

Designing the ACWA Logo as Visual Identity and Branding for the International Academic Collaboration Organization

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explain the collaborative process carried out by students of the Faculty of Business, Law, and Social Sciences (FBHIS), Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, in designing the official logo of the Association for Collaboration in Worldwide Academia (ACWA) as a representation of its visual identity and international branding strategy. **Method:** A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through several systematic stages, including needs analysis, brainstorming, visual exploration, iterative design refinement, and final validation with ACWA representatives. Data were collected through discussions, feedback sessions, and direct coordination with the partner institution. **Results:** The findings show that the final logo successfully embodies ACWA's core values of academic collaboration, openness to knowledge, and intercultural synergy. The chosen visual elements stacked books, a bookmark icon, sans-serif typography, and a yellow black color palette effectively communicate ACWA's academic orientation and international identity. ACWA expressed strong satisfaction with the final design, noting its alignment with the initial brief and its readiness for implementation as soon as the organization's legal and digital infrastructures are officially launched. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how visual communication theory, particularly Kress and van Leeuwen's representational framework, can be integrated into community service activities to produce a collaboratively constructed and culturally sensitive visual identity for an emerging international academic consortium.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization of higher education, cross-border collaboration between universities has become one of the key pillars in strengthening academic networks, expanding access to knowledge, and building institutional reputation at the international level. The dynamics of inter-university collaboration have given rise to various forms of cooperation, ranging from academic exchanges and joint scientific publications to the development of interdisciplinary learning programs [1]. One concrete manifestation of this spirit of collaboration is the establishment of the Association for Collaboration in Worldwide Academia (ACWA), an international organization focused on strengthening academic cooperation between universities in six countries: Indonesia, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Uzbekistan.

As an organization comprising educational institutions from various cultures and academic backgrounds, ACWA requires a visual identity that represents a spirit of togetherness, professionalism, and the integration of academic values across nations [2]. In the context of visual communication, a logo is not merely an aesthetic element, but a representative symbol that reflects the vision, values, and character of the organization [3]. A logo designed with a strategic approach can build a positive image, enhance credibility, and strengthen brand recognition in the eyes of the international public [4]. According to [5] in visual communication, images and symbols function not only as

aesthetic elements, but also as tools for conveying social and cultural meanings to the audience, emphasizing organized visual structures and representations that enable the audience to interpret messages contextually.

Recognizing the importance of this aspect, a group of students from the Faculty of Business, Law, and Social Sciences (FBHIS) at Muhammadiyah University Sidoarjo (Umsida) carried out a community service program in the form of designing the ACWA logo. The activity was carried out over a one-month period in August 2025 on the Umsida campus, under the guidance of lecturer Dr. Poppy Febriana, M.Med.Kom. The program aimed not only to produce a representative design but also to serve as a collaborative learning platform for students to apply visual communication theory and professional design principles in a real-world context [6]. Through this project, students acted as designers bridging the needs of international partners with creative and scientific approaches.

The stages of the activity were carried out systematically, involving several key processes, namely logo requirements analysis, idea brainstorming, visual concept design, design revision, and final validation with ACWA [7]. The analysis process was conducted to understand the organization's core values and the message it wanted to communicate through visual symbols [8]. The brainstorming stage provided a space for exploring creative ideas based on literature research and global design references [9]. Meanwhile, the revision and validation stage serves as a forum for dialogue between the student team and partners, ensuring that the final result reflects an aesthetic consensus and philosophical meaning in line with ACWA's vision. Through this project, students not only apply visual communication skills and professional design principles in a real-world context, but also play an active role in designing a visual identity that can strengthen global academic diplomacy.

From an academic perspective, this activity shows that logo design not only functions as a graphic product, but also as a social representation of collectively constructed values [10]. In the realm of organizational communication, logos have the ability to shape public perception and strengthen emotional ties between institutions and their audience [11]. Therefore, this project is a manifestation of the application of visual communication science that is oriented towards the needs of society, while also demonstrating how international academic branding can begin with simple elements such as symbols and colors [12].

This community service activity also reflects the active role of Umsida students in global academic diplomacy through creative works. By promoting the value of cross-cultural collaboration, this project is a tangible contribution by students to strengthening the image of Islamic educational institutions in the international arena. In addition to producing visual products, this activity also raises students' awareness of the importance of cross-cultural communication and symbolic sensitivity in designing the identity of global organizations [13]. Conceptually, this study seeks to analyze in depth the collaborative process of FBHIS Umsida students in designing the ACWA logo as a representation of the visual identity and branding strategy of an international academic

organization. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study examines the collaborative dynamics between students and partners, the values internalized in the design, and the contribution of the work to strengthening the institution's image at the global level.

Thus, this community service activity is not only oriented towards the final result in the form of a logo, but also towards the process of social and intellectual learning that combines design theory, visual communication practice, and international collaboration ethics. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of a design-based community service model in higher education, while strengthening Umsida's position as a university committed to innovation and global academic collaboration.

RESEARCH METHOD

This community service activity was carried out using a collaborative participatory approach. The method used in this community service activity is in line with the idea of participatory design, which is a method that actively involves partners in the design process rather than just accepting the final results.

Through a collaborative participatory approach, students act as designers and visual communicators who actively interact with international partners, namely the Association for Collaboration in Worldwide Academia (ACWA). The activity will take place over a month in August 2025 at Muhammadiyah University Sidoarjo, under the direct guidance of supervising lecturer Dr. Poppy Febriana, M.Med.Kom. This method emphasizes student involvement in all stages of the creative process, from identifying the organization's visual needs, exploring ideas, creating design concepts, to validating the final results with partners [14].

The first stage began with a logo needs analysis. In this phase, the student team conducted a study of ACWA's profile and objectives, including its core values, vision for international academic collaboration, and the character of its founding member countries. This analysis was conducted through interviews and online communication with ACWA representatives to understand how the institution wanted its identity to be perceived globally. This needs assessment is important so that the logo design is not limited to aesthetic aspects, but also functions as a representation of the organization's identity and communication direction [15]. The results of the analysis showed that the partners wanted a logo that represented the spirit of cross-cultural collaboration, openness to knowledge, and a progressive academic orientation.

This analysis process aims to identify the core values that ACWA wishes to emphasize, as well as the symbolic messages that will be translated into visual designs. The next stage is brainstorming and visual exploration, where students explore a variety of design references relevant to the world of academia and global education. This process resulted in six logo models (1A-3B) with different styles and philosophies. Each model not only highlights aesthetic form, but also has deep symbolic value. For example, some designs feature stacks of books as a symbol of the accumulation of knowledge that grew

from the diverse academic backgrounds of ACWA's founders. The bookmark icon element is also featured to symbolize the spirit of capturing and documenting scientific phenomena, in line with the organization's goal of publishing collaborative publications across countries.

In addition, students also considered typography as an important element in building visual character. The choice of sans-serif font was based on functional and psychological considerations, namely to convey a modern, innovative, and progressive impression in line with ACWA's image as an international academic institution that is open to scientific developments. The main colors used, yellow and black, were also chosen based on semiotic considerations. Yellow represents the continent of Asia, often referred to as the Yellow Continent, symbolizing optimism, enthusiasm, and togetherness. Meanwhile, black reflects formality, authority, and intellectual maturity, which are synonymous with the academic world.

After the exploration phase was complete, an iterative design and revision process was carried out. Students used professional design software such as Adobe Illustrator to produce digital versions of each logo concept. Each model was then tested in various visual contexts, such as digital media displays, academic publications, and print formats. ACWA partners provided input in each online discussion session, assessing aspects of readability, symbolic philosophy, and suitability with organizational values. This process demonstrated the synergy between graphic design science and cross-cultural communication, as each revision took into account the visual perceptions of representatives from member countries with different cultural backgrounds. Each model was then tested in various visual contexts, such as digital media displays, academic publications, and print formats. ACWA partners also provided input in each online discussion session, helping students revise and adjust their designs to reflect symbolic philosophy and organizational values.

The final stage was the validation of the final design, in which partners selected the logo that best represented ACWA's character and objectives. This validation process was conducted through open discussions that assessed three main aspects: the suitability of the symbol's meaning to the organization's vision, the consistency of visual elements with professional design standards, and the logo's potential for adaptation in various international publication media. The selected logo is then finalized and officially submitted as ACWA's visual identity, complete with color guidelines, typography, and the underlying design philosophy.

Through this collaborative participatory method, community service activities not only produce visually appealing products, but also foster students' conceptual understanding of the importance of design as a medium for academic diplomacy. The process of creating the ACWA logo is a concrete example of the application of visual communication science combined with the value of community service, where creativity, cultural sensitivity, and professional responsibility come together in a scientific activity with a global impact. With this collaborative method, students not only produce a

visually functional logo, but also learn the importance of design as a tool for visual diplomacy in the context of international academia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. ACWA Logo Design Process

The ACWA logo design process was carried out through a series of systematic stages, beginning with an analysis of visual requirements conducted through communication with partners. At this stage, students identified ACWA's core values and the organization's need for a visual identity that could represent cross-border academic collaboration. The next stage was brainstorming and visual exploration, which resulted in six alternative logo concepts with variations in symbols, colors, and composition.

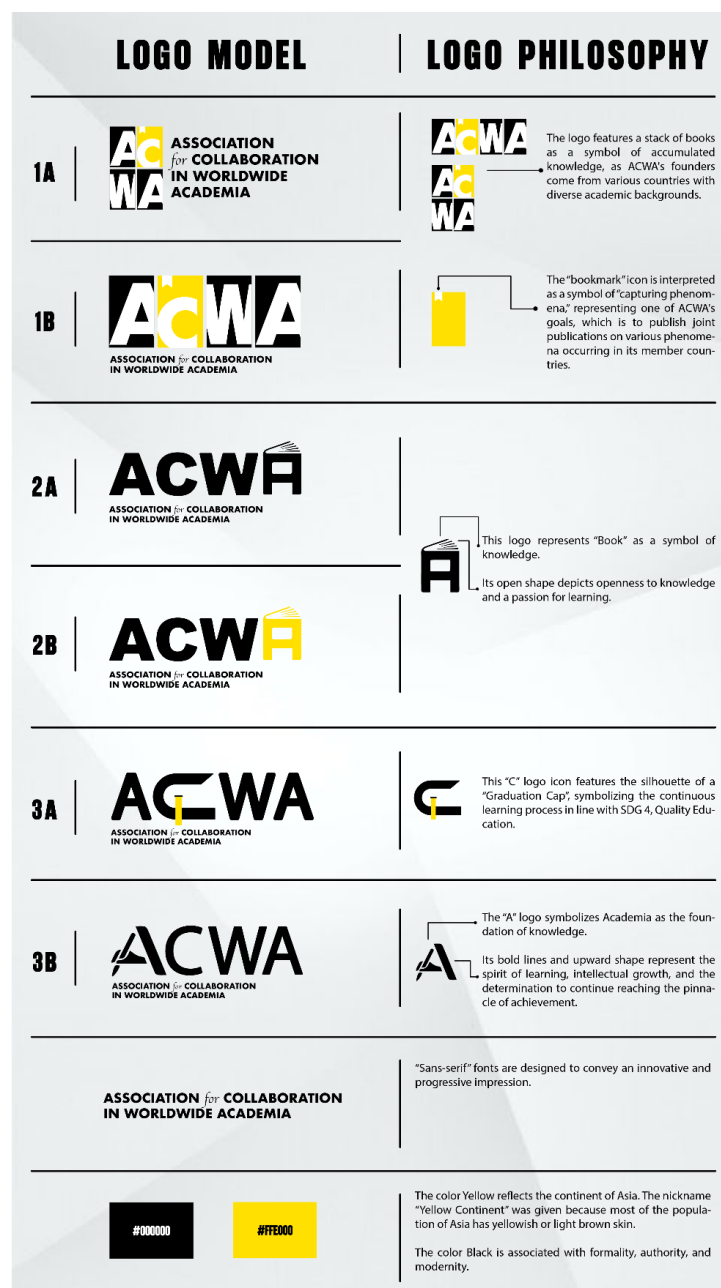


Figure 1. Six initial ACWA logo concepts resulting from visual exploration.

After undergoing a process of readability and visual relevance testing, one logo was selected as the final design based on its level of suitability to the partner's initial brief. The changes made to the initial design were not significant because the partner's instructions from the outset were very clear and structured, especially regarding the elements of books, bookmarks, colors, and layout [16].



Figure 2. The final ACWA logo established as the organization's official visual identity.

2. Visual Elements of the ACWA Logo

The final design features a stack of books as a symbol of the organization's accumulated knowledge and academic background, as well as a bookmark icon representing the recording of scientific phenomena through joint publications. Yellow was chosen to represent optimism and the Asian region, while black reflects formality and academic credibility. Sans-serif typography is used to convey a modern, open, and progressive impression.



Figure 3. Analysis of the visual elements of the ACWA logo.



Figure 4. Typography for ACWA Logo (Futura Bold and Apple Chencery Font).

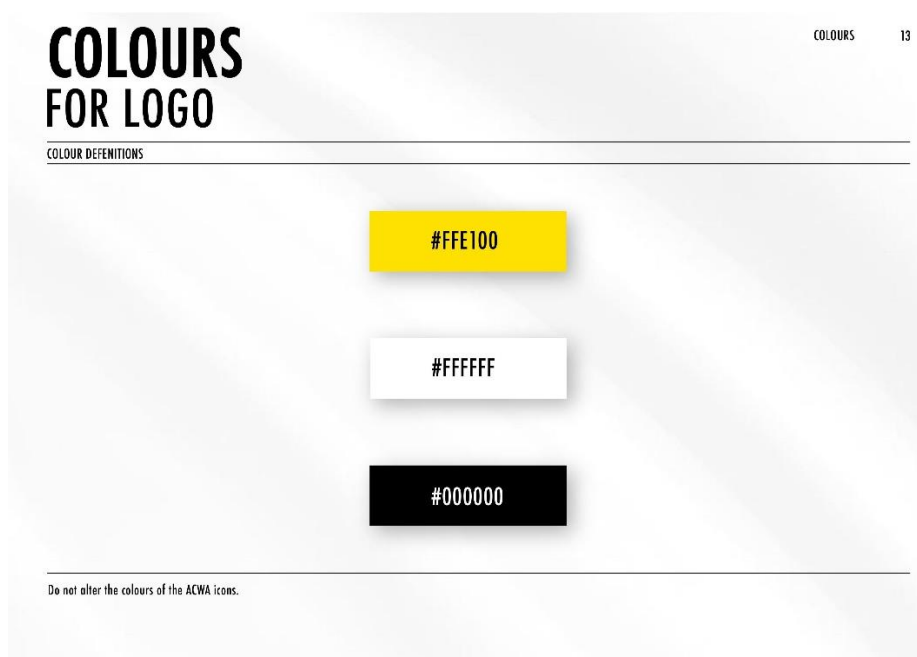


Figure 5. Main color palette of the ACWA logo.

3. Partner Response and Logo Implementation

ACWA responded positively to the final logo and stated that the design was fully in line with the brief. The logo is currently being used internally but has not been officially launched as the organization's legal process is still ongoing. ACWA is also developing a website and social media as the association's official publication channels, which will be used to release the logo to the public.

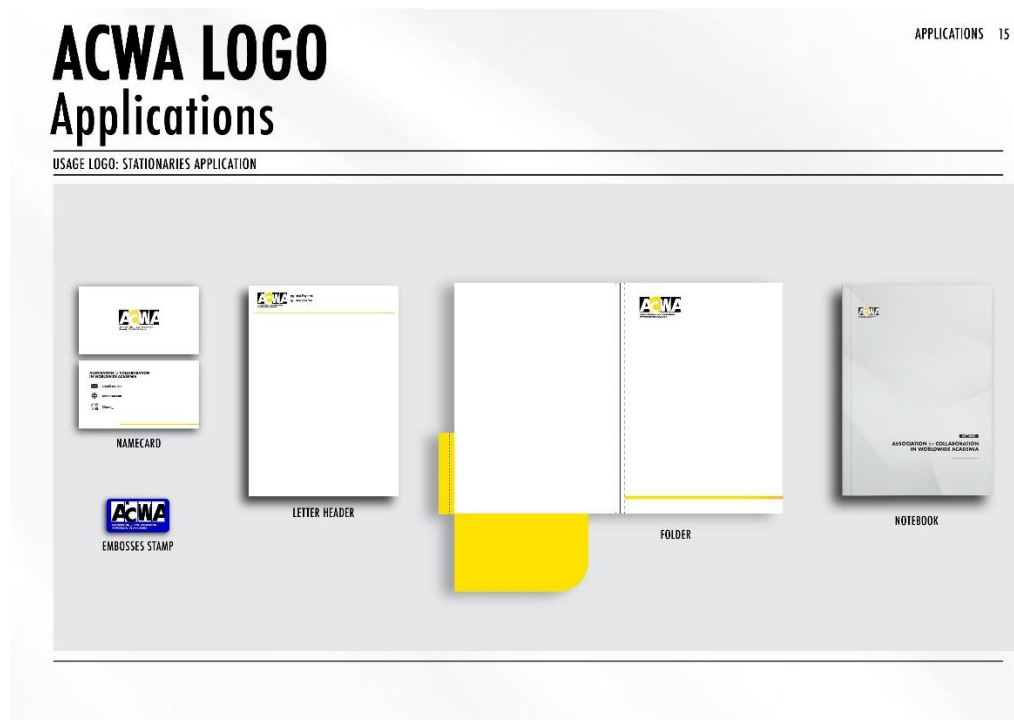


Figure 6. Example of the application of the ACWA logo.

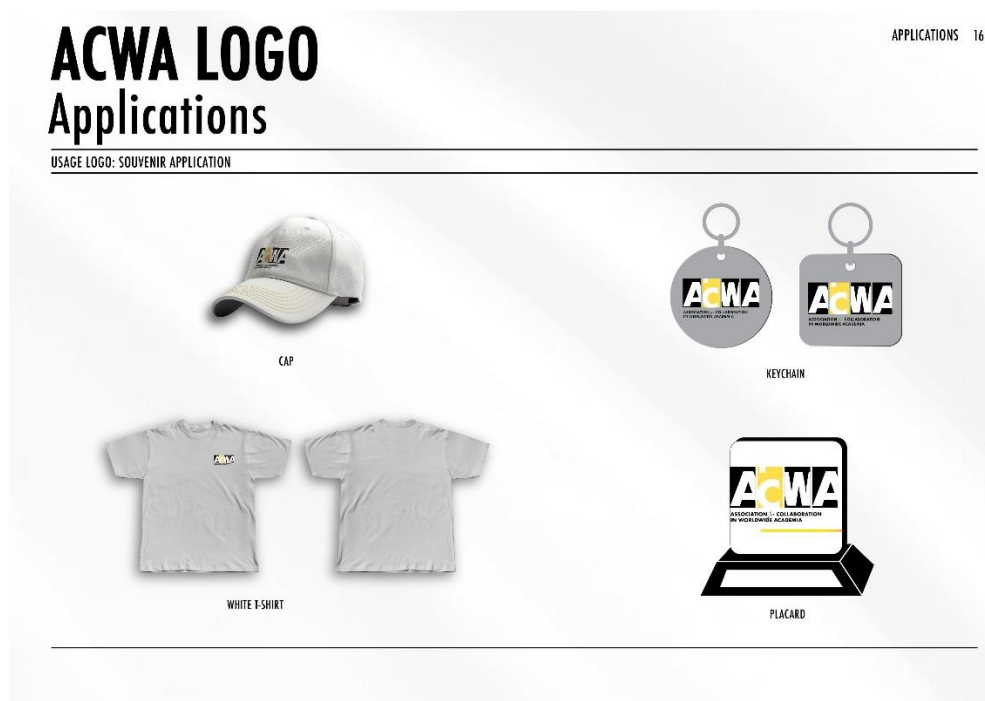


Figure 7. Example of the application of the ACWA logo on merchandise.

Discussion

The results of the ACWA logo design show that the creative process carried out by FBHIS Umsida students not only produced visual products but also formed a construction of meaning relevant to the organization's identity. When analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual communication perspective, the entire design process, from idea exploration to logo finalization, incorporates representational, compositional, and interactional practices that construct social and cultural messages in a structured

manner. Within the framework of representational meaning, the symbols used in the logo, such as the stack of books and the bookmark icon, serve as direct representations of ACWA's orientation as an international academic organization that upholds knowledge, scientific documentation, and the publication of global phenomena. These elements show that the visual structure of the logo has been designed not only for aesthetics but also to convey substantive meaning related to the organization's functions, objectives, and values.

In terms of compositional meaning, the integration of yellow and black contributes significantly to ACWA's visual image. Yellow, which is synonymous with the representation of Asia, conveys a sense of optimism and cultural diversity, while black conveys a sense of formality, stability, and academic credibility. This color composition reinforces ACWA's position as a globally oriented organization that remains grounded in the cultural values of its founding region. The placement of symbols, the proportion of elements, and the choice of sans-serif typography demonstrate a visual structure that emphasizes readability, modernity, and a progressive feel. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's theory, this compositional structure allows the audience to grasp the relationship between elements and understand the message being conveyed effectively.

In terms of interaction, the ACWA logo design establishes a communicative relationship between the organization and its audience. The use of simple yet bold sans-serif typography gives it a professional yet inclusive feel, reflecting the organization's values of openness to cross-cultural collaboration. This interactive impression is further reinforced by the symbolic meaning of the book and bookmark, which represent the activities of reading, researching, and recording phenomena. These symbols build an emotional connection between the organization and global academics as the target audience, given that these activities are an integral part of the academic world.

The collaborative process between students and international partners is also an important part of the dynamics of this discussion. Within the framework of visual communication theory, meaning production does not occur unilaterally, but is the result of negotiation between the message creator (designer) and the message recipient (partner). Intensive discussions during the brainstorming and revision stages show the existence of collective meaning construction, in which students adjust their designs according to the interpretations and needs of partners from various countries. This proves that logo design not only functions as a visual output, but also as a practice of cultural interaction that requires cross-cultural understanding. This discussion reinforces the answer to the first problem statement, namely that the collaboration process not only produces a logo, but also shapes a shared understanding of ACWA's identity.

From an organizational branding perspective, the ACWA logo design has proven to have a visual structure that is capable of building a consistent organizational image. The selected visual elements provide a unique, recognizable identity that is capable of illustrating the academic values that ACWA wishes to highlight. In the context of international branding, the consistency of this visual meaning is very important because it allows the organization to build a positive perception, strengthen its academic

legitimacy, and increase public awareness of the organization's identity. The positive response from ACWA's partners shows that the visual elements in the logo have successfully represented the character of the organization, thereby strengthening its function as an effective branding tool.

In addition, although the logo has not yet been fully implemented in public media pending legal proceedings, the discussion shows that ACWA has positioned the logo as a key part of building its digital identity through its website and social media. This confirms that the logo has great potential to become the face of the organization in global communications, especially after its official launch. Thus, this discussion not only highlights the logo's function as a visual identity, but also outlines how the design will play a strategic role in shaping the organization's image in the future.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study demonstrates that the ACWA logo designed by FBHIS Umsida students emerged from a systematic and collaborative visual communication process, encompassing needs analysis, brainstorming, visual exploration, iterative design, and joint validation with international partners, confirming that visual meaning is constructed through mutual negotiation between designers and users as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. **Implication :** The resulting logo, incorporating stacked book imagery, bookmark symbols, sans-serif typography, and a yellow-black color scheme, effectively conveys ACWA's identity as an international academic collaboration organization that values openness, professionalism, and knowledge development, while also strengthening the organization's image and providing students with practical experience in applying visual communication design within a global context. **Limitation :** Despite receiving positive feedback from ACWA partners and being aligned with the organization's branding needs, the logo had not yet been implemented in public media due to pending legal processes and the absence of an official launch. **Future Research :** Future research may explore the long-term impact of the logo's public implementation on ACWA's organizational branding and stakeholder engagement after legal approval and official dissemination across various communication platforms.

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