarding identity, values, and organizational commitment without requiring lengthy verbal explanations.

A symbolic approach within communication studies provides a theoretical framework for understanding the meanings behind the use of such visual attributes. Symbols refer to signs, images, or objects that represent particular ideas and values. From the perspective of social action theory, symbolic meaning can be associated with value-oriented action, goal-oriented action, and traditional action. The Muslimat NU uniform, for instance, not only reflects organizational tradition but also represents a commitment to moderate Islamic values and women's empowerment. In digital spaces, these symbols acquire new dimensions, as they can be reproduced, shared, and commented upon by broader audiences.

Furthermore, digital communication enables more participatory dialogue between organizations and the public. Audiences are no longer passive recipients of messages but can provide feedback, criticism, and support directly. This situation demands consistency between the visual identity displayed and the communication practices implemented. Discrepancies between digital image and organizational reality may trigger reputational crises that spread rapidly online. Therefore, the integration of visual branding and digital-based public relations strategies becomes a strategic necessity for Muslimat NU.

Considering these dynamics, this study positions Muslimat NU as a relevant subject for analysis within the perspective of digital communication. The organization not only possesses a broad membership base and strong structural network but also a distinctive visual and symbolic identity. An analysis of the role of uniforms as part of visual branding in supporting public relations functions in the digital era is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on the integration of symbolism, branding, and digital communication within religious organizations. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for similar organizations in designing adaptive, consistent communication strategies oriented toward strengthening a positive image in digital spaces.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the symbolic meanings embedded in the visual branding of Muslimat NU uniforms and their implications for public relations practices within the context of digital communication. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly those related to meaning-making processes, symbolic interaction, and mediated

communication (Moleong, 2000). Rather than testing hypotheses or generating statistical predictions, this research aims to provide a comprehensive description and interpretation of how organizational symbols are constructed, communicated, and interpreted in both offline and digital environments.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in symbolic interactionism. The term “symbolic” derives from the Latin *symbolicus* and the Greek *symbolicos*, referring to signs or symbols used to represent specific meanings. According to Effendy (1989), symbolic interactionism posits that the essence of social interaction among individuals and groups lies in communication, wherein meaning is internalized and negotiated through shared symbols. This perspective emphasizes that social reality is constructed through communicative processes. In the digital communication era, such processes increasingly occur through technologically mediated platforms, where symbols circulate rapidly and are interpreted by diverse audiences.

The study particularly draws on the ideas of George Herbert Mead, who conceptualized symbolic interactionism through three key elements: mind, self, and society. First, *mind* is understood not as a static object but as a social process developed through interaction. Mead argued that thought is an internal conversation shaped by social stimuli. In digital communication contexts, this internal dialogue may be influenced by exposure to online content, including images and narratives representing organizational identity. Second, *self* refers to the capacity to see oneself from the perspective of others. Influenced by Cooley’s “looking-glass self,” this concept suggests that individuals form self-concepts based on how they imagine others perceive them. Within digital spaces, feedback mechanisms such as comments, likes, and shares function as reflective mirrors that shape both individual and organizational self-perception. Third, *society* consists of organized patterns of social interaction that generate shared meanings and norms. Digital platforms extend this societal dimension by creating virtual communities where collective interpretations of symbols are negotiated.

Methodologically, this research adopts a case study approach focusing on the visual branding of Muslimat NU uniforms in Desa Bago, Kecamatan Pasirian, Kabupaten Lumajang. A case study design is appropriate because it facilitates intensive and holistic examination of a particular group, organization, or phenomenon within a specific context and time frame. The objective is to obtain a rich and contextualized description of how uniforms function as symbolic representations in both physical gatherings and digital representations.

Data collection involved two primary techniques: observation and literature review (library research). Observations were conducted to examine how uniforms are used in organizational activities and how these activities are documented and disseminated through digital media platforms. Particular attention was given to visual consistency, symbolic elements, and patterns of audience engagement in online postings. The literature review was undertaken to analyze relevant theoretical and empirical sources related to symbolic interactionism, visual branding, public relations, and digital communication. These sources provided conceptual grounding and supported interpretive analysis.

The research focuses on two principal variables. The first variable concerns community responses that generate symbolic interaction, both in face-to-face contexts and in digital environments. Community responses were analyzed in terms of perceived meanings,

emotional reactions, and interpretive frameworks regarding the uniform as an organizational symbol. The second variable concerns visual branding of the uniform as a form of public relations activity. In this regard, the uniform is examined as a strategic communication tool that conveys identity, values, and organizational credibility through visual representation.

Data analysis was conducted through a process of selection, categorization, and interpretation. Relevant data were identified and organized according to thematic categories aligned with the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. The analysis sought to identify patterns of meaning-making related to mind (interpretive processes), self (organizational identity and reflection), and society (collective norms and shared understandings). In addition, digital communication dynamics, such as content dissemination, audience interaction, and visual repetition, were analyzed to assess how symbolic meanings are reinforced or transformed in online spaces.

By integrating symbolic interactionism with digital communication analysis, this methodology enables a nuanced understanding of how visual branding operates not merely as aesthetic representation but as a socially constructed and digitally mediated communicative process. This approach ensures that the findings reflect the complex interplay between symbols, interpretation, and technology in contemporary organizational communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the symbolic interaction embedded in the visual branding of Muslimat NU uniforms in Desa Bago, Pasirian District, Lumajang Regency, and analyzed how these symbols function within public relations practices in the context of digital communication. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, particularly the concepts of mind, self, and society as articulated by George Herbert Mead, the findings demonstrate that the Muslimat NU uniform operates not merely as clothing but as a socially constructed symbol that generates meaning, interaction, and organizational identity both offline and online.

Symbolic Meaning and the Concept of Mind in Digital Contexts

According to Mead, individuals act based on the meanings that objects, events, and people hold for them. These meanings arise from social interaction and are modified through interpretive processes. In this study, the community's perception of the Muslimat NU uniform reflects the concept of *mind* as a social process. Community members interpret the green batik uniform as a marker of organizational identity without requiring verbal confirmation. The uniform functions as a nonverbal symbol that communicates affiliation, values, and social roles.

The findings indicate that when community members encounter Muslimat NU members wearing their official uniforms, they immediately associate them with religious activities, women's empowerment, and community service. This cognitive process occurs internally before any direct interaction takes place. In Mead's terms, thought emerges as an internal conversation shaped by prior social experiences. In the digital era, this interpretive process is further influenced by repeated exposure to visual representations of the uniform on social media platforms. Images and videos shared through Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups reinforce collective understanding of the uniform's meaning.

Digital communication accelerates and amplifies this symbolic process. When photographs of organizational events are disseminated online, audiences engage in interpretive acts similar to those occurring in face-to-face settings. The uniform becomes a digitally mediated symbol that triggers recognition and shapes perception even among individuals who are not physically present. Thus, the concept of *mind* extends beyond immediate social interaction and becomes embedded in virtual spaces where symbolic cues circulate continuously.

Self-Concept and Organizational Reflection

The second element identified in the findings relates to the concept of *self*. In symbolic interactionism, the self develops through social interaction and the ability to take the role of the other. Community members who observe Muslimat NU members in uniform position themselves as audiences and respond accordingly. While the *mind* stage involves internal interpretation, the *self* stage involves enacted responses based on that interpretation.

Observational data reveal that community members often greet, smile at, approach, or inquire about activities conducted by Muslimat NU members. These responses indicate that individuals not only interpret the uniform positively but also adjust their behavior in relation to it. The uniform, therefore, shapes both the self-perception of members and the perceived role of observers within the interaction.

In the digital sphere, this process becomes even more visible. Social media interactions, such as likes, comments, shares, and reposts, function as forms of reflective feedback. Members of Muslimat NU may experience pride and affirmation when their activities, documented in uniform, receive positive engagement online. This aligns with Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self," in which self-concept is shaped by imagined judgments of others. Digital platforms intensify this mirror effect by providing quantifiable indicators of public response.

The findings also show that the uniform generates a sense of pride among members. Wearing the uniform fosters collective identity and strengthens emotional attachment to the organization. This internal reinforcement is crucial in digital communication contexts, where visual consistency contributes to brand recognition. Members become conscious representatives of the organization not only in physical gatherings but also in digital documentation. Thus, the self is constructed through a continuous loop of symbolic presentation and mediated reflection.

Society and Collective Interpretation

The third dimension of Mead's framework, *society*, is reflected in the broader social environment in which these interactions occur. Individuals in Desa Bago are already embedded in a shared social structure where Muslimat NU operates as a recognized community organization. Consequently, when individuals encounter members in uniform, they interpret the symbol within an existing network of social norms and expectations.

The study found that the uniform is widely recognized as an identifying marker of Muslimat NU without requiring explicit explanation. This indicates that collective meaning has been established within the community. Society, in Mead's perspective, is an organized pattern of interaction that shapes and sustains shared meanings. In digital contexts, society extends

beyond geographic boundaries to include virtual communities connected through online networks.

Digital communication enhances the societal dimension by enabling broader dissemination of symbolic representations. Events attended by uniformed members—such as *Manaqib* recitations, Jam'iyatul Qurro' gatherings, Al-Banjari festivals, Dziba'iyah, Yasin and Tahlil recitations, and large-scale religious lectures, are frequently documented and shared online. These digital artifacts contribute to the normalization and reinforcement of the uniform as a legitimate and respected organizational symbol.

Moreover, digital platforms create opportunities for cross-community interaction. Individuals from different regions or backgrounds who view online content may develop shared interpretations of the uniform. This process reflects the macro-social dimension of symbolic interactionism, in which collective norms and meanings are shaped by patterns of communication. The uniform, therefore, operates as a bridge between micro-level interpersonal interaction and macro-level digital society.

Observational Findings

The observations conducted in this study yielded four primary findings:

1. The Muslimat NU uniform is recognized by the community as an organizational identity marker without the need for verbal clarification and is capable of generating social interaction.
2. The uniform attracts public attention and may encourage individuals to join the organization.
3. The uniform fosters a sense of pride among members.
4. The uniform possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate Muslimat NU from other Muslim women's organizations.

These findings highlight the strategic role of visual branding within public relations practices. The uniform serves as a tangible representation of organizational identity that operates effectively in both physical and digital communication environments.

Visual Branding and Public Relations in Digital Communication

From a public relations perspective, the uniform aligns with the working definition proposed by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), which emphasizes goodwill, mutual understanding, favorable public opinion, and harmonious relationships achieved through two-way communication (Efendi et al., 2023). Visual branding functions as a core instrument in achieving these objectives.

Kotler and Keller's framework of marketing public relations activities, including publications, identity media, events, news, speeches, public-service activities, and sponsorship, provides a useful lens for analysis. The Muslimat NU uniform falls within the category of identity media, serving as a recognizable visual marker. However, its function extends beyond identity media alone. When documented and shared online, the uniform becomes part of publications and

news dissemination. When worn during religious gatherings or social service events, it contributes to event management and public-service activities.

Digital communication amplifies these functions. Photographs and videos posted on social media serve as publications that extend organizational visibility beyond local boundaries. Live streaming of events transforms traditional gatherings into hybrid communication experiences. Online engagement metrics provide immediate feedback, enabling the organization to gauge public perception and adjust communication strategies accordingly.

The uniform thus operates as a multi-layered communication tool. It conveys symbolic meaning at the interpersonal level, strengthens organizational self-concept, and reinforces societal recognition. Simultaneously, it supports digital branding strategies by ensuring visual consistency across platforms. In an era where audiences are exposed to vast amounts of visual content, distinct and consistent branding becomes essential for maintaining visibility and credibility.

Integration of Symbolism and Digital Strategy

The integration of symbolic interactionism and digital communication theory reveals that the Muslimat NU uniform functions as a dynamic communicative symbol rather than a static object. Its meaning is continuously negotiated through interaction, both face-to-face and mediated by technology. The symbolic process identified by Mead (*mind*, *self*, and *society*) unfolds in layered ways within digital spaces.

First, digital exposure shapes cognitive interpretation (*mind*). Second, online feedback mechanisms influence identity formation (*self*). Third, networked communities create shared norms and collective understanding (*society*). Together, these processes demonstrate that visual branding in the digital era is deeply intertwined with symbolic meaning-making.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the Muslimat NU uniform serves as an effective public relations instrument that bridges traditional communal interaction and contemporary digital communication. By maintaining consistent visual identity and actively disseminating content online, the organization strengthens its positive image and sustains harmonious relationships with the community. The symbolic power of the uniform, reinforced through digital channels, contributes to organizational credibility, member pride, and public engagement, thereby validating the theoretical and methodological framework employed in this study.

CONCLUSION

Uniforms function as symbolic representations that communicate organizational identity. In the case of Muslimat NU, the women's autonomous body of Nahdlatul Ulama, the uniform operates as a form of visual branding that introduces and promotes the organization to the broader public. Within the framework of digital communication, the uniform extends beyond physical gatherings and becomes a strategic visual asset disseminated through social media platforms, online publications, and digital documentation of events. As part of marketing public relations, the uniform employs visual elements to strengthen branding, visibility, and public recognition.

Grounded in symbolic interactionism, particularly the concepts of mind, self, and society proposed by George Herbert Mead, this study demonstrates that symbols generate interaction through individual responses and shared interpretation. Symbols convey meaning in both verbal and nonverbal forms, and their significance emerges through communicative processes. The findings confirm that visual branding is not merely aesthetic but serves as a strategic communication instrument for interaction and identity reinforcement in both offline and digital environments.

The results indicate that the Muslimat NU uniform is recognized by the community as an organizational identity marker and is capable of generating social interaction. The uniform attracts public attention and encourages interest in organizational participation. It fosters pride among members as public visibility increases. The uniform also possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate Muslimat NU from other Muslim women's organizations.

Understanding community responses to the visual elements of the Muslimat NU uniform is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of its visual branding strategy. In digital contexts, consistent visual representation strengthens symbolic meaning, enhances engagement, and supports positive organizational image. The integration of symbolic meaning and digital communication confirms that visual branding plays a critical role in sustaining credibility, recognition, and relational harmony between the organization and society.

REFERENCES

- Adnas, D. A., & Veren. (2023). Analisa dan perkembangan visual branding dengan pendekatan R&D: Studi kasus barbershop. *Jurnal Remik: Riset dan E-Jurnal Manajemen Informatika Komputer*, 7(1), 353–360.
- Azzahra, F. (2019). *Strategi marketing public relations dalam membangun brand awareness (Studi deskriptif pada PT. HNI HPAI)*.
- Dwiriantoro, S. (2000). *Komplikasi sosiologi tokoh dan teori*. UR Press.
- Efendi, E., Ningrum, I. I. T., & Andini. (2023). Peran public relations dan media dalam pelaksanaan dakwah. *INNOVATIVE: Journal of Social Science Research*, 3(5).
- Ekawati, R., Wulandari, N. L. T., & Herdito, R. D. (2022). Metode sosialisasi SMA dalam pengenalan kampus di era pandemi. *Jurnal Humanika: Kajian Ilmiah Mata Kuliah Umum*, 22(2), 133–140.
- Effendy, O. U. (1989). *Kamus komunikasi*. Mandar Maju.
- Malik, A., Astuti, M. T., & Putri, L. D. (2021). Tindakan sosial penggunaan simbol agama dalam poster kampanye legislatif tahun 2019 di Provinsi Banten. *Linimasa: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(1), 1–10.
- Moleong, L. J. (2000). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif* (Rev. ed.). PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Ropi. (2003). *Citra perempuan dalam Islam: Pandangan ormas keagamaan*. PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Siregar, N. S. S. (2011). Kajian tentang interaksionisme simbolik. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 4(2), 100–110.
- Sugiyono. (2005). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif*. CV Alfabeta.