



SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE OF RESTORATION AND FANTASY THEMES IN STRENGTHENING THE NASDEM PARTY'S BRAND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The National Democratic Party (NasDem) emerged by promoting the "Restoration of Indonesia" movement, an idea intended to revive the spirit of nationalism as envisioned in the 1945 Proclamation of Independence. The slogan "Restoration of Indonesia" distinguishes NasDem from other political parties; however, more than a decade later, tangible improvements in national and political conditions remain limited. The restoration concept has not been fully institutionalized within the party's internal structure, creating a gap between political discourse and practical implementation. This study examines how NasDem's symbolic cues communicate the idea of restoration, the fantasy themes that emerge in this communication, and how symbolic convergence occurs between party elites and constituents. It also analyzes the extent to which a communication model based on symbolic convergence and fantasy themes strengthens party brand identity. Grounded in Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) developed by Ernest G. Bormann, and reinforced by Kevin Lane Keller's branding theory, this research adopts a post-positivist paradigm with a qualitative explanatory approach. Data were collected through online literature review, observation, expert interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings show that fantasy themes and symbolic cues are strategically used to communicate the "Restoration of Indonesia" narrative. Symbolic convergence occurs through restorative communication mechanisms aimed at building shared understanding between party elites and constituents. This communication model contributes significantly to strengthening brand identity. However, the study also reveals that inconsistencies between fantasy narratives and internal political practices may undermine the credibility and sustainability of the party's brand identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democratic politics, competition among political parties extends beyond ideological positioning and policy proposals to include the construction of symbolic meaning and emotional resonance. Political communication increasingly operates within a branding logic, where parties seek to establish distinctive identities that are easily recognized, emotionally appealing, and cognitively meaningful to voters. As traditional forms of political identification weaken, symbolic narratives, slogans, and visual cues become essential tools for mobilization and long-term loyalty.

Political branding literature emphasizes that a party's success depends not only on rational evaluations of performance but also on its ability to create shared meanings and narratives that resonate with collective aspirations. In this context, symbols function as shortcuts for complex political ideas, while narratives provide coherence and continuity across diverse communication channels. The challenge for political actors lies in ensuring that these symbolic constructions are consistently interpreted by both party elites and the broader electorate.

The NasDem Party represents a compelling case for examining symbolic communication and political branding in an emerging democracy. Since its establishment, the party has promoted the slogan "Restoration of Indonesia" (*Restorasi Indonesia*) as its core narrative. This concept is framed as a moral and political movement aimed at renewing democratic values, governance ethics, and national direction. Despite its sustained use, the restoration narrative has not fully translated into a strong and differentiated brand identity in the public sphere. Electoral performance and public discourse suggest that the symbolic and emotional linkage between the party and its constituents remains uneven.

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), developed by Ernest G. Bormann, offers a theoretical framework for understanding how shared narratives and dramatized messages create collective meaning. SCT posits that group cohesion emerges when individuals share fantasy themes—stories that dramatize events, characters, and values—and integrate them into a broader rhetorical vision. Through repetition and circulation, these fantasies can converge, producing a shared symbolic reality. Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) provides a methodological tool to identify and examine these narratives within political discourse.

This study applies SCT and FTA to analyze how the NasDem Party constructs and disseminates its restoration narrative, how fantasy themes are embedded in political communication, and to what extent symbolic convergence contributes to the strengthening of party brand identity. By focusing on the intersection of symbolic communication and political branding, this research seeks to contribute to broader discussions on narrative politics and identity construction in contemporary democracies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in a post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist approach acknowledges that social reality is constructed through meaning-making processes while maintaining systematic and rigorous analytical procedures. This paradigm is particularly suitable for examining symbolic communication, where interpretations, narratives, and shared meanings play a central role.

2.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative case study design focusing on the NasDem Party as a single, information-rich case. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of symbolic communication practices, narrative strategies, and brand identity construction within a specific political and cultural context.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using multiple techniques to ensure triangulation and enhance credibility:

1. In-depth interviews with party elites, communication strategists, and political communication experts to capture elite-level intentions and interpretations.
2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving party cadres and supporters to explore audience reception and shared meanings.
3. Document analysis of party manifestos, campaign materials, speeches, slogans, official websites, and social media content.
4. Observational analysis of offline campaign activities and digital communication practices, particularly on social media platforms.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) within the framework of Symbolic Convergence Theory. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Symbolic cues, fantasy themes, rhetorical visions, and fantasy chains were identified and categorized. These elements were then analyzed to assess the degree of symbolic convergence between party elites and constituents.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Symbolic Cues of the NasDem Party

The NasDem Party needs to reevaluate its logo and color design to ensure full alignment with the restoration narrative. The dominant color blue and the star symbol should be consistently associated with a message of systemic renewal, not simply a visual identity. This recommendation includes establishing strict branding guidelines, including the use of color, font, and layout in all campaign materials, to avoid distortion of meaning. The use of the mosque dome symbol



should also be reviewed, as it potentially contradicts the party's principle of inclusivity as a secular nationalist organization.

To reach younger generations, NasDem must develop digital content that is not only informative but also interactive, such as augmented reality (AR) visualizing "post-restoration Indonesia" or an online quiz about party values. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels can be used to convey restoration messages in short, viral formats. However, content should be designed to spark substantive discussion, not just image-building, by involving independent experts in the creation of the material.

Any restoration symbol (e.g., the slogan "Working for Indonesia") should be supported by concrete evidence in the form of measurable programs. For example, anti-corruption campaigns should be demonstrated through transparent party financial reports or active involvement in public policy oversight. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of "actionable symbolism" — symbols that are directly linked to concrete actions, such as associating the color blue with publicly verifiable transparency initiatives.

To avoid fragmentation of meaning, NasDem needs to create a cadre training module that unifies interpretations of restoration at the central and regional levels. This module should include case studies on how to translate "political moral restoration" in local contexts, for example through community service programs or public accountability forums. Cadres at the regional level also need to be involved in creating restoration symbols that are relevant to local cultures without compromising the party's core message.

NasDem can use current issues (such as corruption scandals or controversial policies) as "symbolic momentum" to strengthen the restoration narrative. However, responses must be accompanied by concrete policy proposals, not mere rhetoric. For example, when criticizing oligarchic practices, the party could simultaneously launch an online platform that monitors the involvement of political elites in business. This approach transforms symbols into credible advocacy tools.

Rather than relying solely on media coverage, NasDem needs to build a community of supporters who actively develop and disseminate the meaning of restoration. Offline/online discussion forums, political classes for young voters, or creative content competitions based on restoration values can provide avenues for participation. This community must be given space to provide critical input, rather than simply become a one-way disseminator of messages.

Restoration symbols must be packaged differently for different voter segments:

- Urban voters: Use data and infographics to demonstrate the impact of restoration on economic development.
- Rural voters: Link restoration to symbols of local wisdom (e.g., "gotong royong" as a form of political participation).
- Generation Z: Utilize memes or futuristic narratives about "digital democracy."
- The party's communications team needs to be trained to identify the symbolic needs of each segment.

To avoid appearing manipulative, NasDem must involve academics from various disciplines in formulating measurable restoration indicators. For example, collaborate with universities to create a "level of democratic restoration" index that will serve as a benchmark for public evaluation. This collaboration will provide a theoretical basis for the symbols used by the party.

NasDem needs to develop a digital opinion monitoring system that analyzes public response to its symbolic cues. Tools such as sentiment analysis can be used to evaluate whether the restoration message is truly understood as intended. The analysis results should inform monthly communication strategy revisions, not just annual evaluations.

The NasDem color blue and logo risk becoming monotonous after years of use. The party could consider seasonal symbol variations (for example, adding visual elements during election campaigns) or color adaptations for specific programs (e.g., dark blue for legal issues, light blue for education). However, changes must maintain the key identifying elements.

NasDem can enrich its symbolic cues by forging tactical alliances with like-minded civil society movements (e.g., budget transparency groups). This collaboration provides access to symbols already trusted by the public, such as the anti-corruption banner. However, the party must avoid co-optation that could undermine the movement's autonomy.

3.2. NasDem Party Fantasy Themes

The NasDem Party needs to strengthen its fantasy theme of "political moral restoration" by linking it more concretely to the party's work program. Currently, this theme remains abstract and relies too much on rhetoric. Our recommendation is to develop measurable indicators of success, such as the number of anti-corruption policies implemented or transparency in the cadre recruitment process. This way, the fantasy of clean politics will not remain merely an empty narrative but can be verified by the public through the party's concrete actions.

The current theme of resistance to oligarchy relies too heavily on black-and-white dichotomies. NasDem needs to enrich this theme by demonstrating concrete evidence of the party's efforts to disrupt oligarchic networks, such as by publishing a list of party donors or rejecting the involvement of large businesspeople in internal decision-making processes. This theme must also be balanced with constructive criticism of the system, not simply attacks on political opponents.

The fantasy of meritocracy and equal opportunity needs to be supported by visible programs, such as scholarships for cadres from marginalized backgrounds or an open recruitment system that is open to public scrutiny. The party could create a digital platform that displays profiles of cadres from various backgrounds and their selection process, so the public can directly observe the implementation of its espoused values.

The current theme of national awakening is too Javanese-centric. NasDem needs to develop variations of this theme that are appropriate to the local context in various regions, by connecting it to symbols of local wisdom and the history of regional struggles. For example, in Papua, this theme could be linked to the spirit of equitable development, while in Aceh, it could be linked to the value of post-conflict peace.

The fantasy of deliberative democracy must be realized through innovative participation mechanisms, not just mere jargon. Our recommendation is to develop a digital platform for policy consultations with constituents, or to hold regular citizen forums in various regions with a clear agenda and transparent follow-up. The outcomes of each forum should be integrated into the party's decision-making process.

The theme of political modernization should not be limited to digital discourse but should demonstrate concrete examples, such as the use of blockchain in internal party elections or a high-tech financial reporting system. Parties can be pioneers in implementing technology for transparency, so that the fantasy of modern politics is truly realized in organizational practice.

3.3. Symbolic Convergence Through Restorative Communication of the NasDem Party

The current symbolic convergence process is still dominated by one-way communication from elites to constituents. The NasDem Party needs to develop a permanent dialogue platform that allows constituents not only to receive but also to reinterpret and provide input on restorative symbols. A digital town hall meeting forum with interactive features, or a crowdsourcing platform for developing the party's narrative, could be a solution. This mechanism would transform convergence from a passive process to a participatory one, where symbolic meaning is truly constructed collaboratively.

Restorative communication should not only occur during campaigns but should become part of the party's organizational structure. Our recommendation is to establish a special "Symbolic Communication" division tasked with continuously monitoring, evaluating, and developing the symbolic convergence process. This division should consist of a multidisciplinary team (political communication, anthropologists, social psychologists) capable of bridging elites and the mass base in creating shared meaning.

Party elites need clear restorative communication guidelines on the use of core symbols (such as terms like "restoration" and "systemic change"), but with room for contextual adaptation. These guidelines should include: (1) a consistent list of keywords, (2) sample narratives for various situations, and (3) a prohibition on the use of terms that could lead to multiple negative interpretations. Regular training is needed to ensure that cadres at all levels understand the symbolic essence of the messages being conveyed.

To measure the effectiveness of convergence, NasDem needs to develop a monitoring system that captures constituents' interpretations of party symbols. Technologies such as sentiment analysis on social media or mobile applications for rating message comprehension can be used. Data should be analyzed periodically to adjust communication strategies, prioritizing regions or demographic groups that demonstrate low symbolic understanding.

Rather than relying solely on vertical communication, NasDem could establish community discussion groups with training to act as "interpretive bridges" between elites and ordinary constituents. These communities would serve as living laboratories where the symbolic meaning of restoration is tested, critiqued, and developed according to the local context. Member diversity (age, profession, background) should be maintained to gain a holistic perspective.

Every constituent interaction with the party (complaints service, legal consultation, empowerment programs) should be designed as a vehicle for symbolic convergence. For example, by incorporating consistent visual elements (logo, colors) and verbal elements (signature greetings, narratives) at every point of contact. Positive experiences in receiving services will strengthen the association between party symbols and the promised restoration values.

The convergence process will be more effective if symbols of restoration are linked to shared emotional moments. NasDem could create "experience marketing" programs such as tours to historic sites of reform or meetings with victims of systemic injustice whom the party has helped. These emotional experiences will serve as a strong anchor for the symbolic meaning it wishes to convey.

When distortions of meaning or misuse of symbols occur, the party needs to have a rapid response protocol that strengthens convergence. For example, holding a clarifying press conference involving constituents or creating



educational content on correct interpretations. Transparency in acknowledging and correcting errors will strengthen the credibility of the convergence process.

The convergence process often fails to reach marginalized groups due to language and cultural barriers. NasDem needs to develop alternative versions of its key symbols that are appropriate for people with disabilities (tactile symbols for the blind), indigenous communities (local cultural analogies), or less educated groups (simple visuals). This inclusivity will broaden the reach of symbolic convergence.

Symbolic convergence must occur consistently across both domains. Every symbol appearing on social media should have a counterpart in offline activities, and vice versa. For example, digital campaign hashtags should also be visible on banners for field activities, or the party's color avatar on online platforms should match the dress code of cadres in the field. This consistency prevents cognitive dissonance among constituents.

To ensure sustainable convergence, NasDem needs to design a special program to introduce and internalize the party's core symbols to the younger generation. This could take the form of a political school for millennials and Gen Z with appropriate learning methods (gamification, experiential learning), or a symbolic mentoring program where senior cadres mentor potential successors.

Beyond conventional media, the party could experiment with performing arts, public installations, or cultural events as vehicles for symbolic convergence. Collaborating with local artists to create works that interpret restoration values can reach a typically apolitical audience. This approach enriches the party's symbolic repertoire.

NasDem could develop a reward mechanism for constituents who actively contribute to enriching the party's symbolic meaning. An award for the best "Restoration Ambassador" or a festival of creative works based on party values would encourage broader participation. Rewards don't have to be material, but can take the form of meaningful symbolic recognition.

In the event of a political crisis or national disaster, NasDem needs to have a prepared restorative communication scenario. Party symbols must be able to function quickly as a unifying force, for example by temporarily replacing the logo with a solidarity symbol that maintains the core visual identity. Appropriate symbolic responses at critical moments can accelerate convergence.

An independent board consisting of communication experts, cultural experts, and constituent representatives could be established to oversee the use of party symbols. Its duties include preventing misuse of meaning, evaluating the effectiveness of symbolic strategies, and providing recommendations for development. The existence of this board would increase accountability for the convergence process.

Material on the philosophy and practice of restorative symbolic communication should be a core curriculum in cadre education. Every prospective party leader would need to demonstrate a deep understanding of the symbolic convergence process and the ability to lead it. This system would ensure the sustainability of the restorative approach beyond the current generation of leadership.

3.4. NasDem Party Brand Identity

A special event, or a symbolic procession during the inauguration of new officials, should be held.

Develop a special program to ensure the younger generation understands and internalizes the party's symbolic meaning. This could be digitally based, such as a political education game, or a mentor-mentee program where senior cadres are responsible for passing on symbolic understanding to their successors. This inheritance ensures continuity of brand identity.

Create a mechanism for adjusting symbols and fantasy themes that is responsive to socio-political changes. When values shift in society, party symbols must be able to adapt without losing their core identity. A dedicated team should continuously monitor social trends to recommend timely symbolic updates.

Use neuroscience approaches to test the effectiveness of symbols and fantasy themes, such as eye-tracking to determine which visual elements attract the most attention, or measuring emotional responses to various narrative variants. Experimental findings will refine the symbolic communication strategy.

Create a culture of innovation in symbol and theme development by providing periodic awards to cadres or teams that contribute to strengthening brand identity. Categories could include the most creative use of symbols, the most effective adaptation of fantasy themes, or the most appropriate symbolic crisis response.

Establish a digital archive documenting the evolution of the party's fantasy symbols and themes, including the meaning behind each change. This archive serves as both a historical reference and an educational tool for both the party and the public. Good curation will deepen the brand identity.

Develop a comprehensive evaluation system that measures the impact of the use of fantasy symbols and themes on various aspects: electability, cadre recruitment, constituent engagement, and the party's political position. The evaluation should combine quantitative (survey) and qualitative (discourse analysis) data to achieve a complete picture.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that symbolic convergence and fantasy themes are essential components of effective political branding. The NasDem Party's use of restoration narratives illustrates both the potential and the challenges of symbolic communication in an emerging democracy. While symbolic cues and fantasy themes generate engagement and identity formation, incomplete convergence limits their long-term impact. Future research should explore comparative cases and examine how symbolic convergence evolves across different political and cultural contexts.

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