

Identity and Marketing Strategies: Lessons Learnt From Indonesian University Website

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Analysing how institutions present themselves on websites provides significant benefits in unravelling the intricacies of the messages educational institutions aim to communicate. In the context of Indonesia, however, there has been limited research on the content of university websites as a promotional tool. Hence, the current study aims to address this void by offering a comprehensive exploration of how educational institutions shape their narratives in the digital era.

Design/Methodology/Approach: By adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study describes the linguistic features of text and images on the websites of the universities located in the Province of Gorontalo, namely Universitas Negeri Gorontalo (UNG) and Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Gorontalo (UNUGO). A three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough (2013) was employed for data analysis.

Findings: UNG and UNUGO have revealed distinctive strategies in portraying their identities and marketing strategies. UNG adopts a multifaceted approach, incorporating specific historical milestones, official documents, and a symbolic logo philosophy to establish credibility and signal adaptability, while UNUGO strategically positions itself as a reputable Islamic higher education institution, emphasizing religious foundations and academic excellence.

Keywords: CDA; University Website; Marketing Strategies; UNG; UNUGO

INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital growth, the existence of educational institution profiles on platforms, particularly websites, has become an unavoidable reality that cannot be ignored. Major technological and communication advancements have impacted on how educational institutions position themselves online. Websites are more than just

windows or external displays for educational institutions; they also function as an interactive interface that showcase valuable insights to the larger audience (Mohammadi, Saeedi, Mansouri, Banisaffar, Mahimani, Azghandi Shahri, & Yadgari, 2019). Consequently, the main role of a website in presenting the profile of educational institutions becomes crucial. Through planned design, careful choice of words, and the use of appropriate visual elements, a website can help to shape a narrative that influences opinions regarding the values, achievements, and unique identity of each educational institution (Kusuma, et al, 2024).

Websites for educational institutions are a main source of information that helps shape the opinion of the public (Liao, 2023). According to van Dijk's (2006) study, an institution's textual and visual self-portraits comprise its institutional representation. It reflects the fundamental character of an institution rather than simply a display (Al-Qahtani, 2021). A company's internet presence is an extension of its culture and ideals that the general public wishes to acknowledge and cherish, not only its physical identity. For this, Norris (2004) emphasises the critical role that websites play as the primary means of communication for educational institutions. This suggests that the website serves as a direct communication line with the community in addition to being a representation (Rosyidah, Masrtin dan Rosyidi, 2020). Therefore, the extent to which a website succeeds in delivering the values, culture and mission of an institution is a key element in shaping public perception (Kusuma, et al, 2024).

Studying the representation of institutions on websites has important advantages in disentangling the complexity of the messages delivered by educational institutions. For instance, Al-Qahtani (2021) undertook a comparative examination and assessment of the diverse discourses employed for the portrayal of Saudi universities on their websites, with a specific focus on social constructs such as gender and race. The methodology employed involves the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to delineate, scrutinize, and construe the textual and visual depictions presented on the websites of five Saudi universities, considering the local, institutional, and societal dimensions. The findings reveal a consistent and structured promotional discourse adopted by these universities, accentuating notions of prestige and distinctiveness.

Another relevant study was conducted by Alhojailan (2020), who unravelled the rhetorical manoeuvres and discursive strategies employed for marketization objectives in several prominent Saudi's universities. The findings showed a range of choices in the rhetorical moves and sub-moves adopted by these universities. In total, eight rhetorical moves and 13 sub-moves were identified, with only one sub-move being consistently present across all seven university websites. The discursive strategies were strategically utilized for self-

promotion, illustrating the promotional nature of the “About Us” sections across all universities. The study concludes by offering recommendations for universities aiming at global marketization and competition with other international institutions in higher education.

The other study is from Kusuma, et al., (2024) who explored marketing trends in higher education and provided insight into how universities utilize their websites for promotional and institutional representation purposes. The study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which includes text and image features on the Home Page of the institutional websites of two universities located in the Province of Gorontalo, as well as the implementation of the marketing mix therein. It was revealed that both universities effectively used institutional websites as strategic promotional media with specific targets. However, both universities adopt different strategies for promoting themselves.

Although much research has been conducted on the representation of institutions in digital media, there are knowledge gaps that need to be further explored, particularly in the context of higher education in the Indonesian context. Little is understood about how university websites contribute to the way the university portrays and promotes itself among the public. Therefore, this present study sought to fill this gap.

METHODS

The present study involved the analysis of texts and images contained on the websites of two universities located in the Province of Gorontalo, namely Universitas Negeri Gorontalo (UNG) and Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Gorontalo (UNUGO). The two universities were chosen because of their contrastive characteristics, where UNG has a long history and a good reputation in the country, while UNUGO is still in the developing stage to become one of the leading universities in the province. Data were collected from the UNG and UNUGO website pages, namely: Profile Page (<https://www.ung.ac.id/profil/about>, <https://unugorontalo.ac.id/bs-anteunugo/>) which were available during July-August 2023.

By adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study described the linguistic features of text and images on the websites of the two universities; interpreted the social factors that contribute to the text and image production process; and explained the influence of text and images on social structures and relationships to reveal the promotional strategies of the two universities. A research question guides this study: How are institutional identity and marketing strategies represented in the Profile section of the Universities websites? A three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough (2013) was employed for data analysis, namely: (1) The first stage, explains the linguistic features of the text and images on the UNG and

UNUGO websites; (2) Second stage, interpreting the production and consumption of texts and images; and (3) The third stage, explaining the effect of text and images on public perception and the relationship between the university and the public.

RESULTS

Critical discourse analysis conducted on the UNG and UNUGO websites shows that these two universities use different strategies to portray their identities and to promote their respective institutions to larger target markets. This is further elaborated as follows:

Product
UNG: Offers dynamic educational products, with an emphasis on adaptability and institutional development over time. The logo philosophy is a strong symbol of UNG's identity and commitment.
UNUGO: Highlighting Islamic-based educational products with a vision, mission and core values that emphasize Islamic morals and values in student development.
Price
UNG: Presents specific information about changes in leadership and institutional identity, creating value for students looking for a dynamic, forward-looking institution.
UNUGO: Strong self-esteem as an Islamic-based educational institution, highlighting academic excellence and moral development as added value.
Place
UNG: Demonstrates the adaptability and growth of the institution, giving the impression that UNG is a dynamic and experienced educational place.
UNUGO: Displaying a commitment to Islamic-based education, positions itself as a choice for students seeking an academic environment that is in line with Islamic values.
Promotion
UNG: Emphasizes the use of dates, official documents, and institutional history as strategies for building image and credibility.
UNUGO: Focus on religious foundations and academic excellence, promoting itself as a superior Islamic institution.
People
UNG: Describes the identity and development of the institution with emphasis on individual roles, official documents, and leadership history.
UNUGO: Emphasizing the role of society and community, creates the impression that UNUGO is part of a larger movement for Islamic education.
Process

UNG: Demonstrate adaptation and development of the institution through changes in leadership and changes in the name of the institution.

UNUGO: Highlighting the Islamic-based education process and the integration of religious values in all academic aspects.

Physical Evidence

UNG: Display physical evidence in the form of dates, official documents, and symbols in the logo philosophy as proof of identity and development.

UNUGO: Highlighting physical evidence through religious foundations, vision, mission and core values as the foundation for education at UNUGO.

DISCUSSION

The profile (about) page on an institution’s website is a place where the institution introduces itself to stakeholders (Hamdani, Hayati, Purnomo, & Rifqi, 2023), including prospective students, parents, researchers, donors and other related parties. UNG and UNUGO have different ways of building their image based on historical background, leadership and governance, as well as accomplishments. UNG underlines the use of specific dates, institutional names, individual names and titles, official government documents, and logo philosophy in institutional profile narratives. Meanwhile, UNUGO takes the strength of the community and its long founding history with formal and technical language as a strategy to market their institution.

The profile page contains promotional discourse in which UNG and UNUGO improve their reputation and build national and international relevance. The text and images displayed on the profile page are clear evidence for UNG and UNUGO in building the image of each institution. On the UNG profile page, the use of specific dates, names of institutions and individuals, as well as official government documents such as Presidential Decrees, gives the impression of credibility and legitimacy for the existence and growth of the institution. Apart from that, the mention of “seven changes in university leadership” and “six changes in the name of the institution” can be interpreted as a reflection of UNG’s ability to adapt and develop over time. This can be seen as evidence of UNG’s commitment to growth and development and can be an attraction for prospective students who are looking for a dynamic and forward-oriented institution. This is important because as stated by Rosyidah, Masrtin and Rosyidi (2020), the promotion of universities is one of universities’ organizational strategies considering the importance of integrating the international dimension into promotion to ensure that it is institutionalized.

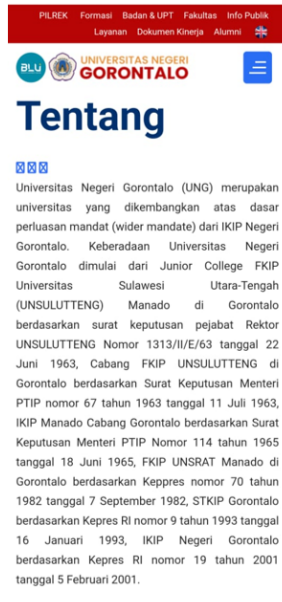


Figure 1. UNG Profile in Website

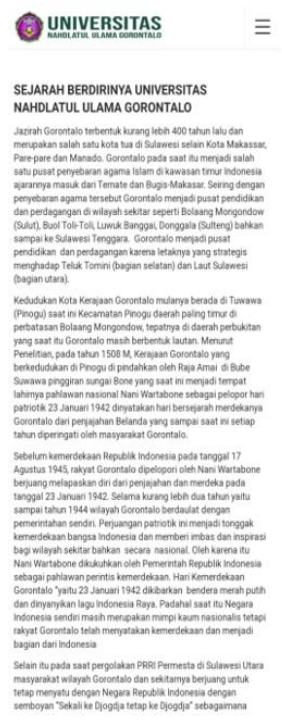


Figure 2. UNUGO Profile in Website

Overall, the UNG logo contains various symbols that represent the university's values and aspirations. By displaying its logo philosophy on its website, UNG seeks to promote a strong sense of regional identity, intellectual exploration, interdisciplinary education, and historical significance. Al-Qahtani (2021) said that the use of symbols

and their meanings shows how an educational institution values holistic and transformative educational experiences for its students.

Meanwhile, the UNUGO profile page indicates how UNUGO strategically promotes itself as a respected Islamic higher education institution with a strong emphasis on its religious foundations and academic excellence. The language used on the profile page reflects UNUGO's commitment to Islamic values and its mission as an Islamic university. The use of terms such as "Islamic-based education", "integration of Islamic values", and "faith-based educational institution" highlights UNUGO's religious foundation and positions it as an institution that prioritizes Islamic teachings and principles in its academic programs.

Besides, the UNUGO profile page provides comprehensive information about UNUGO's vision, mission, and core values which emphasize the institution's commitment to cultivating students with Islamic morals and values, producing competent graduates, and contributing to community development. This commitment, which is explicitly reflected in the institutional profile, increases promotional efforts for target markets seeking Islamic-oriented education (Del Vecchio, 2017).

The profile page also highlights UNUGO's efforts in fostering collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders, including government agencies, industry and local communities. However, there is a lack of details or specific data regarding achievements, awards and important contributions that this page needs to address. Chernyavskaya and Safronenkova (2019) and Christensen et al. (2019) believe that the repetition of success stories and accomplishments can be used to establish a unique identity and to foreground reputation, especially for marketing purposes. Although the profile page states its commitment to quality education and community development, UNUGO could benefit from presenting concrete examples or statistics to substantiate the claims it has outlined and increase the institution's credibility.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the profile pages on the websites of UNG and UNUGO has revealed distinctive strategies employed by these institutions in portraying their identities and marketing strategies. UNG adopts a multifaceted approach, incorporating specific historical milestones, official documents, and a symbolic logo philosophy to establish credibility and signal adaptability, while UNUGO strategically positions itself as a reputable Islamic higher education institution, emphasizing religious foundations and academic excellence. Future research could explore the effectiveness

of various promotional strategies employed by educational institutions through their websites. A comprehensive investigation into the impact of specific elements, such as the use of dates, official documents, and symbols, on the perception of stakeholders would offer valuable insights. It is important to note that the present study has limitations, primarily in the scope of the websites analysed and the qualitative nature of the analysis. A quantitative approach and a more extensive sample of institutions would contribute to a more robust understanding on the topic.

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