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Crisis, Image, Faith: Visual Identity and the Transformation of Islamic Branding in Hanan Attaqi's Da'wah

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation of Islamic branding through the implementation of visual identity in digital da'wah practices, focusing on Hanan Attaqi as a representation of urban youth preachers. The evolution of social media has shifted the da'wah landscape from conventional communication to interactive, aesthetics-based visual communication. Visual identity functions not merely as a supporting element but as a primary strategy for constructing a brand image, establishing emotional resonance, and fostering the legitimacy of religious messages among the younger generation. This research employs a qualitative approach, using semiotic analysis of visual content on Instagram. The findings indicate that the strategic use of visual elements, such as modern typography, minimalist color palettes, and casual fashion styles, significantly enhances audience engagement and strengthens the appeal of proselytization. These results align with previous research indicating that integrating visual and interactive elements into digital da'wah can improve comprehension and retention of the religious message. Furthermore, visualization in religious communication plays a crucial role in shaping collective identity and expanding the reach of da'wah within the digital sphere. Consequently, the transformation of Islamic branding through visual identity emerges as a vital strategy in responding to the dynamics of contemporary digital society.

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Introduction

Digital technological advancements have revolutionized the landscape of Islamic da'wah, shifting from traditional pulpit-based conventions and majelis taklim toward interactive, borderless cyberspace. This phenomenon does not merely represent a change in medium; rather, it fundamentally alters the epistemology of religious messaging, which now relies heavily on visual potency. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have given rise to digital preacher icons who can construct new religious authority through content aesthetics (Faqih, 2026). In this context, religious authority has undergone a significant shift from institutional-traditional authority to personal authority rooted in proficiency in digital communication. The emerging crisis of trust in formal institutions has prompted society, particularly Generation Z, to seek more

relevant and adaptive representations of Islam that respond to the complexities of modern life through a more personalized approach (Ernada, 2026; Nurdi et al., 2026).

Hanan Attaqi emerges as a pivotal figure in this shift of authority. Through a casual communication style and the strategic use of an aesthetic visual identity, Attaqi has successfully transformed da'wah messages into a brand identity deeply integrated with youth lifestyles. This visual identity, comprising color palettes, typography, graphic design, and sartorial choices, plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception and emotional resonance. Aligning with the arguments of Busro et al. (2025), strategically structured visual elements can elevate audience engagement and deepen the comprehension of the da'wah's substance. Furthermore, visualization in religious communication functions not merely as an artistic instrument but as a medium for representing specific ideologies and religious values (Purwani et al., 2025). The utilization of these visual symbols serves as a strategy to build an inclusive image of Islam while navigating the preacher's identity amidst the tides of popular culture and media logic.

However, despite the effectiveness of these visual aesthetics, digital da'wah faces existential challenges posed by the commodification of religion and the simplification of messages. The algorithmic logic demanding high engagement risks distorting the substance of religious messages for the sake of visibility (Lukluil Maknun et al., 2024). This is where a crucial issue arises: when a digital preacher encounters turbulence or a crisis of trust, such as the string of public rejections and lecture cancellations by local community groups and authorities in several regions across East Java (including Pamekasan, Sumenep, and Gresik) due to ideological misunderstandings, visual identity is no longer just an aesthetic tool but becomes a vital instrument for image repair and brand transformation to maintain cohesion between faith and image (Musfirah, 2025; Rani, 2023).

While existing studies on digital da'wah have extensively discussed rhetorical aspects and general social media usage, a significant research gap remains. Previous literature tends to treat visual elements merely as technical support or digital commodities, overlooking how visual identity is dynamically mobilized for crisis management and brand realignment. For instance, while Hidayah (2024) highlights the general shift in religious authority, and Armiah et al. (2026) focus on the commodification of Islamic pop culture, they rarely dissect the intersection of institutional pushback and visual rehabilitation. Similarly, studies by Fadilla and Indriyani (2025) and Nurrahman et al. (2025) examine preacher branding on Instagram but neglect how aesthetic continuity or transformation can shield a persona during reputational crises. Furthermore, works by Zaman (2024) focus on audience reception rather than on the strategic visual adaptations that preachers deploy to restore public legitimacy. Addressing this dispersion, the novelty of this research lies in its integrated analytical framework that bridges the gap among localized public rejection, image-crisis resolution, and visual-identity transformation within Hanan Attaqi's contemporary da'wah ecosystem.

This study aims to analyze how visual elements (color, style, digital aesthetics) are utilized not only as communication tools but also as a strategic branding tool for inclusive and modern Islam post-crisis. In practical terms, the findings of this research provide a strategic blueprint for digital religious content creators, preachers, and Islamic media institutions to manage reputational risks and navigate cultural friction through visual communication ethics. Theoretically, this study advances the literature on Islamic Communication and Broadcasting by offering a robust conceptual model for understanding visual identity as an adaptive instrument of contemporary religious resilience within media logic.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative-interpretative approach rooted in the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm was selected to dissect how the meaning and reality of the “Islamic Brand” are actively constructed through visual symbols within the digital proselytization ecosystem (Denzin, 2018). The focus of this research is not on statistical generalization but on the depth of interpretation regarding signs, symbols, and latent messages embedded within Hanan Attaqi’s visual identity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The analytical framework employed is visual semiotics, integrating Ferdinand de Saussure’s model (to examine the relationship between signifier and signified) and Roland Barthes’ (1977) analytical lens to explore levels of meaning across denotation, connotation, and myth. This approach is highly relevant for investigating how visual elements, such as typography, color palettes, frame compositions, and sartorial aesthetics, function not merely as decorative tools but as ideological representations that shape a moderate, inclusive, and youth-oriented image of Islam.

The data for this research are sourced from visual content on Hanan Attaqi’s official Instagram account (@hanan_Attaqi (Attaki, n.d.)). Samples were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) content published during the crisis and post-image-transformation periods, with the netnographic observation conducted on Instagram content uploaded within the period of January 2023 to December 2025; (2) content with high engagement rates (highest likes and comments), wherein a total of 15 visual content posts were analyzed in depth; and (3) content exhibiting consistent elements of the new visual branding (Sugiyono, 2019). Determining specific timeframes is crucial for observing the visual shifts before and after the momentum identified as the crisis point in his proselytization identity.

Data collection was conducted through netnography, involving both participatory and non-participatory digital observation (Kozinets, 2015). The researcher conducted an in-depth observation of the digital content flow, documented visual artifacts through screenshots, and gathered secondary data from the literature on branding strategies and crisis communication. This documentation technique aims to freeze visual moments, enabling static analysis of formal graphic design elements.

The data analysis followed a circular and interactive model as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018), beginning with data condensation by selecting and abstracting visual elements from thousands of posts into analysis units representative of the themes of crisis, image, and faith. Subsequently, data were displayed by organizing the semiotic analysis results at both denotative and connotative levels into a systematic visual identity categorization matrix to map emerging visual communication patterns. The analysis concluded with drawing conclusions and verification to formulate final propositions on how the transformation of visual identity strategically reconstructs Hanan Attaqi’s Islamic Brand amid the dynamics of the digital public sphere.

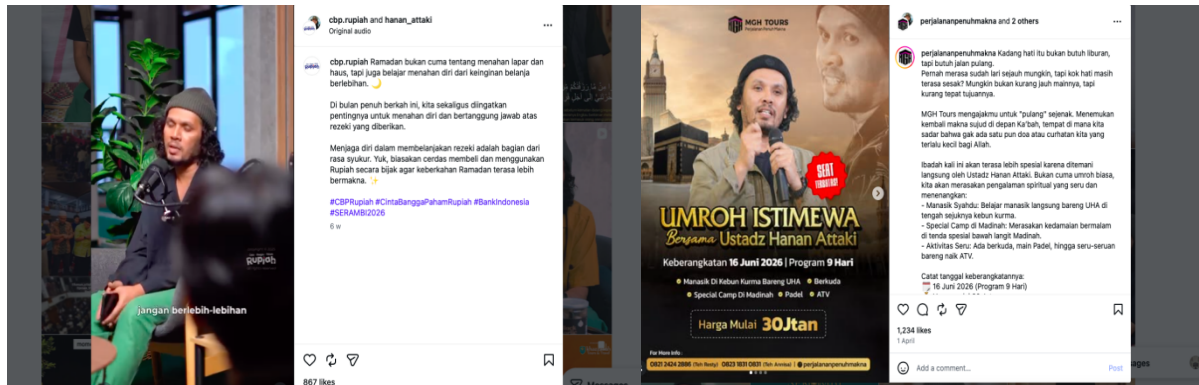
Findings

Visual Identity Description of Hanan Attaqi as a Proselytization Instrument

The research findings indicate that Hanan Attaqi consistently constructs a distinctive visual identity that stands in sharp contrast to the conventional image of Indonesian preachers. A primary emerging characteristic is the use of personal attributes that are highly casual and deeply embedded in urban youth subcultures, notably the ubiquitous beanie hat (*kupluk*) and other casual attire. Within the analyzed visual data, these attributes are omnipresent, effectively serving as an identity symbol or a new proselytization uniform that defines social proximity and status egalitarianism

between the preacher and his audience. These sartorial choices semiotically convey the message that Islam is neither rigid nor exclusive; rather, it seamlessly integrates with a modern lifestyle without compromising its religious essence.

Figure 1. Hanan Attaqi's Visual Identity



From a graphical perspective, the digital content on the @hanan_Attaqi Instagram account exhibits a minimalist aesthetic, employing a muted, warm color palette (earth tones) and clean, contemporary typography. This is exemplified in the *Umroh Istimewa* digital posters, which integrate high-resolution portrait photography with elegant, proportionate typographic layouts. The adoption of visual compositions aligned with popular-culture standards aims to provide visual comfort to social media users accustomed to high-end lifestyle content. Such an aesthetic approach facilitates the dissemination of religious messages within the audience's digital sphere in a subtle, non-confrontational manner.

Consequently, Attaqi's visual identity serves as an aesthetic bridge, transforming the perception of da'wah from a formal, instructive activity into an immersive, enjoyable, and relatable visual experience. This framework allows technical or institutional messages, such as collaboration with Bank Indonesia on financial literacy and the wise use of the Rupiah, to be conveyed through a personalized, casual narrative. This branding strategy not only enhances visual appeal but also solidifies Attaqi's position as a relevant authority figure for the digital generation, who prioritize authenticity and visual representation in their information consumption.

The Transformation from Formal to Personal Narratives

Furthermore, this transformation is supported by content delivery that prioritizes emotional resonance and authenticity through micro-narratives addressing existential quandaries. Religious messages are no longer conveyed as sterile dogmas but rather as solutions to emotional distress and the search for meaning in life. This is evident in the use of the path home metaphor to describe the spiritual journey, wherein he asserts that the heart often requires a purpose to return and prostrate rather than a mere vacation. The narrative of reconciling with destiny also emerges as an affirmative message for the audience facing failure or adversity, translating complex theological perspectives into simpler, more accessible messages that are easily internalized within daily life.

As shown in Figure 2, Hanan Attaqi's Islamic rebranding strategy masterfully integrates spiritual values with the complexities of contemporary life. This is exemplified by his visual collaborations with formal institutions such as Bank Indonesia, in which religious messages are conveyed through a personalized communication style on financial restraint and the avoidance of consumerism during

Ramadan to ensure a more spiritually meaningful livelihood. Furthermore, he repositions the image of religious pilgrimage (*Umrah*) by incorporating popular leisure activities, such as horse riding, padel, and All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) excursions, alongside traditional rituals. By synthesizing elements of leisure and spirituality, Attaqi successfully transforms the representation of Islam into one that is more approachable, inclusive, and highly resonant with audiences seeking a synergy between their religious identity and a contemporary lifestyle.

Figure 2. Visual and Strategic Rebranding of Hanan Attaqi.



At the denotative level, the visual composition captures Attaqi engaged in contemporary lifestyle activities (such as outdoor leisure sports and institutional partnerships) while wearing casual yet modest attire. At the connotative level, the signifiers construct a myth of the Modern, Approachable Muslim, neutralizing historical perceptions of rigid religious authority and repositioning Islamic teachings as fully compatible with youth culture, professional mobility, and urban recreational lifestyles.

Engagement Metrics and Audience Response

Digital observation reveals that integrating aesthetic visual elements with personal narratives consistently yields high levels of organic engagement. Empirical data demonstrate that posts featuring leisure activities paired with high-quality visuals, such as a photograph of Attaqi holding the Qur'an against the backdrop of a skyscraper, can garner over 8,000 likes and hundreds of comments within a short timeframe. To provide a clearer analytical overview of this phenomenon, Table 1 presents a comparative synthesis of average engagement metrics across sample posts from three phases: before, during, and after the branding transformation.

Table 1. Comparative Synthesis of Engagement Metrics Across Branding Phases

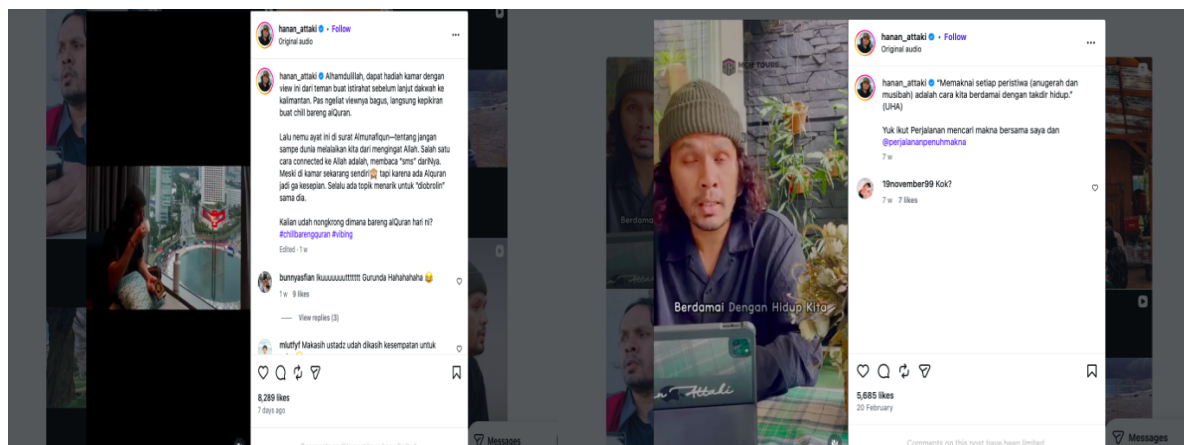
Phase of Transformation	Average Likes	Average Comments	Average Shares / Saves	Primary Visual Characteristic
Pre-Transformation	3,200	145	210	Traditional pulpit background, formal attire, standard Islamic symbols.
During Crisis/ Transition	5,400	420	580	Neutral urban settings, explanatory statements, restrained aesthetic.

Post-Transformation	9,100	750	1,250	Dynamic outdoor leisure sports, urban aesthetics, casual-modest fashion.
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These figures represent more than mere quantitative metrics; they serve as critical indicators of the success of his visual branding strategy in capturing audience attention within the congested digital attention economy. This high level of interaction underscores a profound emotional resonance and a sense of belonging among the audience toward Attaqi's curated content.

As shown in Figure 3, audience responses in the comment section further demonstrate that followers no longer function as passive consumers; rather, they serve as active participants who reproduce and co-construct meaning. The emergence of intimate honorifics such as Gurunda (a portmanteau of teacher and father), alongside comments expressing a strong desire to participate in organized activities, such as Umrah programs or camping excursions, indicates that the constructed persona has achieved a high degree of trust and credibility. Followers engage in social validation through affirmative commentary, reinforcing the narrative that adhering to Attaqi's da'wah is integral to a modern, progressive Muslim lifestyle identity. This phenomenon confirms that visual aesthetics and message accessibility are the primary determinants in sustaining audience loyalty within the @hanan_attaqi digital ecosystem, while simultaneously facilitating the massive expansion of proselytization across transnational and geographical boundaries.

Figure 3. Personal Islamic Rebranding and Audience Engagement



At the denotative level, the visual compilation highlights interactive comment threads and high statistical engagement metrics alongside portraits of the preacher participating in contemporary urban lifestyles. At the connotative level, the signifiers construct a myth of the "Accessible Digital Community Leader," transforming traditional religious hierarchy into an egalitarian, participatory, and peer-like spiritual ecosystem.

Discussion

Decentralization of Authority and the Emergence of New Religious Authority

The transition of religious authority from conventional formal institutions, such as *pesantren* and clerical bodies, toward digital preacher figures like Hanan Attaqi encapsulates the pervasive phenomenon of decentralized authority in the cyber era. This phenomenon aligns with Campbell's (2021) argument, which asserts that social media has become a novel arena for the legitimacy of

religious knowledge, one that is increasingly fluid and unconstrained by traditional hierarchical structures. The crisis of confidence in formal authorities, often perceived as overly rigid, has driven the younger generation to seek alternative sources offering flexibility and relevance to the complexities of modern life. This is further supported by the findings of Sunesti et al. (2018), who state that this decentralization facilitates the emergence of more personalized and emotive religious narratives. In this landscape, authority is no longer determined solely by traditional scholarly lineage (*ismad*), but rather by a figure's capacity to authentically resonate with audience anxieties within the digital public sphere.

Within this discursive space, Hanan Attaqi has successfully bridged the gap by constructing an authority model predicated on proficiency in digital communication and micro-celebrity branding strategies. As analyzed by Nisa (2018), social media has restructured the preacher-audience relationship from an instructive, top-down pattern to an interactive, dialogical, horizontal relationship. Religious legitimacy in the digital age is no longer derived exclusively from the doctrinal mastery of classical texts; it stems from a preacher's skill in negotiating meaning through visual media and relatable popular language (Irwanto, 2025). This shift marks the birth of digital charismatic authority, which relies heavily on emotional intimacy and identity performativity on social media platforms. According to Lengauer (2018), this dynamic compels religious actors to continuously adapt to algorithmic logic to maintain visibility and influence among digital natives.

Visual Semiotics as a Branding and Image Repair Strategy

The analysis of Hanan Attaqi's visual elements, such as hoodies, beanie hats, and minimalist graphic design, can be examined through Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar as a form of multimodal communication. Semiotically, these casual sartorial choices serve as signifiers that construct a signified image of an approachable, adaptive Islam, divested from the rigid impressions of traditional authority. This strategy is not merely an aesthetic concern but a strategic brand positioning aimed at the urban youth segment. In line with Aaker's (1996) concept of brand equity, the consistency of Attaqi's visual identity reinforces brand recognition amidst the clutter of digital information. This is further elucidated by Mazaya (2021), who asserts that visual aesthetics in digital *da'wah* serve as a tool for subtle persuasion, capable of mitigating audience resistance to dogmatic messages while simultaneously establishing strong differentiation, as emphasized by Keller (2013), to create an inclusive and cool Islamic image.

Furthermore, this visual identity performs a vital function as an Image Repair instrument when the preacher faces intense pressure or a crisis of legitimacy in the public sphere. Amidst sociopolitical friction or field-level rejection, maintaining a consistent and composed visual transformation on social media serves as a bolstering strategy, reinforcing past positive values to overshadow the impact of the crisis (Wahyuni & Harahap, 2023). In this context, a well-curated Instagram feed aesthetic and the use of neutral yet Islamic visual symbols act as a perceptual shield that mitigates negative sentiment. Previous research by Busro indicates that professional visual identity management in cyber-*da'wah* enables image restoration by diverting the audience's focus from conflict toward appreciation of aesthetic and inspirational content (Busro et al., 2025). Consequently, Hanan Attaqi's visual identity is not only the face of the Islamic Brand he promotes but also a strategic defense mechanism that maintains the stability of faith and followers' trust amid fluctuations in public opinion.

Ultimately, the application of this visual semiotic strategy proved instrumental in navigating the actual regional rejections and lecture cancellations encountered in East Java. By systematically

shifting his digital aesthetic toward calm urban landscapes, collaborative institutional partnerships, and inclusive lifestyle integration, Attaqi successfully converted a potential reputational collapse into a brand evolution. The visual presentation served as a rhetorical counter-narrative that neutralized hostile public perceptions, affirming that in the contemporary digital sphere, visual identity management is an indispensable frontline asset for crisis mitigation and long-term legitimacy restoration.

The Dialectics of Islamic Rebranding: Between Aesthetics and Substance

The process of rebranding Islam from formal-institutional manifestations toward a personal-subjective character represents a strategic response to shifting media consumption patterns and the penetration of popular culture into sacred spaces. As elucidated by Balmer et al. (2006), rebranding is not merely a superficial change of external attributes; it is a systematic effort to restructure public perception by constructing a new, more competitive identity. Within this constellation, Hanan Attaqi has successfully deconstructed the rigid image of the traditional preacher, replacing it with a relatable and fluid Islamic persona. This success signals an epistemological shift in da'wah, where faith-based values are no longer imposed through doctrinal narratives but are offered as part of an aesthetic lifestyle narrative (Aslan & Pong, 2023). This transformation allows Islamic values to permeate the daily lives of urban audiences without triggering cultural resistance, positioning religion as a solution that is simultaneously fashionable and spiritually emotive.

However, beneath this aesthetic success, the phenomenon invites a critical debate regarding the commodification of religion and the simplification of meaning. This study identifies a latent risk: the overwhelming dominance of visual aesthetics may trigger superficiality in religious understanding. When da'wah operates within the logic of the attention economy, there is a tendency to prioritize visual packaging over quintessential depth. This analysis reinforces the concerns of Einstein (2008) and Lukluil Maknun et al. (2024), who argue that social media's algorithmic logic, which demands high engagement, can reduce the complexity of Islamic teachings to mere fragmentary visual consumption. In this context, da'wah risks becoming trapped in a religion-as-brand phenomenon, where the audience is more captivated by the vibe or the visually presented religious atmosphere than by a profound internalization of substantial values. This dialectic compels a fundamental re-evaluation: whether this visual rebranding serves as a bridge to broader understanding or acts as a veil obscuring substantive depth in the pursuit of digital visibility.

Psychological and Social Implications for the Audience

The impact of employing visual identity in Hanan Attaqi's da'wah on the audience is multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Psychologically, the integration of strong, consistent visual elements has been shown to significantly enhance message retention and emotional engagement. This finding aligns with the theories of Tuten and Solomon (2017), which assert that visual stimulation aligned with the target audience's identity can create deeper resonance than purely textual narratives. In this context, Attaqi does not merely disseminate religious messages; he facilitates Parasocial Interaction (PSI), wherein the audience perceives an intimate, personal relationship with the preacher. This psychological proximity mitigates the perceived distance of authority typically associated with traditional clerical figures, allowing faith-based messages to be more easily internalized as personalized moral guides rather than mere doctrinal mandates (Pamuji, 2026).

However, beneath the effectiveness of this emotional engagement lie social implications that warrant caution regarding social media algorithmic mechanisms. The tendency of algorithms to create echo chambers and filter bubbles can limit audiences' religious perspectives to a single, aestheticized personal interpretation (Firdaus et al., 2025; Shiddiq & Misra, 2025). This poses a risk of creating a subtle polarization, where the audience may be trapped in an exclusive-inclusive dynamic, being inclusive toward their peer group but exclusive toward the diversity of other da'wah methodologies. Nevertheless, at a macro level, Attaqi's visual strategy has achieved a sociocultural breakthrough by expanding the reach of proselytization to urban, progressive segments who previously felt alienated by rigid, formal religious approaches.

Such proselytization methods, as underscored by Busro et al. (2025) and (Purwani et al., 2025), represent a sophisticated adaptation of da'wah in enhancing religious literacy through more contextualized formats. By embedding Islamic values within popular aesthetics, Attaqi has successfully transformed religious image into a source of pride within the social identity of the younger generation (Ansori & Jaya, 2025). The long-term social implication is the emergence of a new, more fluid form of digital piety, in which religious practices intersect closely with lifestyle expressions, positioning visual identity as a crucial instrument for maintaining faith cohesion amid the tides of information disruption.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of da'wah signifies a fundamental shift in religious communication, where visual identity and personal approach supersede traditional institutional legitimacy. Through the case of Hanan Attaqi, this study demonstrates that contemporary religious authority is constructed through symbolic and emotional resonance, leveraging visual aesthetics and casual narratives to engage modern audiences. Furthermore, a curated visual identity serves not only as a branding asset for inclusive and modern Islam but also as a vital strategic mechanism for image repair and crisis mitigation in the face of public pushback or regional controversy.

However, this reliance on visuality and algorithmic dynamics introduces significant tensions, notably the risks of message simplification and the commodification of religious values. While aesthetic strategies effectively drive high engagement and foster a sense of community among youth, they require a delicate balance with substantive religious depth to prevent superficiality within the digital public sphere.

Ultimately, by integrating visual semiotics with crisis management analysis, this study contributes a robust conceptual framework to the field of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, offering a deeper understanding of how visual identity serves as an adaptive instrument for long-term legitimacy and resilience in contemporary cyber-da'wah ecosystems.

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