Organizational Representation Through Visual Archives: An Analysis of the Muhammadiyah Museum

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Notes	ABSTRACT
  	This study explores the archival collections of the Muhammadiyah Museum as a medium for transmitting and reflecting the organization's ideology. The research aims to analyze how Muhammadiyah's ideological values are constructed and articulated through the visual elements embedded in its museum archives. A qualitative approach was employed, incorporating visual content analysis, ethnographic observation, and in-depth interviews with curators and visitors. The findings reveal that the museum's archives actively construct ideological narratives of Islamic modernism and nationalism through carefully curated visual frameworks. Representations of Muhammadiyah leaders, educational initiatives, and social movements are displayed with an aesthetic that underscores values such as progress, rationality, and reform. The curatorial practices demonstrate processes of selection and interpretation that mirror the organization's contemporary ideological orientation in navigating Indonesia's socio-political landscape. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of museums as ideological agents and highlights the importance of visual literacy in interpreting embedded messages within historical archives. The findings further illustrate how religious organizations utilize visual representation to preserve and transmit ideological identities across generations. **Keywords:** Archives; Archives management; Visual archives

1. INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has a long history since it was founded by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (KHA Dahlan) in 1912 (Muallimah, 2023). The spirit of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (promoting good and forbidding evil) and the *tajdid* movement, or Islamic renewal based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, has become a crucial foundation for maintaining the organization's ideology. Muhammadiyah's prominence as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia is measured not only by the quantity of its members, but more significantly by the quality and beneficial impact of its contributions (Nashir H., 1994).

Since before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, as an Islamic organization with a history of over a hundred years, has witnessed Indonesia's historical journey. This includes the early emergence of national aspirations, the proclamation of the republic, and the refinement of the Indonesian state structure after independence (Mu'ti, 2016). The struggle of the Muhammadiyah movement has sought to establish an inclusive and modern social order, eliminating the colonial-era dichotomy between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples inherited from the colonial social structure. Tangible evidence of Muhammadiyah's struggle in building the Indonesian nation is recorded in various forms of archives scattered across the country. These archives reflect the pulse of the organization's struggle over many decades. However, over time, many of these valuable archives have been dispersed. Some are still kept privately by the families of prominent figures and remain undocumented in a systematic way. Physical artifacts are also at risk of being lost or damaged without adequate conservation efforts. Some have deteriorated due to age or unsuitable storage conditions or are even no longer known to younger generations (Suara-Muhammadiyah, 2016). This situation underscores the importance of establishing the Muhammadiyah Museum as a collective space to rescue, preserve, and reintegrate this historical heritage in a complete and accessible manner for the public (Muchlas, 2025). At the same time, it serves as a public educational space that connects the present generation with the values and struggles instilled by earlier founders.

The success or failure of museum visitors can be determined by the value of the experience they perceive (Falk & Dierking, 2013). Nevertheless, a common problem faced by most museums is that the richness of information about collections is difficult to grasp fully without additional information such as historical context and interpretive narratives (Sutaarga, 1982; Daly, 2019; Anderson & Mileham, 2020) accessible to all segments of society. This experiential process involves time and the ability to visually analyze and understand, especially considering that many visitors are unwilling to spend time reading text panels in museums (Andina, 2024). As a result, there arises a need to develop newer methods for presenting traditional text-based information in ways that can attract interest, enhance understanding, and raise awareness of the importance of Muhammadiyah's contributions in Indonesia.

One approach that can be used to overcome this challenge is through archival arrangement using visual representations. According to Roger Saul (Roger, Gerbrandt, Burkholder, & al, 2024), visual arrangements can help visitors understand museum content more deeply, making information easier to access and understand. This issue has become an important subject of research to explain how the Muhammadiyah Museum implements archival transformation. This transformation is not merely aesthetic, but rather an epistemic act to shape the historical framework and identity of Muhammadiyah in the contemporary social landscape.

Therefore, this study is able to analyse how visualisation, such as elements reflected in each image, symbol, colour selection and archive arrangement, successfully conveys a specific message that not only strengthens internal identity but also functions as a powerful and adaptive tool for da'wah (proselytising) in changing times. Thus, the Muhammadiyah Museum does not only function as a repository of history, but also as a medium in the process of shaping the image and disseminating Muhammadiyah values to a wider audience.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method with visual content analysis techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Rose, 2016). The research objects consisted of various Muhammadiyah archives, including artefacts, founding documents, correspondence from prominent figures, photographs of organisational activities, and publications such as school guidebooks and Suara Muhammadiyah magazine. These materials had undergone selection, processing, and transformation, enhanced by technological developments such as the creation of digital platforms that enabled broader access to museum collections through both conventional and virtual exhibitions, document digitization, and online information. By contextualizing the archives within historical narratives, this study aimed to examine how the ideological framing of Muhammadiyah was carefully designed to influence visitors' understanding and engagement (Conway, 2010; Gilliland, S, & Lau, 2014).

Through the contextualization of archives within historical narratives, this study examined how the ideological framing of Muhammadiyah was constructed and how it influenced visitors' understanding and interaction. The ideological and historical foundations of Muhammadiyah served as references for interpreting the construction of these narratives (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012). This initiative helped transform the use of archives from being limited in access to becoming more widespread (Hein, 1998; Falk & Dierking, 2013), thereby facilitating easier access to historical information at the Muhammadiyah Museum.

The author conducted direct observations at the Muhammadiyah Museum and carried out in-depth interviews with three categories of informants, namely museum curators, staff (archivists and educators), and visitors. A total of six key informants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in museum management and had interactive experience with the museum's archival collections (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The author then analyzed the data through three stages: first, thematic analysis to identify key patterns and central themes in the museum's collections and information presentation; second, narrative analysis to understand how the chronology of the archives was constructed and transformed; and third, visual analysis to interpret the visual elements within the archival materials (Krippendorff, 2018).
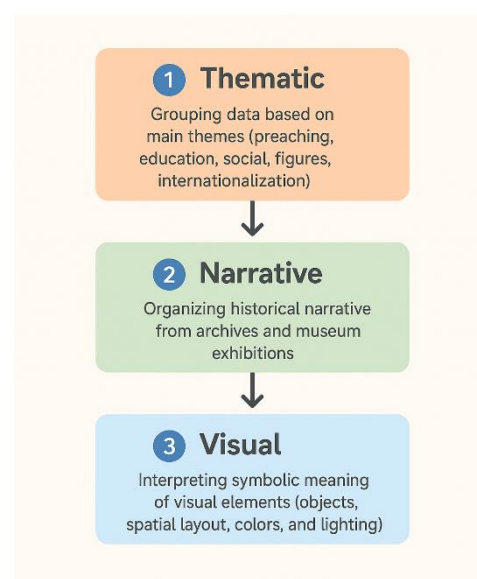

Figure 1. Research Analysis Stages
(Source: Klaus Krippendorff, 2018)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Archives as a Framework for Organisational Identity

Archives are a primary source for preserving the history and identity of an organization. However, the challenge in the digital era lies in how these archives can be accessed, understood, and appreciated by the wider public, especially the younger generation, which is more visually oriented (Yakel, 203). According to Law Number 43 of 2009 on Archives (ANRI-Indonesia, 2009), archives are defined as records of activities or events created and received by state institutions, regional governments, educational institutions, companies, political organizations, social organizations, and individuals in the course of societal, national, and state life, a definition shaped by the advancement of information and communication technology.

Muhammadiyah is a mass-based community organisation in Indonesia, which has grown significantly, partly through good archive management, given the importance of archives since the birth of religion in society and their role as the spirit within humanity (Sulistyo-Basuki, 2003). The establishment of the organisation has a long history for religious adherents, which is inseparable from the archives that have been created. One of the functions of archives is to store recorded memory, which will become an important component of the development of organisations, history and culture (Sutarno, 2006; ANRI-Indonesia, 2009). As a concrete manifestation of archive management, Muhammadiyah established a museum in 2022, located in Tamanan, Banguntapan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region Province. The Muhammadiyah Museum has a responsibility to maintain the authenticity, accessibility, and sustainability of information so that the historical and educational value of the archives is preserved. Each archive stored is not only administrative evidence, but also functions as a medium for forming institutional memory that reflects the values and ideas based on progressive Islam from time to time (Nashir H. , 2015; Cook, 2011). Therefore, a good archive management system is key to maintaining the continuity of history and the integrity of the information contained therein. To support systematic and standardised archive management, the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA International) in its book cited by Read and Ginn (Sutirman, 2020) classifies archive storage systems into three main categories (filing systems), namely based on: Alphabetic, Subject and Numerical Filling.

The results of field observations and interviews with museum staff indicate that the Muhammadiyah Museum implements a subject-based archive storage system (ISO, 2016). Evidence of this system's implementation is evident in the grouping of archives through nine zones in the museum, starting from the lobby on the first floor, which serves as an introductory zone (conditioning), the history of Muhammadiyah's founding, to the third floor, which serves as a zone for Muhammadiyah's development in responding to contemporary issues, thus referred to as the internationalization of Muhammadiyah. This zonal division allows for a more efficient information retrieval process because visitors can search for archives based on thematic categories, rather than alphabetical or numerical order (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah consistently promotes transparency regarding the dynamics of its organizational movement, allowing the public the opportunity to access, study, and utilize such information in accordance with applicable regulations, to support educational activities and other interests (Afan-Kurniawan, 2025).

Alongside the complex dynamics of the organization, the forms of documentation produced are also diverse. To provide a comprehensive picture of Muhammadiyah's history,

role, and contributions, the museum collects various types of materials, including textual, visual, and audio-visual collections (Trust., 2017). Each type of collection represents different aspects of the organization's journey, whether administrative, social, or intellectual. The management of the Muhammadiyah Museum archives has been identified by categorizing keywords and main subjects of each archive. The following is a presentation of the archive relevance index based on data processing of exhibition space visualizations, documentation, and interview results:

Table 1. Relevance index of the Muhammadiyah Museum Archives

No	Keywords/Subject	Brief Description
1	Organizational History	Founding documents, organizational development, and activities.
2	Education	School archives, universities, and Muhammadiyah educational programs.
3	Social and *Da'wah* Activities	Health programs, documentation of social activities, *da'wah*, and community empowerment initiatives.
4	Figure of Muhammadiyah	Biographies and works of prominent figures
5	Publications and Media Official	Publications and organizational information media that function as a means of disseminating ideas.

Source: Researcher data processing, 2025

As of early 2025, the Muhammadiyah Museum has a collection of 2,812 (two thousand eight hundred and twelve) historical items, and this collection will continue to grow. The distribution of these collections is summarized as follows:

Table 2. Types of collections at the Muhammadiyah Museum

No	Form of Documentation	Example collection	Number of items (±)	Collection Description
1	Artifacts	1930's dormitory bed, Falakiyah maps, da'wah pulpit, ortom flag	1880	The main physical collection showing Muhammadiyah's educational, preaching and social activities since the early 20th century
2	Photo and Media Collections	Photos of business activities, audio-visual recordings of organizational activities, portraits of Muhammadiyah figures, documentation of Muktamar	425	Photographs of Muhammadiyah activities since its establishment, as well as audio-visual recordings of organizational events.
3	Document Sheets	Meeting minutes, decrees, branch establishment deeds, educational institution archives	225	Primary sources for tracing the history of administration and organizational structures.
4	Collection of letters, charters and certificates	Correspondence of figures, award certificates, business institution certificates	86	Symbolic archives that mark institutional recognition and organizational achievements
5	Publications	Suara Muhammadiyah magazine, bulletins, pamphlets, textbooks	196	Early publications such as the magazines *Pustaka Hizbul Wathan* and *Suara Muhammadiyah*, and other publications discussing Muhammadiyah activities; Various books written by prominent Muhammadiyah figures such as AR Fachrudin, Faqih Usman, H. Djarnawi

Hadikusuma, H. Iping Zainal Abidin, collections of *fatwas* from the Majlis Tarjih, and others.

Source: Researcher data processing, 2025

Innovation and Modernization of the Muhammadiyah Museum Archives

Technological advancements and changing societal behaviors, especially among younger generations, demand that museums adapt and innovate without delay (UNESCO, 2021). Muhammadiyah was founded as a *Tajdid* (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2023) movement with the spirit of progressive Islamic renewal. It is expected to consistently uphold its identity as a progressive Islamic organization. Inconsistency would arise if the museum continues to rely on conventional approaches while the organization promotes modernity. Therefore, the Muhammadiyah Museum, which serves to preserve a long history, must ensure that its archival management remains relevant and engaging for present and future generations. Without innovation and modernization, the museum risks becoming a lifeless, dull institution that loses its appeal (ICOM, 2022).

Innovation and modernization integrated into the Muhammadiyah Museum include the following:

a. Archive Digitization

Based on an interview with museum staff (Fatkhur, 2025), approximately 10–20% of the total collection has entered the digitization stage. Although the archives digitization process is not yet fully completed, the gradual steps taken by the Muhammadiyah Museum demonstrate institutional awareness of the importance of adapting technology to historical heritage management. This effort is not merely a form of archive preservation, but also part of a curatorial strategy to bridge historical values with the needs of a modern society increasingly oriented towards digital media.

The archive conversion process at the Muhammadiyah Museum includes scanning physical collections such as documents, photos, artifacts, and audio-visual recordings, followed by media conversion into digital formats such as PDF, JPG, or other formats. These collections are then exhibited using a medium called digital lightbox display, one of its advantages being the ability to display images with uniform LED (light emitting diode) brightness, enabling visitors to access and view archives directly without damaging the original library materials (FADGI, 2022; Millar, 2017), providing a comfortable experience while maintaining a modern appearance of the archive display. From the museum curator's perspective, archive digitization also helps facilitate their tasks in information preservation and conservation.

Figure 2. Conversion of Muhammadiyah Archives
(Source: Researcher's documentation, 2025)

b. Mobile Application

Information fatigue among museum visitors due to excessive labels and lengthy texts can be minimized through technology-based innovations that offer additional features (Tallon & Walker, 2008). Visitors are encouraged to download the application onto personal devices such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops, by accessing Google Drive under the name "*Aplikasi Museum Muhammadiyah*" at the following link: https://museum.muhammadiyah.or.id/aplikasi. The app's features include a digital map of the museum, complete with the locations of exhibition spaces, collections, and interactive zones. While inside the museum, the app displays the user's location in real time, allowing them to know where they are and what collections are nearby. This technology is based on an indoor positioning system that uses Bluetooth signals and smartphone sensors.
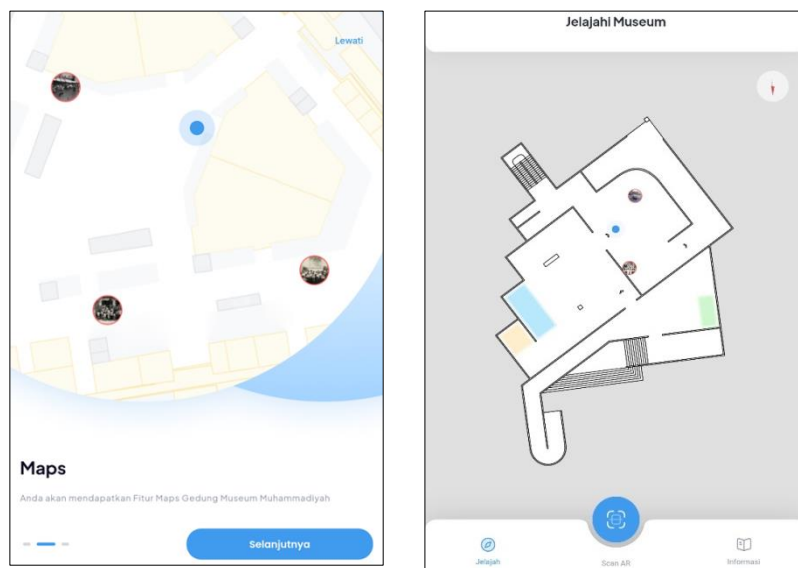

Figure 3. Muhammadiyah museum mobile application
(Source: Researcher's documentation, 2025)

Another feature of the Muhammadiyah Museum app is its use of interactive barcode technology. This audio-visual-based feature connects the physical collection with digital content, with a barcode or QR code connecting the physical collection to the digital content. When visitors scan the song lyrics displayed on the exhibition wall within the Muhammadiyah Museum app, their smartphones automatically display the digital lyrics, accompanied by clear audio playback of the Mars Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah song. This system demonstrates how the museum is able to combine archives, music, and technology as a modern learning tool. Visitors not only read historical texts but also directly experience the values contained within them through audio and digital interaction.
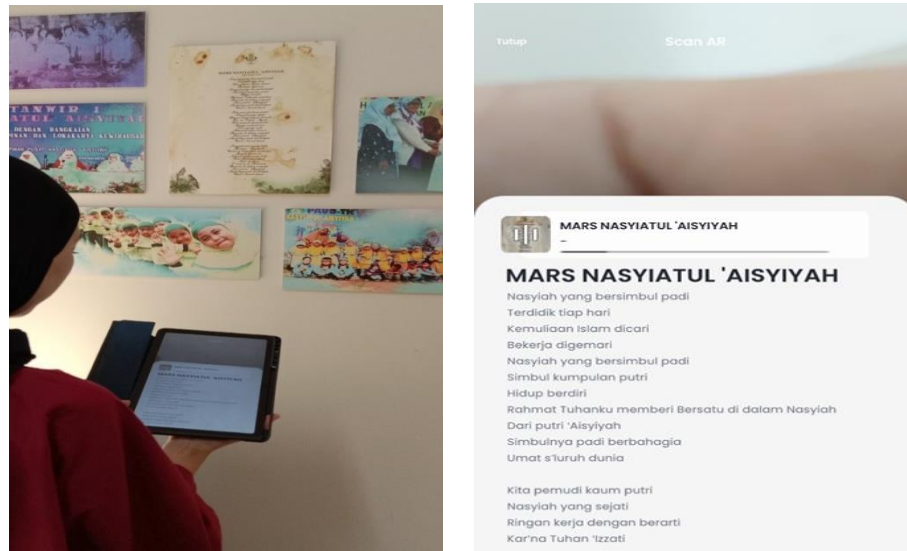

Figure 4. Muhammadiyah Museum Mobile Application
(Source: Researcher's documentation, 2025)

c. Interactive and Multimedia Exhibitions

Museum exhibitions are no longer limited to displaying collections in glass cases; they can now be a combination of text, audio, visuals, and interactive elements (Simon, 2010; McCall, 2014). Interactive museum maps, educational games, and other engaging content have been placed in various rooms throughout the Muhammadiyah Museum. These interactive technologies enhance visitor expectations through the use of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR/VR), touchscreen, and video projections, creating a more interactive and immersive experience for visitors with enjoyable visual presentations (Bekele, et al., 2018).

Figure 5. AR/VR Technology at the Muhammadiyah Museum
(Source: Researcher's documentation, 2025)

d. Promotion through Website and Social Media

Websites and social media are powerful tools for museum promotion and building an online community (Villaespesa, 2013; ICOM, 2022). The Muhammadiyah Museum can utilize various platforms and social media channels such as the official website of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah, autonomous organizations (ortom), and external networks. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp can be optimally managed to share engaging content about collections, exhibitions, events, and museum activities. Social media can also be used to interact with visitors, reaching audiences from various regions and countries, receiving feedback, and responding to inquiries.

Table. 3 Muhammadiyah museum social media

No	Platform	URL
1.	Instagram, X Twitter	@museum.mu
2.	TikTok, Facebook	Museum Muhammadiyah
3.	Website	museum.muhammadiyah.or.id
4.	Email	museum.mu@uad.ac.id
5.	WhatsApp	0812-8787-1912

Source: Muhammadiyah Museum Information, 2025

e. Development of Dynamic and Flexible Exhibition Spaces

Exhibition spaces in museums can be redesigned periodically to remain dynamic and flexible, especially if the presentation is monotonous (Bitgood, 2009), following a repetitive "case-label-case-label" pattern. Display cases are installed at heights that are neither too high nor too low, ensuring a comfortable posture for visitors when reading. Room acoustics and the use of modular systems help minimize visitor fatigue during museum tours. Even the staircase design connecting different floors in the Muhammadiyah Museum has considered accessibility for inclusive visitors. Regular monitoring and evaluation allow for periodic changes in the layout and exhibition themes (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Macdonald, 2002).

Modernization and innovation of archives at the Muhammadiyah Museum have transformed it from merely a storage place for historical objects into a center for knowledge production (Bitgood, 2013). The establishment of a museum with a modern concept, as part of the competition in the marketplace of ideas, presents information in an engaging and contextual manner, demonstrating that Islam and modernity are not mutually exclusive (Nashir H. , 2015; Nakamura, 2012). As a result, the museum, continuously growing and evolving, has become an innovative institution that accommodates diverse levels of knowledge and interests within its multi-layered organizational community, from simple, child-friendly content to in-depth materials for authors.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that Muhammadiyah's organizational identity is actively constructed and communicated through the visual elements presented in museum archive exhibitions. Photographs, symbols, typography, and spatial design collectively form a visual narrative that conveys the organisation's core values of modernity, reform, and spirituality. The central challenge for museums, therefore, lies not only in preserving historical collections

but also in ensuring that these visual representations remain meaningful and engaging for contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations. Looking ahead, these visual strategies may be further enhanced through digital media such as augmented and virtual reality, thereby expanding accessibility and deepening organizational engagement. Through deliberate and thoughtful visual interpretation, museums transform archival materials into dynamic symbols that reflect Muhammadiyah's enduring vision as a progressive Islamic movement.

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