

Semiotic Approach to Visual Representation of Islamic Values in Islamic Early Childhood Education Instagram Content

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Abstract

This study examines visual communication strategies on the Instagram accounts of two Islamic Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Bandung, TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool, in building public image and trust in the digital era. A descriptive qualitative approach is employed, supported by quantitative data collected through content observation, interviews with media managers, and questionnaires administered to 20 parents of prospective students. The analysis draws on Roland Barthes' visual semiotics and digital marketing communication theory to interpret symbolic meanings and assess visual effectiveness. The results show two equally effective visual communication patterns with different orientations. These differences are influenced by communication strategies, particularly a multichannel approach that emphasizes professionalism and visual consistency through structured layouts, sans-serif typography, and color compositions such as yellow, orange, blue, and white. The mean perception score was 3.66, while the highest scores were regarding visual appeal (43) and message clarity (42). Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool, on the other hand, emphasizes emotional intimacy and spiritual values through blue-orange tones and narrative-based visuals, achieving a mean score of 3.9. The highest scores were found in visual consistency (43) and the representation of Islamic values (45). Both approaches show that the effectiveness of visual communication does not rely on a particular visual style, but rather on the consistency between visual elements and narrative messages to their audience's expectations and institutional values. When aligned with institutional goals and audience engagement, different visual strategies can achieve similar levels of effectiveness. Practically, this study offers guidance for

Islamic ECE institutions in designing digital visual communication strategies by ensuring coherence between visual consistency, narrative content, and platform usage in line with their communication objectives.

Keywords: *Visual Communication, Social Media, Instagram, Islamic ECE, Roland Barthes Semiotics, Digital Marketing Communication, Institutional Image*

1. Introduction

The increasing use of Instagram among Islamic early childhood education (ECE) institutions has transformed how institutional identity is constructed and communicated to prospective parents. In the context of Islamic ECE (PAUD Islam) in Bandung, social media is not only used for information dissemination but also as a medium to visually represent educational values, religious identity, and the quality of learning services within an increasingly competitive educational environment (Nurhidayah, 2022). The effectiveness of an Islamic ECE institution's digital promotion depends not only on the presence of social media but also on the way visual messages are designed and contextualized to align with institutional identity. As noted by Rudy Farid et al (Farid, Astuti, & Supandi, 2025) Social media functions as a strategic branding medium for Islamic educational institutions, requiring consistent visual management to convey institutional values and character. However, previous studies have not sufficiently explored how visual communication on Instagram integrates design elements with Islamic values in shaping institutional image, particularly when viewed from a semiotic perspective.

In the study of Visual Communication Design, visual representation is understood as a strategic element in the formation of institutional identity through the consistency of colors, typography, illustration styles, and visual narratives. In Islamic educational institutions, previous research has shown that branding strategies grounded in Islamic values can strengthen public trust and enhance institutional credibility (Yusuf, 2023). On the other hand, visual semiotic studies in Indonesia often adopt Barthes' framework, which is rooted in Western cultural traditions; therefore, its application in non-Western contexts, particularly in interpreting religious representations and cultural practices within Islamic ECE institutions, requires conceptual adaptation (Jha, 2025). Digital communication research in Islamic ECE institutions tends to highlight the use of social media as an information channel, rather than as a space for the production of visual meaning and digital branding strategies (Li, Hui, 2024).

However, to date, there is limited empirical clarity on how Islamic ECE institutions construct visual communication on social media as a means of shaping public image and trust. In fact, for parents of prospective

students, the visual appearance and messages conveyed through social media often constitute the first impression that influences their trust in an educational institution, particularly in Islamic ECE contexts that integrate religious values with professional educational standards. The practice of digital promotion of Islamic ECE still tends to be understood as documentation of activities, rather than as a visual strategy that is consciously designed to represent Islamic values, institutional professionalism, and emotional closeness to parents. This condition is important to study because parents' visual perception of ECE institutions plays a significant role in building trust and influencing children's enrollment decisions.

A number of studies show that visual communication and social media use play an important role in building the image of educational institutions in the digital era. Research across primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels confirms that visual consistency, message clarity, and strong institutional narratives can shape positive perceptions and enhance public trust in educational institutions (Wahyunto, Muh, 2024). From the perspective of educational marketing, social media is also understood as a strategic branding tool that allows institutions to connect with audiences visually and emotionally (Kotler, P., & Armstrong, 2017).

If examined further, research on the promotion and visual communication of educational institutions is still dominated by studies at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. At the elementary level, the research focus tends to emphasize visual communication strategies in building institutional image. Meanwhile, at the secondary level, studies more frequently address the use of digital media as a means of school branding (Bungai, Joni, 2024). Research on universities generally highlights institutional marketing strategies in the face of competition in the digital era (Valentin, 2025). On the other hand, studies at the ECE level are still dominated by the topics of curriculum, child development, and parental involvement in the educational process (Nurhayati, 2021).

Although the potential of social media as a medium for visual communication is increasingly recognized, empirical studies specifically addressing the visual communication strategies of Islamic ECE institutions in the digital context remain limited. To date, there is still little research examining how Islamic ECE institutions construct visual meaning, represent Islamic values, and shape public image and trust through social media. These limitations show that there is a research gap, especially in understanding the visual communication of Islamic ECE as a strategic practice that is not only aesthetic but also loaded with religious and emotional dimensions.

This condition indicates that social media use in Islamic ECE

institutions has not been widely examined as a space for producing visual meanings that represent institutional professionalism, Islamic values, and emotional closeness with parents. Therefore, research is needed that empirically examines how the visual communication strategy of Islamic ECE is built and interpreted in the context of social media as part of efforts to form the image of Islamic ECE institutions.

The selection of TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool was based on differences in their digital characteristics and strategic orientations, which support the analysis of visual representation in this study. TK Islam Taman Firdaus adopts a multichannel communication strategy that reflects a more advanced level of digital branding, while Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool relies on a single-channel approach, resulting in more intimate, personal, and narrative-driven visual communication patterns. The institutional age difference also reflects variations in institutional experience and the maturity of communication strategies relevant to understanding how organizational history and culture shape the construction of visual identity. The difference in the digital character of the two institutions is increasingly evident from the pattern of social media use that they have built. For example, TK Islam Taman Firdaus demonstrates a mature multichannel communication strategy, reflected in its consistent and active presence on social media: Instagram (@tkislam_tamanfirdaus), has been active since January 2022 (Nursa'adah, 2025a) YouTube (@tkislamtamanfirdauskotaban2272) has been active since March 2013; Facebook (Tkislam Taman Firdaus), active since February 2013 (Hartati, 2025); and TikTok (@tkislamtamanfirda), active since August 2023 (Nursa'adah, 2025b). Meanwhile, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool focuses on a single channel: Instagram @rumahbintangislamic (Hakim, 2025) which has been active since October 2017 and is used as a platform for documentation and communication that highlights the closeness between teachers, children, and families. These differences in social media strategies are analytically significant because they produce distinct forms of visual meaning construction, one oriented toward institutional professionalism, while the other emphasizes relational warmth and also demonstrates how digital approaches shape the branding practices of Islamic ECE institutions in online spaces.

Based on these conditions, this study examines the visual communication strategy on Instagram social media as the main media for digital promotion of two Islamic ECE institutions in the city of Bandung. This study examines how visual messages are designed and communicated through the institution's official accounts, how parents interpret content, and how the relationship between visual elements and digital narratives

shapes the image of institutions in the online space. Theoretically, this study expands the field of visual communication and semiotics by positioning Islamic ECE institutions as an analytical context that has been relatively underexplored. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as an initial reference for Islamic ECE institutions in designing digital visual communication strategies that align with Islamic values and meet the expectations of parents in the digital era.

To answer the research gaps that have been identified, namely, the lack of studies on the visual communication strategies of Islamic ECE institutions in the digital realm, parents' interpretation of visual messages, and the construction of institutional images through visual-narrative integration, this study formulates three main questions as follows:

1. How is the visual communication strategy designed and implemented in Instagram content by TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool in the city of Bandung?
2. How do audiences, especially parents of prospective students, interpret and respond to visual messages conveyed through social media?
3. How does the interaction between visual messages and digital narratives strengthen the image of Islamic ECE institutions and influence children's interest and enrollment decisions?

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach complemented by quantitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the visual communication practices of the two institutions. The analysis integrates Roland Barthes' visual semiotic theory with a digital marketing communication framework to explore symbolic meanings, representations of Islamic values, and the effectiveness of visual strategies in building institutional image on social media. However, Barthes's use of semiotics needs to be positioned critically because this theory was developed in the context of Western culture, which tends to be secular and does not explicitly address the representation of religious values. This poses limitations when applied to the context of Islamic ECE institutions, so interpretive adaptation is needed so that sign analysis can be in harmony with Islamic spiritual and cultural values. Meanwhile, digital marketing communication theory has a strong focus on branding and image-building objectives but tends to be oriented toward commercial logic. Therefore, this study combines these two perspectives to balance the interpretation of visual meaning both as a sign system and as a strategic communication practice, thereby enabling a more nuanced analysis of institutional goals, cultural contexts, and underlying Islamic values.

Theoretically, the blending of the two perspectives expands the understanding of how visual signs, myths, and branding strategies work simultaneously in the context of Islamic ECE. This approach provides an

analytical framework for examining visual representations in non-Western contexts, which have received relatively limited attention in semiotic studies. Practically, the results of this study have the potential to generate a digital visual communication strategy model that is sensitive to cultural context and institutional identity, thereby supporting Islamic ECE institutions in designing more effective and consistent visual content in the era of digital transformation.

2. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative data as a complement to the analysis. This approach was selected to better understand visual communication practices in the digital promotion of Islamic ECE institutions. Quantitative data serves as a complement to validate the tendency of qualitative findings through respondents' perception patterns, so that the interpretation of results becomes stronger and measurable. Visual communication cannot be fully explained through numerical data on audience perception alone, as it also requires interpretation of visual meaning, social context, and institutional communication strategies. In line with Creswell's view (Pertiwi, Annisa Bela, 2024) The use of qualitative data supported by quantitative data enables researchers to capture the complexity of social phenomena more comprehensively through a combination of narrative and empirical evidence.

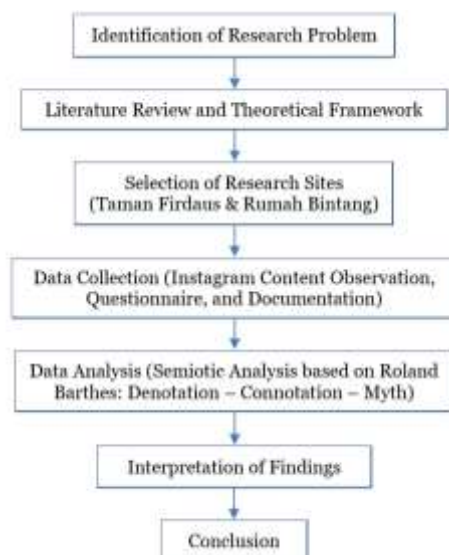


Figure 1. Research Flow of the Study

Figure 1 presents the research flow of the study. The research began with the identification of the research problem, followed by a review of

relevant literature and the establishment of the theoretical framework. Two Islamic ECE institutions were selected as research sites. Data were collected through Instagram content observation, questionnaires, and documentation. The data were then analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, focusing on denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. Finally, the findings were interpreted to draw conclusions.

This research was conducted on two Islamic ECE institutions in the city of Bandung that actively promote their institutions through digital media and websites, namely TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool. The two institutions were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on three criteria: (1) having consistent and sustained digital communication activities; (2) demonstrating the characteristics of Islamic institutions in their visual content; and (3) actively conducting visual promotion for at least the past two years. The selection of the two institutions was not only based on the availability of data, but also on the differences in digital communication strategies they applied, making it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of how variations in visual approaches shape the representation of Islamic values on social media.

2.1 Research Design

The design of this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative data as a complement to the interpretation. This approach was chosen because the phenomenon of visual communication on social media, especially Instagram, of Islamic ECE institutions cannot be understood through numerical data alone, but requires the interpretation of visual meaning, social context, and digital communication strategies implemented by institutions. According to the view of Creswell & Plano Clark (Sutriyanti, 2024) A qualitative approach complemented by quantitative data provides a more complete understanding of the complexity of social phenomena through a combination of interpretive narratives and empirical data.

To clarify and systematically outline the research process, this study includes a research flow diagram that details each stage of the research. The diagram illustrates the process beginning with the identification of research problems and gaps, followed by the formulation of research objectives and questions, the selection of research objects and purposive sampling techniques, and data collection through visual observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The data are then analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, thematic analysis, and descriptive statistics, followed by triangulation, synthesis of findings, and conclusion drawing. The inclusion of this flowchart aims to enhance methodological clarity and ensure traceability of the research process.

This research was conducted in two Islamic ECE institutions in Bandung that are actively utilizing social media for promotional purposes, but differ strategically. For example, Taman Firdaus employs a multiplatform digital strategy with its Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok channels and will leverage those for both communication and branding, while Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool relies solely on Instagram. The two institutions were intentionally sampled using purposive sampling techniques based on the following criteria:

1. Have consistent and continuous digital promotion activities;
2. Displaying Islamic characters and values in its digital visuals and narratives;
3. It has been developing active digital promotional content for at least the past two years.

The selection of the two institutions was conducted deliberately rather than randomly, as both met the criteria required for this study, namely consistency in digital promotion, clarity of Islamic identity in visual content, and relevance of the communication context to the objectives of visual representation analysis.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques

This study uses three main data collection techniques, namely:

1. Visual observations and documentation were carried out on the digital promotional media of the two institutions, especially the Instagram account, as well as digital brochures and official websites. This observation aims to analyze visual elements such as color, typography, layout, illustration style, and text narrative used in digital communication strategies. The analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework (Mulyazir dan Fadhillah, 2023) to examine the layers of denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in the construction of visual messages within Islamic education. Operational definitions in the semiotic analysis were applied by assigning specific visual indicators to each level of meaning: denotation, connotation, and mythology, so that the interpretation process remains consistent and systematic.
2. In-depth interviews were conducted with three key informants in each institution, namely school principals, digital media managers, and creative teachers or public relations staff who are directly involved in content design. This interview explores the goals, creative processes, strategic considerations, and Islamic values intended to be conveyed through the institution's digital promotional visuals.
3. The audience perception questionnaire was distributed to 20 parents of prospective students, 10 respondents from TK Islam Taman Firdaus, and 10 respondents from Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool.

Respondents were selected using *criteria-based sampling*, namely parents who enroll their children in the institutions and follow the school's Instagram account. They were chosen because the researchers wanted to find out if their appearance and information on Instagram influenced their reasons for choosing ECE for their children.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to assess the effectiveness of visual communication based on four main dimensions: message clarity, visual appeal, suitability of Islamic values, and influence on beliefs and enrollment decisions. The selection of the four dimensions is based on a theoretical foundation in visual communication, where the *clarity of the message* is related to the principle of readability and the ability of the audience to understand the information precisely; *visual appeal* refers to the aesthetic concepts and visual attention that determine the audience's interest; *Value matching* is necessary because the visual communication of an Islamic ECE institution must reflect the values and identity of the institution; whereas *persuasive influence* is an important element in marketing communication theory that assesses the extent to which visual messages influence the audience's attitudes and decisions. This framework aligns with the indicators of effective visual communication formulated by Sulianta (Sulianta, 2024), and communicative design theory, which positions message, aesthetics, values, and persuasion as the four main evaluative components. The instrument employs a 1–5 Likert scale and is adapted from effective visual communication indicators (Sulianta, 2024), with systematic contextual adjustments. To ensure instrument validity, the adaptation process underwent content validity testing through expert judgment involving two lecturers in Visual Communication Design and one educational communication practitioner. The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, and suitability of the indicators within the context of visual communication in Islamic ECE institutions prior to data collection. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically categorized, while quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

2.3 Data Validity and Triangulation

The validity of the research is strengthened through systematic triangulation of sources and methods. Triangulation was performed at three levels: (1) to compare interview data with visual observations and questionnaire data to identify where findings are consistent or differ; (2) explore the differences between accounts in terms of context, informant role, or audience perspective; and (3) synthesize all three forms of information into a triangulation matrix whereby broad patterns can be visually shared and structured. This tends to not only validate but also enhance interpretations using the systematic cross-referencing between

data sources. Member checking was conducted after the initial coding stage was completed. A summary of preliminary findings and interpretations of visual meaning was then presented to the principals and digital media managers of each institution in a structured meeting. They were asked to review the contextual accuracy, ensure that the researchers' interpretations aligned with actual communication practices, and provide corrections where necessary if any misinterpretations were identified. The input from this process is then used to refine the theme categories and clarify the interpretation in the final analysis. In addition to triangulation, the validity of the questionnaire instrument was strengthened through *a content validity* procedure involving *an expert assessment* of two Visual Communication Design lecturers and one educational communication practitioner, who assessed the relevance, clarity, and suitability of the questionnaire indicators with the context of Islamic ECE visual communication before the instrument was used. This approach aligns with Morgan's (Morgan, 2024) view that "the credibility of qualitative investigations increases when data sources are triangulated and interpretations are shared with participants for verification." In addition, the researcher conducted an audit trail and peer debriefing with academics in the fields of Visual Communication Design (DKV) and educational communication.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was conducted interpretively and thematically, combining visual content analysis with Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Theme coding was conducted inductively through repeated readings of visual observation data and interview transcripts to identify emerging patterns of meaning. The coding process was strengthened through peer discussion to maintain thematic consistency and minimize researcher bias. Barthes' semiotic framework was applied systematically through three layers: denotation, connotation, and myth, each analyzed using predetermined operational indicators to ensure consistency throughout the analytical process.

To ensure consistency in the application of Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the study applied three layers of meaning, denotation, connotation, and myth, operationally and uniformly to each visual content analyzed. At the denotation stage, the immediately visible visual elements (colors, objects, typography, composition) are described descriptively. The connotation stage is applied by interpreting the associated meanings, Islamic values, and implicit messages emerging from the relationships among visual elements. Meanwhile, the myth stage is elaborated through the interpretation of cultural and religious meanings constructed from both narrative and visual elements. These three layers are applied sequentially to each content sample, and the results of the analysis are presented in a

structured format so that methodological consistency is explicitly demonstrated.

The results of the thematic analysis were combined with quantitative findings in a supportive manner. Questionnaire data were not used for generalization, but rather to indicate patterns of parental perception that complement qualitative findings. Integration was performed by comparison of quantitative modalities, with interview narratives and visual observations. If findings were in agreement, they confirmed each other; and if not, the researcher looked again at the visual context and informants' statements to understand their differences." Therefore, integration was interpretive, treating the quantitative data more as supplements to than yet another layer of generalization derived through statistical means.

2.5 Research Ethics

All research procedures are carried out with regard to the principles of academic ethics. Each participant was given an explanation of the goals and benefits of the study, and consented to their involvement through informed consent. The respondents' personal identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and all visual content analyzed was used with the written permission of the institutions involved.

3. Results

3.1 Visual Communication Strategies in Digital Promotional Media

The results of the observation show that two Islamic ECE institutions in the city of Bandung, TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool, have different visual characters and digital communication approaches in building the institution's image. This difference indicates that visual communication outcomes are influenced by platform strategy and content focus, which may vary across institutions. These findings are presented by separating visual descriptions from theoretical interpretations to ensure a more systematic presentation in accordance with established standards for reporting research results. The posters and uploads of TK Islam Taman Firdaus display varied color compositions, including yellow, orange, blue, and white, reflecting flexible visual strategies across different posts. One New Student Admission poster contains visual elements such as the institution's logo, photographs of children's activities, registration information text, and cartoon-style illustrations. Denotatively, the use of color serves to affirm the institution's visual identity, while connotatively it signifies cheerfulness and positive energy associated with Islamic ECE institutions. Visual elements such as logos, activity photos, and illustrations of children dressed in Muslim clothes reinforce the connotative meaning of Islamic educational institutions as modern, credible, and quality-oriented institutions. From a semiotic perspective, this poster contains layers of denotative

meaning (registration information) and connotative meaning (professionalism, credibility, and educational ethos). Digital marketing communication considers design to be part of visual branding that helps parents perceive the institution as a credible entity. While these theories are built on strong descriptive findings, they do not present an explicit empirical link between visual elements and perception by the audience; hence, their theoretical imposition is best placed as an analytical reading rather than providing direct empirical evidence.

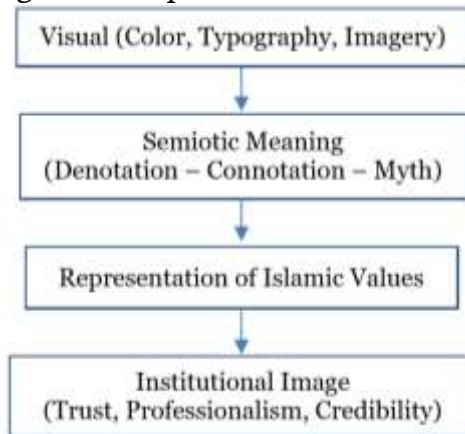


Figure 2. Conceptual Relationship Between Visual Elements, Semiotic Meanings, and Institutional Image

Figure 2: The visual elements and the process of semiotic meaning changes. Through denotative and connotative readings, visual aspects also participate in the representation of Islamic values that construct institutional identity through trust, professionalism, and credibility.

Table 1. Comparison of Visual Communication Strategies Across Islamic ECE Institutions

No	Indicator	Taman Firdaus	Rumah Bintang
1	Dominant Colors	Yellow, orange, blue, and white	Blue and orange, with green in religious-themed content
2	Visual Style	Formal, institutional	Friendly, child-centered
3	Islamic Symbols	Strongly emphasized	Moderately emphasized
4	Content Focus	Religious values & credibility	Emotional closeness & trust
5	Platform Strategy	Multiplatform	Instagram-focused

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of visual communication approaches applied by two Islamic ECE institutions. These differences in visual elements, content focus, and platform utilization are further explained in the table as they elucidate how each institution builds its online identity (Kannan, P.K., and Li, 2017) and engages with parents in communicating Islamic values.

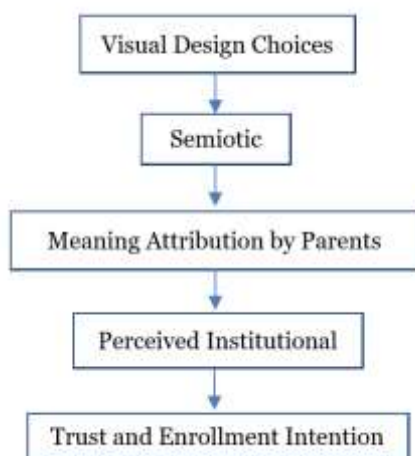


Figure 3. Process of Meaning Construction and Its Impact on Institutional Trust

Figure 3 illustrates the process through which visual design choices are interpreted semiotically and subsequently influence parents' perception of institutional values. This process clarifies the relationship between visual communication strategies and the formation of trust, showing how digital visual representation may play a strategic role in shaping parental confidence toward Islamic ECE institutions.

On the other hand, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool emphasizes an image of cheerfulness, spirituality, and family. This approach is reflected in its promotional visual content. Figure 4 (right) presents a promotional poster featuring visual elements such as illustrations of children, star icons, rocket symbols, the institutional logo, and registration information text. Denotatively, the design functions as an invitation to join the institution, while connotatively it represents a spirit of growth and development, joyful learning experiences, and the formation of Islamic character. The blue tone used is in line with the identity of the institution. Blue functions as a significant visual marker representing serenity and spirituality, so that semiotic analysis becomes more structured. According to Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, the color blue acts as a *marker* that symbolizes calmness, sincerity, and spirituality, in line with the image of the institution as an Islamic school that gently instills

compassion and discipline. The hadith quote, “Children who are active during childhood are a sign that children will be intelligent when they grow up,” functions as a statement of religious values that strengthens the institution’s positioning as an Islamic ECE with a progressive character and an orientation toward early moral development. However, the application of emotional branding theory (Gobe) must be contextualized: in Islamic institutions, emotions are not solely grounded in human relationships, but also in religious values. Therefore, Western theoretical frameworks require contextual adaptation when applied. From the perspective of digital marketing communication, design serves as a form of visual branding geared towards building the perception of the institution as a credible option for parents. This finding is in line with previous studies on educational digital branding, which show that consistent visual identity and structured design contribute significantly to institutional credibility and public trust (Wahyunto, Muh, 2024).



Figure 4. Comparison of new student admission promotion uploads: TK Islam Taman Firdaus (left) highlights a professional and credible image, while Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool (right) displays cheerful and spiritual visuals that emphasize Islamic values in learning.

3.2 Representation of Islamic Values and Visual-Narrative Interaction in the Formation of Institutional Image

The two Islamic ECE institutions in Bandung display Islamic values and character education through uploads themed around religion and parenting. In Figure 5 (left), a parenting post from TK Islam Taman Firdaus entitled “Ready to Be a Good Parent” highlights educational and religious values by featuring photographs of resource persons wearing hijab, accompanied by soft decorative elements and complementary color tones, predominantly yellow and orange, with additional supporting colors. Denotatively, this upload informs seminar activities for parents; while connotatively, the visual represents an institution that is professional, open to collaboration, and oriented towards the formation of a knowledgeable Islamic family.

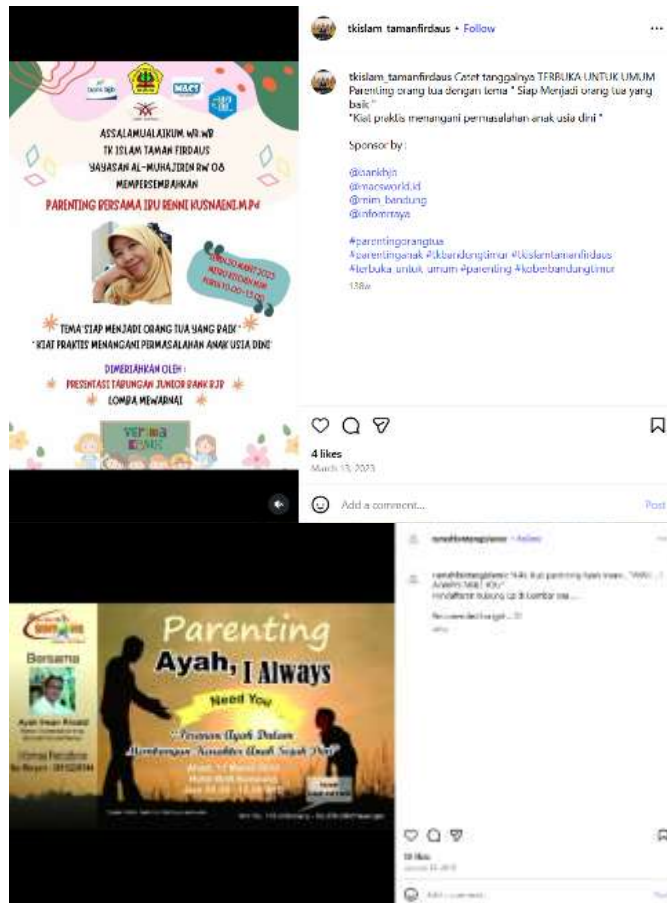


Figure 5. Parenting-themed uploads: TK Islam Taman Firdaus (left) and Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool (right)

Meanwhile, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool (Figure 5, right) displays

the upload of "Parenting Dad, I Always Need You" with a silhouette of father and son under the orange light of dusk. Denotatively, this image illustrates parenthood activities emphasizing the role of fathers, while connotatively, the twilight colors and father–son interaction symbolize affection, role modeling, and emotional closeness in Islamic education.

Using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, these two uploads use visual signs like the warm color palettes, family representations, and religious symbols to construct ideological meanings that build ideologies about the significance of synergy between family and institutional education in imparting Islamic values. In terms of digital marketing communication, both posts apply emotional branding strategies by connecting religious values with family togetherness to strengthen parental trust and engagement as the primary audience. However, this interpretation is not intended to show a direct causal relationship between visual elements and audience perception, but rather as a preliminary indication based on descriptive data. In order to avoid reading that is detached from the scientific framework, this interpretation is further associated with the relevant literature, since the process of institutional image formation cannot be separated from the theory of marketing communication and visual semiotics. In line with (Kotler, P., & Armstrong, 2017), Visual consistency in promotional media plays a role in building brand trust; this finding also supports previous empirical studies showing that consistent visual communication in educational social media strengthens audience perception and institutional credibility (Wahyunto, Muh, 2024). On the other hand, Gobe's theory of emotional branding (Wahyuningsih, 2015) describes that through religious narratives and expressions of emotion, psychology creates closeness with the audience, which reinforces previous research showing that storytelling with an emotional approach in educational content can strengthen parents' presence and build trust (Yusuf, 2023). Moreover, the emergence of religious meanings from these findings is in line with Barthes' semiotic theory about myth construction, which enriches previous semiotic studies in educational contexts that showcase how symbols and narrative create ideological meaning and institutional identities (Sholihah & Zakarias, 2023).



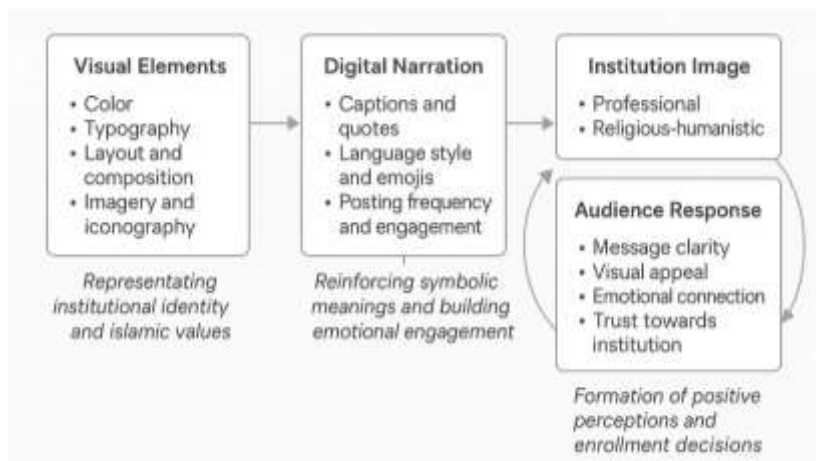


Figure 7. The Relationship between Visual Elements, Digital Narratives, and Institutional Image

As shown in Figure 7 (relationship diagram), the interaction between visual elements and digital narratives forms an intact institutional image. Visual elements (color, typography, layout, and iconography) play a role in representing institutional identity and Islamic values. Digital narratives (text, language style, and upload frequency) reinforce symbolic meaning and foster emotional engagement. Together, these two aspects shape the institutional image, professional for TK Islam Taman Firdaus and religious-humanist for Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool, which in turn influences audience responses in terms of message clarity, visual appeal, emotional connection, and trust in the institution. This process demonstrates an effective visual communication cycle: *Visual elements* → *Digital narrative* → *institutional image* → *Audience response* → *Reinforcement of images and enrollment decisions*.

Thus, the representation of Islamic values and visual-narrative integration not only strengthens the religious image of the institution but also increases the trust and emotional attachment of the audience, making social media a strategic space to build the identity of Islamic ECE institutions in a modern and meaningful way.

Practically, these findings provide guidance for Islamic ECE institutions in designing digital visual communication strategies by aligning visual consistency, narrative content, and platform selection with their institutional goals. This demonstrates that different visual approaches can be strategically applied to achieve either credibility or emotional engagement.

3.3 Audience Perception of the Effectiveness of Visual Communication

The questionnaire distributed to 20 parents of prospective students, representing 10 respondents from TK Islam Taman Firdaus and Rumah

Bintang Islamic Preschool, provided a preliminary (not comprehensive) picture because the sample size was small and not designed for inferential analysis. This questionnaire examines audience perceptions of the effectiveness of visual communication in the two institutions' social media content, particularly in terms of attractiveness, message clarity, Islamic values, and trust in the institution.

Table 2. Results of the Parent Perception Questionnaire on the Effectiveness of Visual Communication on Instagram of Islamic ECE Institutions in Bandung

No	Indicator	Taman Firdaus (Σ)	Rumah Bintang (Σ)
1	Neat, attractive, easily recognizable upload display	31	37
2	Child-friendly and Islamic colors & designs	36	41
3	Uploads show real activities, not decorative ones	42	45
4	Photos/videos showing Islamic values (prayer, manners, togetherness)	43	45
5	Consistent visual style & tone	33	37
6	Photos/videos assuring the quality of education	37	40
7	Uploads help to understand the character and atmosphere of the institution	37	41
8	Posts that make you interested in more info	35	39
9	The display is more attractive than other Islamic ECE accounts	32	37
10	Design makes trust a safe & trustworthy institution	39	40
11	Captions help understand the meaning of the content	39	41
12	Stories help to see real and spontaneous activities	40	38
13	Institutions actively reply to comments/messages	38	37
14	Getting to know the institution for the first time through Instagram	31	31

No	Indicator	Taman Firdaus (Σ)	Rumah Bintang (Σ)
15	The reason for choosing/registering is because of a positive impression from IG	36	36
Total Score (Σ)		549	585
Average (Total/150)		3,66	3,9

To clarify the statistical context, it is necessary to convey that Table 2 is a descriptive statistic that displays the total score and the average of 15 assessment indicators based on 10 respondents in each institution. Therefore, comparisons between institutions only describe trends, not generalizable differences. Normalization is not done because all indicators have identical and equal measurement scales, so scores can be summed directly. However, the total and average scores still provide a proportional picture of the visual strength of each institution. As for the cumulative score, Rumah Bintang Islamic preschool scored 585 points, higher than TK Islam Taman Firdaus, which reached 549. On average, the perception of the effectiveness of visual communication has a similar pattern, with 3.9 for Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool and 3.66 for TK Islam Taman Firdaus. These results suggest that both institutions are successful in their visual communication, although each bears unique strengths in the methods employed.

TK Islam Taman Firdaus tends to excel in indicators related to visual neatness and clarity of information, such as photos/videos that display Islamic values (43), child-friendly and Islamic colors and designs (36), and information that helps understand the content (39). On the other hand, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool showed excellence in indicators related to emotional closeness and representation of Islamic values, such as photos/videos featuring Islamic values (45), photos that ensure the quality of education (40), and child-friendly and Islamic colors and designs (41). Narrative descriptions and real activity stories (40–41) illustrate how this institution builds a warm and humanist image. Therefore, TK Islam Taman Firdaus stresses clarity and orderly communication. For Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool, it is about emotional involvement and closeness in relations. This disparity represents two equally effective but differently messaging-oriented visual communication strategies.

3.4 Synthesis of Field Findings

The synthesis of findings in this study shows that visual representations and digital narratives in both Islamic ECE institutions not only reflect the visual character of the institutions but also reveal the dynamics of how Islamic values, professionalism, and family emotions are negotiated in the context of

educational communication.

First, the more professional and structured visual strategy of TK Islam Taman Firdaus indicates that a modern aesthetic approach can strengthen the institution's perceived credibility. However, the higher score achieved by Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool in audience perception suggests that visual professionalism alone is not sufficient to build emotional resonance.

Second, although semiotic analysis identifies denotative and connotative meanings of the use of colors, icons, and narratives, this study also suggests that Barthes's semiotic framework has limitations in capturing more contextual religious meanings, for example, the sensitivity of Muslim family values, moral expectations, and the spiritual experiences of parents that are not only present through visuals but also social norms. This shows the need for a multimodal and socio-cultural approach in reading digital content of Islamic institutions.

Third, the difference between institutions in absolute scores of perception cannot be directly read as evidence that one institution was successful and the other was not due to differences in the effectiveness of the visual strategy; our data are descriptive, the sample size is small, and there was no statistical significance testing. It means that comparisons across institutions should be understood as not generalizable conclusions but rather pointers.

Fourth, that Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool received a higher perception score while it had the least social media exposure raises several alternative explanations; (1) a content by religious and emotional value is able to resonate more with its target audience (Muslim parents), (2) visual image of warm family has high affective value, and (3) communication effectiveness of Islamic institutions are more affected by cultural value compared to how many digital channels.

Thus, the synthesis of the findings of this study emphasizes that the visual communication of Islamic ECE institutions operates within a complex cultural framework in which design, modernity, spirituality, and parental expectations interact with one another.

4. Discussion

The results of the study show that the difference in visual communication strategies in the two Islamic ECE institutions not only reflects aesthetic variations, but also shows the negotiation between modernity and Islamic values that affect the perception of the audience. In the context of Islamic education marketing, these differences show two main orientations: professionalism-rational and spirituality-emotional, which are not always complementary, but serve the needs of different audiences. The rational-informative approach of TK Islam Taman Firdaus highlights visual

professionalism through institutional color consistency, modern typography, and structured layout. However, the findings suggest that the application of Western marketing theories (Kotler, P., & Armstrong, 2017) has limitations in the context of Islamic institutions, as religious values are not fully accommodated within the model. Although TK Islam Taman Firdaus' visual consistency helps build perceptions of credibility, it does not automatically enhance audience perception effectiveness, thereby illustrating the limitations of applying purely rational marketing models in the context of Islamic education. On the other hand, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool's emotional-spiritual approach shows the adaptation of Gobe's (Wahyuningsih, 2015) emotional branding theory into an Islamic context. The visualization of religious activities, children's expressions, and warm narratives not only builds emotions but also communicates moral and religious values, since the emotional closeness accompanied by religious values has been shown to have more influence on parents' perception than visual professionalism alone. Semiotic analysis (Sholihah & Zakarias, 2023) shows that the two institutions negotiate the meaning of religion through different visual strategies. However, Barthes' semiotic framework has limitations in capturing the spiritual dimension, which emerges not only through formal symbols (such as green color and crescent moon imagery) but also through social and emotional interactions that are more difficult to reduce to visual signs. Therefore, a semiotic approach needs to be complemented with socio-cultural readings to better understand how Islamic ECE institutions construct religious meaning visually (Hariyanto, 2023). The semiotic analysis in this study has limitations because the denotative and connotative readings are carried out at the representational level without exploring the mythological layers in more depth, as recommended in Barthes' framework. Therefore, the application of semiotics in this study is positioned as a preliminary reading, not as a comprehensive analysis of the visual ideological construction of Islamic ECE institutions.

The questionnaire results reveal an important contradiction: although TK Islam Taman Firdaus has stronger multichannel exposure and a more professional design, Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool achieves a higher perception score. This challenges the assumption in digital marketing that extensive multichannel presence automatically increases communication effectiveness. In the context of Islamic ECE, the depth of religious messaging and emotional warmth appears to have a stronger influence on parental perception than the number of digital channels used. These findings suggest that the two visual strategies do not necessarily "complement each other," but instead appeal to different audience preferences. Parents who prioritize clarity of information tend to choose the professional approach of the TK Islam Taman Firdaus, while parents who

seek warmth and spiritual value resonate more with the Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool approach. Thus, visual effectiveness is more determined by the suitability between the identity of the institution and the emotional and spiritual needs of the audience.

Theoretically, this study highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the visual communication of Islamic institutions, as neither Western marketing theory nor classical semiotics fully captures the religious and affective dimensions that characterize Islamic ECE. Practically, these findings suggest that visual effectiveness does not depend solely on design professionalism, but also on the ability to balance modernity and tradition, as well as to align visual messages with Islamic values and the emotional needs of Muslim families. However, this practical implication needs to be understood carefully, as the limited scope of the study, both in terms of the number of institutions, the size of the respondent sample, and the characteristics of social media content, limits generalizations to all Islamic ECE institutions in Indonesia.

This study has numerous methodological limitations, which must be noted. As the visual analysis is based on Instagram uploads within a timeframe, it does not reflect the dynamics of changing content strategies across time. In addition, the small number of respondents and the use of descriptive instruments without significance testing limit the strength of inference. Another potential explanation for differences in audience perceptions could be shaping forces outside of the research context, like parents' own experiences with schools, teachers, or social networks that were not examined here. So the results should be interpreted as one of several potential reasons, not an absolute reading.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that visual communication on Instagram plays a role in shaping parents' perceptual tendencies toward the two Islamic ECE institutions examined, based on descriptive data from 20 respondents. These findings are not intended to represent all Islamic ECE institutions in Indonesia, as the study is limited to two institutions with a small sample size. Both use strong strategies, but with different visual types and message styles. TK Islam Taman Firdaus uses a mixture of color compositions (yellow, orange, blue, white), an orderly layout, and a sans-serif typography that is simple / visually strong to depict professionalism and orderliness as well as credibility. This reflects the institution's portrayal as an organized, informative, and modern Islamic place of learning.

In contrast, the green color in religious-themed uploads was found to convey calmness, spirituality, warmth, and family cheerfulness, as Rumah Bintang Islamic preschool usually applies blue and orange in its general

visual communication. This combination of sight, with a personal touch added by the humanistic and empathetic digital story laid out in the content, builds up the institution's image of being an Islamic school that is guided by religion but also caring minds oriented to the character development of their students. The results of the questionnaire strengthen these findings: Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool has a total score of 585 (average 3.9), compared to TK Islam Taman Firdaus with a total score of 549 (average 3.66). The highest scores in the Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool were found in indicators of Islamic value representation and visual narrative appeal, while TK Islam Taman Firdaus excelled in message clarity and design consistency. This distinction suggests that the effectiveness of visual communication of Islamic educational institutions is determined not only by aesthetic quality but also by the extent to which Islamic values and narratives are naturally integrated in digital content.

Thus, the professional design approach demonstrated by TK Islam Taman Firdaus and the emphasis on spiritual values and emotional closeness shown by Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool represent two distinct yet equally meaningful visual communication strategies. More cautiously, this study suggests that these approaches have the potential to complement each other; however, the findings are not sufficient to establish a single "ideal strategy" because the data are descriptive and based on a small sample size.

To provide initial practical direction, a balance between design professionalism and religious-emotional narratives can be realized through simple operational steps, such as:

1. ensuring the consistency of visual identity while still displaying expressions of family warmth,
2. combining institutional colors with Islamic symbolic elements proportionately, and
3. Align the narrative tone of the caption with the religious values you want to emphasize.

Instead, blue and orange are applied by Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool on their general visual communication, while green can be seen in its religious-themed uploads to represent calmness, spirituality, warmth, and family cheerfulness. These visuals, along with a humanistically and empathetically fluent digital narrative, shape the institution into an image of religiousness, compassion, and character towards children (Islamic school). These results were confirmed by the questionnaire, where the total scores of Rumah Bintang Islamic Preschool and TK Islam Taman Firdaus are 585 (average 3.9) and 549 (average 3.66), respectively. To strengthen academic contributions, advanced research can be conducted through cross-regional comparative studies, longitudinal analysis of content

strategies, or visual experiments to test the influence of design elements on audience perception in a more measurable way. Thus, the conclusion of this study is simple, limited to its actual contribution, which is to provide a preliminary idea of how two different visual approaches can affect the perception of parents in the two Islamic ECE institutions studied.

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