

Content, Interaction, and Influencer Collaboration: Mechanisms of Muslimah Beauty Brand Image Construction on Instagram

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Abstract

Instagram has fundamentally transformed how halal cosmetic brands build identity and consumer trust in the world's largest Muslim market. This study investigates the mechanisms through which Wardah constructs its Muslimah beauty brand image via Instagram, integrating consumer, industry practitioner, and sales personnel perspectives. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a constructivism paradigm, data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight purposively selected informants comprising five active consumers, one professional make-up artist, one Wardah Beauty Agent, and one sales person. Source triangulation ensured data validity. Three primary mechanisms were identified: aesthetically consistent visual content communicating halal, modern, and inspirational values; responsive two-way interaction fostering consumer trust and loyalty; and strategic collaboration with hijab-wearing influencers reinforcing brand authenticity. The consistency between digital brand image and real-world product experience proves foundational to Wardah's brand equity. This study contributes to the literature on integrated marketing communication strategies of halal brands in emerging markets, and identifies a fourth dimension of brand image-religious image as cultural identity-beyond Biel's classical framework.

Keywords: Instagram, Brand Image, Muslimah Beauty, Wardah, IMC, Halal Cosmetics.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia's cosmetics industry grew by 21.9% in 2023 from 913 to 1,010 registered companies, within a digital ecosystem where Instagram ranks as the second most dominant social media platform, reaching 85.3% of national internet users. These two facts converge to reshape marketing competition: brand image in the cosmetics sector is no longer formed solely through conventional advertising but is dynamically constructed through visual content, interaction, and collaboration within the Instagram environment [1] [2]. Within this convergence, one segment grows disproportionately: halal cosmetics.

Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, represents a strategic market for halal cosmetic brands. Halal certification functions simultaneously as a push factor reducing religious anxiety among consumers and a pull factor building brand associations with product purity and safety [3]. Wardah, established in 1995 as Indonesia's first MUI-certified halal cosmetic brand under PT Paragon Technology and Innovation, operates this dynamic in a distinctive way. The brand does not merely sell beauty products; it constructs a social identity of the modern Indonesian Muslimah through its Beauty Moves You philosophy and three strategic pillars: Story of Usefulness, Halal Green Beauty Innovation, and Global and Local Collaboration [4]. With more than 3.2 million Instagram followers, Wardah constitutes a

highly relevant case for examining how halal brands leverage digital platforms for brand image construction.

The existing literature has identified several relevant mechanisms. Social media influencers (SMIs) consistently influence consumer perception and purchase decisions in the beauty industry [5] [6] [7]. The credibility of beauty gurus on social media specifically correlates with cosmetic product choices among young millennials [7], while value congruence between influencers and their followers directly strengthens purchase intention [8]. Brand content strategies on Instagram encompassing both content dimensions and responsiveness significantly affect digital consumer engagement [9], and brands' social media activities in aggregate correlate positively with sales and brand equity [2] [10]. In the halal context, certification and religious value communication form an additional brand image dimension not found in conventional brands [3] [11].

Nevertheless, three significant gaps remain in the literature. First, the majority of studies rely on quantitative survey methods that measure brand image variables atomistically, without tracing the mechanisms of brand image construction from the perspective of actual actors. Second, studies on halal cosmetic brand image predominantly focus on purchase intention [3] [11] rather than on the image formation process itself within digital platforms. Third, no study has simultaneously integrated the perspectives of

consumers, industry practitioners (MUAs), and marketing personnel (agents and sales staff) to obtain a comprehensive view of Wardah's brand image ecosystem on Instagram. This gap is theoretically significant since IMC demands message consistency across all touchpoints [1] and practically important given the projected continued growth of Indonesia's halal cosmetics market [12].

Drawing from this identified gap, the study poses the following research question: How does Wardah's Instagram construct and strengthen Muslimah beauty brand image through content strategy, interaction, and influencer collaboration? The study aims to analyze the mechanisms of Muslimah beauty brand image construction on Wardah's Instagram by integrating a multi-stakeholder perspective, and to elaborate its implications for IMC strategies of halal brands in emerging markets.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach with a constructivism paradigm [13] [14]. The paradigm choice rests on the assumption that brand image is a social construction formed through interaction among brand messages, consumer experiences, and social context not a purely objective entity measurable by standardized scales alone. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research question demands understanding of how and why the image construction process unfolds, rather than merely quantifying its magnitude.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allow flexible exploration of informants' experiences and interpretations beyond the prepared question framework [15]. Interviews were conducted in October 2025, with each session lasting 30–60 minutes, conducted face-to-face or via Google Meet according to informant preference, with audio recording consent obtained from all participants. Eight informants were selected purposively based on two criteria: direct and regular engagement with the @wardahbeauty Instagram account, and diverse role representation within the Wardah brand ecosystem. This role diversity consumers, professional MUA, brand agent, and sales personnel enables rich perspective triangulation. Data saturation was reached at the eighth informant, evidenced by the absence of new significant themes.

Data analysis followed the procedures data reduction through thematic coding of interview transcripts; data display in a findings matrix; and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation comparing and confirming the consistency of findings across the three informant groups [13]. Content observation of the @wardahbeauty Instagram account served as secondary data to corroborate informant statements. Next Informant Profile on Table 1.

Table 1. Informant Profile

Code	Role	Background	Date
R1	Wardah Consumer	Active user, Gen Z	20 Oct 2025
R2	Wardah Consumer	Active user, analytical	21 Oct 2025
R3	Wardah Consumer	Active user, 2 years	20 Oct 2025
R4	Wardah Consumer	Active user since 2018	13 Oct 2025
R5	Wardah Consumer	Active user since 2017	27 Oct 2025
R6	Make-Up Artist (MUA)	Professional, user since 2017	2 Oct 2025
R7	Wardah Beauty Agent (WBA)	Official agent since 2015	7 Oct 2025
R8	Wardah Sales Person	Sales staff since 2022	8 Oct 2025

3. Result and Discussion

Analysis of interview transcripts yielded four major themes that collectively explain the mechanisms through which Wardah strengthens Muslimah beauty brand image on Instagram: visual content strategy, brand interactivity, influencer collaboration, and digital-reality consistency. The first three themes emerged as active mechanisms of brand image construction, while the fourth emerged as a cross-perspective validation confirming the overall effectiveness of the strategy. All themes were consistently confirmed by informants across all three groups, indicating the strategic coherence of Wardah's IMC approach.

Visual Content as an Instrument of Brand Image Communication. Wardah's Instagram content operates well beyond the function of conventional promotion. Informants from all three groups independently identified two content characteristics that distinguish Wardah: aesthetic consistency and an educational orientation. R8 (sales person) described the visual architecture of the account with notable precision the feeds are very structured, the posts look cohesive, the captions are attractive and educational. Many consumers come to the store after seeing posts on Instagram. This statement is significant because it directly links digital content quality to offline consumer behavior an empirical validation of the effectiveness of Wardah's content strategy. R7 (WBA), who has access to internal brand strategy, confirmed that educational content tips, tricks, and tutorials forms the backbone of brand communication: "Educational content about new Wardah products and skincare or makeup tutorials really helps me explain the products to consumers. R6 (professional MUA) added a technical dimension: new formula tutorial content carries high informational value for practitioners, not only everyday consumers.

From the consumer side, R4 identified CSR and training content as builders of corporate social responsibility image: Wardah is not just selling products, they also show social responsibility. This indicates that Wardah's content simultaneously operates at two levels: product image (product quality and innovation) and corporate image (values and corporate

responsibility) two of the three brand image dimensions in [16] framework. These findings align with [9] argument that brand content strategies on social media particularly content that invites action and narrative significantly increase digital consumer engagement. Furthermore [17], in their meta-analysis, found that the strategic combination of firm-generated content and UGC produces stronger brand equity than either alone. Wardah operationalizes this logic by encouraging consumers to share their experiences in comments and their own stories, thereby organically expanding the reach of brand content.

Interactivity as a Trust-Building Mechanism. All consumer informants cited Wardah's Instagram responsiveness as a decisive differentiating factor. R4 articulated this qualitative difference precisely Comments on Wardah's Instagram are usually not like a typical admin; sometimes they also provide education to netizens. So it's not a robot replying. R4's observation reveals consumer expectations that go beyond automated responses: they seek substantive and personal interaction. R2 constructed a more systematic taxonomy of trust moments trust forms when the brand responds well to complaints, when educational content proves genuinely useful, and when positive reviews are consistently drawn from multiple independent sources. R7 (WBA) linked trust to cross-channel responsiveness: When Wardah frequently provides insights to consumers by quickly replying to comments on feeds, and responding to consumer questions on Wardah's WhatsApp.

R6 (MUA) provided an industry perspective that reinforces the finding: "I asked through DM and the response was good they also provided education to consumers." This indicates that Wardah's interactivity extends beyond end consumers to encompass industry partners, thereby broadening the brand's trust ecosystem. Theoretically, this pattern reflects the e-WOM principle within the IMC framework: when consumers feel heard, they tend to become voluntary brand advocates [18] [19] [20], demonstrated that trust built through high-quality e-WOM characterized by source expertise and information consistency directly enhances brand equity. The present findings extend this argument by showing that trust is not formed solely through consumer-to-consumer e-WOM, but also through active brand responses that deliver educational value.

Influencer Collaboration as a Brand Authenticity Amplifier. Wardah's influencer selection operates according to a logic that differs from mere reach considerations. Informants from all groups identified that Wardah consistently selects figures whose values and identities align with the brand's positioning particularly modern, confident, and inspirational hijab-wearing women. R1 stated that the selection of hijab-wearing influencers fits perfectly with Wardah's entire campaign. R7 (WBA) elaborated on its strategic dimension: "Influencers who wear hijab bring very inspirational messages that are consistent with a

modern style. R2 provided the most systematic analysis of the influencer trust hierarchy: Micro/nano influencers often have higher levels of trust because they are considered more authentic, honest, and 'like a friend.' Their reviews feel more personal. R2's observation confirms the influencer paradox in the literature: the larger the follower count, the lower the perceived authenticity, and consequently the weaker the influence on purchase intention [21]. Wardah appears to understand this dynamic by combining macro influencers for reach with micro influencers for trust depth a layered strategy validated by R3, who cited a specific beauty figure as the most influential person in her purchase decision.

R6 (MUA) added a dimension often absent from the literature: Wardah's collaboration with professional practitioners such as MUAs extends the brand's reach to an audience possessing high expertise and credibility a segment that is precisely the most skeptical toward brand claims. When a professional MUA recommends Wardah products to clients, the recommendation carries an authority qualitatively different from that of a typical influencer endorsement. These findings are reinforced by [8], who demonstrated that value congruence between influencers and followers positively and directly affects purchase intention. Their study on green cosmetics, confirmed that trust in the influencer and trust in the promoted brand are significant predictors of purchase intention [22]. Within the Public Relations and Publicity perspective of IMC, value-based and selective influencer selection produces organic social proof far more effective than paid conventional advertising [23].

Digital-Reality Consistency as Brand Image Validation. The most significant finding of this study is the consistency reported by all informants between Wardah's image on Instagram and the actual product experience in the real world. This consistency is not merely about visual alignment; it concerns the truthfulness of brand claims. R5 stated explicitly: "It has been very successful and proven when I tried Wardah products myself. R6 (MUA), as a professional user, provided an even more authoritative validation: "What I see on social media is the same as the actual product from the packaging to the ingredients used. It is comfortable to apply on my clients and suitable for a natural look.

R4 revealed the temporal dimension of this consistency From when I first got to know Wardah until now, the brand image shown on social media has always been consistent, even as it continues to follow the times and trends. This temporal consistency is crucial because it is an indicator of brand integrity the ability to maintain core identity while adapting to trend changes. R8 (sales person) confirmed the concrete business impact many consumers come after seeing posts on Instagram and feel it suits them after trying the product directly." This demonstrates that Instagram functions as an effective pre-sales channel building expectations that are subsequently fulfilled by the actual product.

Theoretically, this consistency constitutes evidence of the success of Wardah's IMC strategy. [1] affirm that integrating social media into a consistent IMC strategy directly determines brand identity, brand image, and company performance. Within [16] framework, Wardah's message consistency simultaneously reinforces all three brand image dimensions: corporate image (halal commitment and sustainability), product image (proven quality), and user image (modern, confident Muslimah). The integration of all three dimensions is what creates a brand image that is powerful and difficult for competitors to replicate.

Constructing Muslimah Beauty Brand Image: Halal, Modern, and Inclusive. Beyond the mechanistic findings above, this study identifies the Muslimah beauty brand image constructed by Wardah as a synthesis of three values historically considered difficult to combine: halal (religious), modernity (contemporary), and inclusivity (cross-segment). All informants identified halal as the non-negotiable core value. R1 articulated its psychological effect: Wardah is safe for skin, halal. So if you want to try things out, you feel confident, not afraid of side effects." This reveals that halal certification functions as a risk reducer lowering psychological barriers to trying new products.

However, what distinguishes Wardah from other halal brands is its ability to articulate halal within an aspirational modern frame. R4 described this unique value proposition: A classy woman, an independent woman, but with prices accessible to everyone. R6 (MUA) and R7 (WBA) from the industry side confirmed the success of this synthesis: Wardah shows that Muslimah beauty does not mean closed off from creativity it can be modern and confident. Brand inclusivity was confirmed by R5, who noted that Wardah products are formulated for all Indonesian women with the diversity of their skin tones a proposition that extends beyond the hijab-wearing Muslimah segment.

This value synthesis is strategically relevant in the context of global halal beauty trends. Noted that Muslim Generation Z increasingly seek products that integrate halal values with sustainability and modernity a trend anticipated by Wardah through its Halal Green Beauty Innovation philosophy [12]. Confirmed that Indonesia leads halal beauty trend adoption in Asia with consistent projected growth [12]. In this competitive landscape, the brand image constructed by Wardah on Instagram is not merely a marketing instrument, but a symbolic representation of the identity of the contemporary Indonesian Muslimah an achievement that transcends commercial function and enters the cultural dimension.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Instagram serves as a strategic platform for Wardah's brand image construction through three synergistically operating mechanisms: consistent and educational visual content,

responsive brand interactivity, and value-based influencer collaboration. These mechanisms do not operate linearly; rather, they mutually reinforce one another within an integrated communication ecosystem manifesting the principles of IMC in digital form. The consistency between digital brand image and real-world product experience, confirmed by informants from diverse roles, constitutes the most significant indicator of strategic success. The theoretical contributions of this study are threefold. First, it elaborates the mechanisms of halal brand image construction on Instagram from a multi-stakeholder perspective something absent in a literature dominated by single-perspective quantitative studies. Second, it demonstrates that in the context of halal brands, brand image possesses a fourth dimension beyond [18] classical framework: religious image functioning simultaneously as a risk reducer and a cultural identity marker. Third, it identifies the macro-micro influencer combination strategy as an optimal approach for balancing reach and authenticity a finding relevant for other brands operating in value-driven markets. This study recommends that halal cosmetic brands seeking to replicate Wardah's success prioritize aesthetic and value message consistency across all Instagram content; a substantive and educational interactive response system, not merely reactive; and influencer curation based on value alignment rather than follower count alone. Future research is encouraged to explore the specific effects of individual Instagram features (reels, stories, live) on brand image dimensions using experimental designs, and to conduct comparative studies across halal cosmetic brands in Southeast Asian markets to identify contextual moderating factors.

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