

Constructing Scout Identity through Digital Branding: A Qualitative Case Study of Instagram Use in MTA Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of digital branding strategies conducted by the Scout organization of Pondok Pesantren MTA through Instagram. In the era of digital transformation, social media plays a critical role in constructing institutional identity and image, including within Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, content observation, and documentation of the Instagram account @pramukaponpesmta. The findings indicate that the account is strategically managed to convey institutional messages, Scouting values, and Islamic educational character consistently. The digital branding strategy includes the use of distinctive visual elements (logos, colors, uniforms), educational narratives in captions, and active interaction with the audience. The content uploaded not only documents activities but also emphasizes character values such as discipline, leadership, and teamwork, which are aligned with the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum. This study concludes that social media can serve as a strategic tool in strengthening pesantren's institutional identity by adapting to the digital sphere. The branding implementation through Pramuka MTA's Instagram illustrates how Scouting can represent character education values within a modern communication framework.

Keywords: *Digital Branding; Social Media; Scout; Pesantren*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped the landscape of organizational communication, with social media emerging as a strategic medium for identity construction and public engagement (Gebremariam et al., 2024). No longer confined to one-way information dissemination, social media platforms now function as interactive spaces where organizations articulate their identity through visual, narrative, and participatory features (Dwivedi et al., 2021)(Nsude et al., 2023). For values-based organizations such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), this transformation is particularly important. Beyond promoting visibility, social media offers opportunities to integrate traditional educational missions with contemporary communication practices, ensuring that institutional identity and moral values remain relevant in the digital era.

Within the field of strategic communication, social media use is often framed through the concept of digital branding. Digital branding refers to the deliberate and consistent effort to shape public perceptions of organizational identity through digital platforms. Strategic branding theory emphasizes the importance of coherence between internal identity and external image (Fan et al., 2023), while also highlighting differentiation, consistency, and audience experience as critical elements of brand equity (Alam & & et all, 2023). This means that digital branding is not merely about promotion, but rather a multidimensional strategy that integrates visual design, narrative coherence, and stakeholder engagement (Nasiketha et al., 2024; Wu & Pan, 2022).

Existing research has explored digital branding extensively in corporate, governmental, and commercial contexts (Ningrum Retnno Wulan et al., 2020). Scholars have emphasized the role of visual consistency, storytelling, and digital interaction in cultivating trust and recognition in the public sphere. Similarly, in educational institutions, branding has been linked to strengthening institutional identity and building relationships with wider communities. However, most of these studies focus on higher education or secular schools, while Islamic boarding schools, despite their long-standing role in shaping moral character and social responsibility, have received far less attention in the digital branding literature (Sah & Fuad, 2024).

Pesantren, particularly those implementing the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum, provide a unique setting where religious studies, general education, leadership training, and scouting activities are

integrated (Ambarwati, 2024; Khoirurroji'in et al., 2021). Among these, scouting plays a distinctive role as it not only fosters extracurricular engagement but also serves as a means of character formation, instilling values of discipline, teamwork, leadership, and responsibility (Annafi et al., 2023). Despite its importance, limited research has examined how scouting organizations within pesantren utilize digital platforms such as Instagram to communicate identity and reinforce educational values to the broader public.

This creates a clear research gap. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of digital storytelling and visual identity, yet they have not addressed how pesantren scout organizations represent both institutional and educational values through digital branding (Batubara & Harahap, 2022). The lack of research in this area limits understanding of how religious-based educational institutions engage with digital transformation. Furthermore, practical problems remain: pesantren face the challenge of balancing tradition with modern communication, ensuring that digital presence does not dilute but instead amplifies their character education mission.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the Scout organization of MTA Islamic Boarding School implements digital branding through Instagram. Specifically, it examines the visual and narrative strategies employed to construct a digital identity that reflects both scouting principles and the values embedded in the KMI curriculum. The study seeks to contribute to the literature on digital branding in values-based organizations and provide practical insights for integrating traditional education with modern communication strategies.

2. Research Methods

This study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that social realities are constructed through human interaction and therefore must be understood from the perspectives of the actors involved. The interpretivist stance aligns with a constructivist epistemology, emphasizing the ways individuals and institutions create, negotiate, and communicate meanings in particular contexts. Given that the research objective was to explore how institutional identity and character education values are represented through digital branding practices, a descriptive qualitative approach was selected. This approach privileges depth of understanding over statistical generalization and allows the researcher to uncover nuanced meanings embedded in both narratives and visual representations. Specifically, the research employed a case study design. A case study was considered most appropriate because it enables a

detailed and holistic examination of a bounded system, in this case, the Scout organization at MTA Karanganyar Islamic Boarding School and its digital branding practices on Instagram. By focusing on a single case, the study sought to capture the complexities of institutional strategy, identity construction, and character education within a particular sociocultural and digital environment.

The research was situated at MTA Karanganyar Islamic Boarding School, a well-established pesantren located in Central Java, Indonesia. Pesantren are traditional Islamic educational institutions that play a significant role in transmitting religious knowledge, shaping moral character, and instilling social responsibility. MTA Karanganyar is distinctive in that it implements the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum, which combines religious studies, general education, leadership development, and scouting activities. Scouting, in particular, functions as more than an extracurricular program; it is a core avenue for character formation, emphasizing values such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, and responsibility, all within the framework of Islamic education. The institutional culture of MTA Karanganyar reflects a strong emphasis on moral integrity, collective discipline, and religious commitment, which directly influences the way its organizations, including the Scouts, engage with the public. The official Scout Instagram account, @pramukaponpesmta, was chosen as the primary site of investigation because it represents a digital space where the pesantren extends its visibility and communicates its identity to external audiences. The account provides a unique intersection between traditional Islamic schooling and modern digital branding practices, making it an ideal context for examining how values-based educational institutions engage with digital transformation.

The study relied on two key informants who were directly responsible for the digital branding practices of the Scout organization. The first informant was the administrator of the @pramukaponpesmta Instagram account, who was responsible for managing daily digital communication, including the creation, curation, and publication of content. The second informant was the Chair of the Coordinating Advisory Council (Mabikori), who provided strategic oversight of scouting activities and ensured alignment with broader institutional goals. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability method that identifies individuals with the most relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria required participants to hold an official role with direct involvement in scouting communication and strategy, while individuals without such roles were

excluded. Although the number of informants was limited, their positions provided critical insider perspectives that enriched the analysis of institutional strategies. The recruitment process involved initial contact through institutional networks, followed by obtaining informed consent both verbally and in writing. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

Data collection employed three complementary techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with both informants. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted face-to-face within the pesantren environment to create a comfortable and contextually familiar setting. Questions were organized around thematic areas such as institutional identity, digital branding strategies, and the integration of character education into digital communication. To enhance clarity, the interview guide was pretested with colleagues, though a formal pilot study was not conducted. Second, content observation was carried out on Instagram posts from January to December 2023. A total of 50 posts were purposively selected for analysis based on their relevance to scouting activities, the presence of visual branding elements such as logos, uniforms, and color schemes, and the inclusion of narratives reflecting character education values. While the number of posts was not determined through statistical procedures, it was guided by the principle of thematic saturation, ensuring that the range of themes could be adequately captured. Third, document analysis was conducted on digital artifacts, including screenshots of posts, captions, hashtags, comments, and likes, as well as internal institutional documents related to scouting programs. These documents provided contextual background and enabled triangulation of findings across multiple sources.

The study employed several instruments, including a semi-structured interview guide, an observation sheet for Instagram content, and a document checklist. While the interview guide was reviewed for clarity, no formal pilot testing was conducted. Data collection took place in three stages: preparation (developing instruments, permissions, and consent), implementation (interviews, content observation, and document collection), and documentation (transcriptions, archiving, and audit trail maintenance). A reflective journal was also used to enhance reflexivity. Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Open coding identified recurring themes, axial coding grouped them into categories such as visual identity and educational narratives, and thematic synthesis produced analytic narratives. To ensure reliability, coding was reviewed by a second researcher.

Validity and trustworthiness were strengthened through source and methodological triangulation, member checking, thick description, audit trails, and reflexive journaling. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were assured of informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data handling. Sensitive information was excluded unless explicitly authorized.

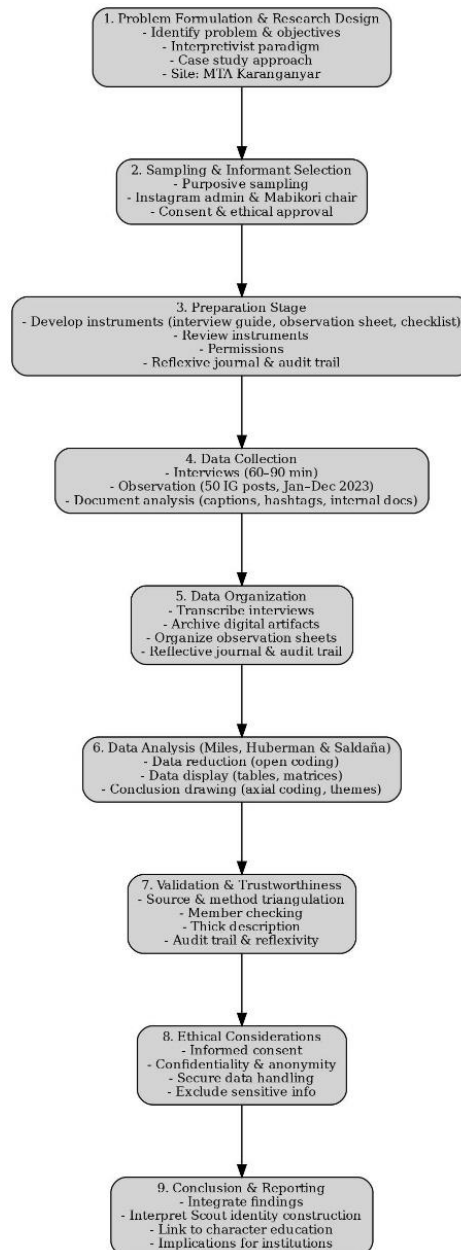


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

3. Results

3.1 Instagram as a Strategic Digital Branding Platform

The first theme demonstrates how the Scout organization at Pondok Pesantren MTA conceptualizes Instagram as more than a social media tool. Rather than functioning merely as a digital noticeboard, Instagram is strategically used as an institutional platform to cultivate organizational identity, document values-based activities, and project pesantren education to a wider audience. At the time of data collection, the official Instagram account @pramukaponpesmta had 115 posts and 1,464 followers. While these numbers are modest compared to regional or national Scout accounts, the strength of this account lies not in its scale but in its *strategic intentionality*. The account reflects careful curation, aligning with Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, particularly in its *physique* (visual markers such as uniforms and logos), *culture* (Islamic and scouting values), and *relationship* (interactive engagement with the audience).

The organization intentionally positions Instagram as a "window of pesantren life," emphasizing not only activities but also the pedagogical philosophy underpinning them. This aligns with Albert and Whetten's concept of Organizational Identity, where institutions highlight their unique characteristics to distinguish themselves from others. For MTA Scouts, Instagram posts act as narrative evidence of the pesantren's identity as both a religious and character-forming institution. A coding framework (Table 1) was created to categorize strategic functions of Instagram content:

Table 1. Coding Framework for Strategic Use of Instagram

| Category | Operationalization | Indicators | Data Examples |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Institutional Identity | Consistent visual representation of pesantren and Scouts | Logos, uniforms, color palette, motto | Group activity photos with organizational banners, Scout logo overlays |
| Scouting Activities | Digital display of activities that reflect pesantren culture | Marching drills, pioneering, outdoor activities | Documentation of events such as Ambalan Gembira and outbound training |
| Character Education | Captions and visuals transmitting values | Discipline, leadership, teamwork, responsibility | Quotes in captions linked to activities, reflection-style narratives |

The Head of Mabikori stressed the intentionality of this strategy:

“We intentionally design every post to show not only activity but also the values behind it. Social media now is the window for people to see how pesantren life develops character in real ways, beyond the classroom.” (Head of Mabikori, 2025)

This testimony illustrates that Instagram is not a passive documentation tool but an active communication strategy. The strategic use of Instagram demonstrates how pesantren education adapts to the digital age. While scouting is traditionally rooted in face-to-face training, its translation into digital content illustrates how institutions negotiate continuity between tradition and modernity. Instagram here functions as a “bridge” preserving pesantren values while projecting them outward to public audiences.



Figure 2. Strategic Digital Branding Implementation Model of MTA Scouts

3.2 Visual Consistency and Representation of Scouting Activities

The second theme highlights how visual consistency across posts contributes to brand identity, and how scouting activities are represented as symbolic carriers of pesantren values. Instagram is not only visual but also symbolic; each uniform, logo, and documented activity reinforces messages of discipline, leadership, and cooperation. Analysis of 50 recent

posts revealed that 94% of posts consistently employed organizational visual markers, such as uniforms, logos, or the pesantren’s red–green–white color palette. This visual repetition is central to digital branding, as it fosters recognition and recall among audiences. In branding theory, this represents the *physical* layer of brand identity that audiences see first and most consistently.

Activities documented in posts were further analyzed for their educational value. As shown in Table 2, scouting activities were not randomly chosen for upload; rather, posts highlighted those activities most closely tied to pesantren values and the KMI (Kulliyatul Mu’allimin al-Islamiyah) curriculum of character education.

Table 2. Representation of Scouting Activities and Associated Values

| Activity Type | Observed Value | Frequency in Sample (50 posts) | Interview Insight |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Marching drills | Discipline, teamwork | 12 | “Marching shows how students internalize order and collective responsibility.” (Admin, 2025) |
| Pioneering | Creativity, problem-solving | 8 | “Students learn to plan, construct, and cooperate skills beyond the classroom.” (Admin, 2025) |
| Outbound / outdoor | Independence, resilience | 10 | “Outdoor challenges teach students to face obstacles and rely on peers.” (Head of Mabikori, 2025) |
| Ambalan Gembira (AG) | Leadership, collaboration | 5 | “AG is ceremonial yet competitive, reinforcing leadership and ethical teamwork.” (Admin, 2025) |

The integration of visual and symbolic elements demonstrates a deliberate approach to value transmission, linking each activity to both scouting principles and the KMI curriculum’s holistic character education goals.

“Through AG and outdoor activities, we want the public to see that our students are learning responsibility, leadership, and teamwork. Every post is curated to show these values in action, which is central to KMI’s educational philosophy.” (Account administrator, 2025)

This consistent visual representation underscores the dual role of Instagram: it not only records activities but also translates them into symbolic communication. By emphasizing values such as discipline or independence, posts serve as “semiotic texts” that audiences interpret as markers of pesantren identity. This reflects Fairclough’s view of discourse as a social practice, where visual texts are not neutral but value-laden.

3.3 Narrative Strategy, Audience Interaction, and Institutional Impact

The third theme goes beyond the visual dimension to analyze how captions, narratives, and audience interactions contribute to digital branding. While visuals attract attention, captions and comments provide interpretive frameworks that connect activities with educational values. Analysis showed that 82% of captions included explicit references to values such as discipline, responsibility, or leadership. Captions often employed motivational quotes, Qur’anic allusions, or reflective statements that tied activities back to pesantren philosophy. For instance, a post about pioneering included the caption: *“Building structures is not only about ropes and wood, but about building teamwork and trust.”*

Audience engagement was also notable. 87% of posts received responses to comments, showing that the account functions as a dialogical platform rather than a one-way broadcast. Followers, primarily students, alumni, and local community members, used comments to express pride, encouragement, or share memories, which the admin often reciprocated with thanks or motivational replies. This interactive strategy aligns with the *relationship* dimension of Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism, where branding is not merely image projection but also relationship maintenance.

The Head of Mabikori elaborated:

“Instagram connects the pesantren to the outside community. People can see how students learn and embody values beyond the classroom. We want followers to understand that our Scout activities are not just extracurricular; they are central to character formation.” (Head of Mabikori, 2025)

Narrative strategies and interaction highlight how digital branding is relational. By actively engaging followers and providing value-based captions, the organization strengthens both internal solidarity (students and alumni) and external legitimacy (public perception of pesantren education). This represents branding as both pedagogical and social capital, extending pesantren influence beyond its physical boundaries.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Integration of Digital Branding and Organizational Identity in Pesantren-Based Scouting

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism and a nuanced application of Albert & Whetten's Organizational Identity Theory, while also extending both frameworks in culturally specific ways. The *physical dimension* of Kapferer's framework is clearly reflected in the Scouts' consistent use of logos, uniforms, and a red-green-white color scheme. These visual markers create a coherent symbolic language that reinforces recognition, as Kapferer predicted in his emphasis on tangible assets as a brand's foundational layer. The *cultural dimension* is equally evident through captions and narratives that embed Islamic values such as discipline, responsibility, and leadership. This alignment demonstrates how organizational branding in pesantren settings is inseparable from value-based communication. Finally, the *relational dimension* emerges through active two-way engagement with followers, extending Kapferer's model into a dialogical digital space where relationships, not just recognition, become central to brand building.

Albert & Whetten's identity markers, centrality, distinctiveness, and timelessness are substantiated in the digital practices of MTA Scouts. Centrality is grounded in the pesantren's mission of character formation, distinctiveness arises from the unique synthesis of Islamic values with scouting traditions, and timelessness is underscored through recurring emphasis on enduring virtues such as leadership and teamwork. Yet, findings extend the theory by illustrating how these markers are not only articulated in organizational rhetoric but are also visually and narratively embodied in social media content. This suggests a digital extension of identity theory where organizational "core" values are actively performed in online spaces. While existing frameworks explain much of the Scouts' branding practices, findings also highlight additional dynamics. The deliberate use of scouting activities (marching, pioneering, outdoor training) as symbolic carriers of Islamic educational values reveals a mechanism not fully accounted for in either Kapferer or Albert & Whetten. This abductive insight suggests that organizational identity in pesantren contexts is not only communicated through symbols and narratives but also through the digital translation of structured co-curricular activities. This points toward a hybrid model of identity construction that combines institutional values, symbolic assets, and embodied practices.

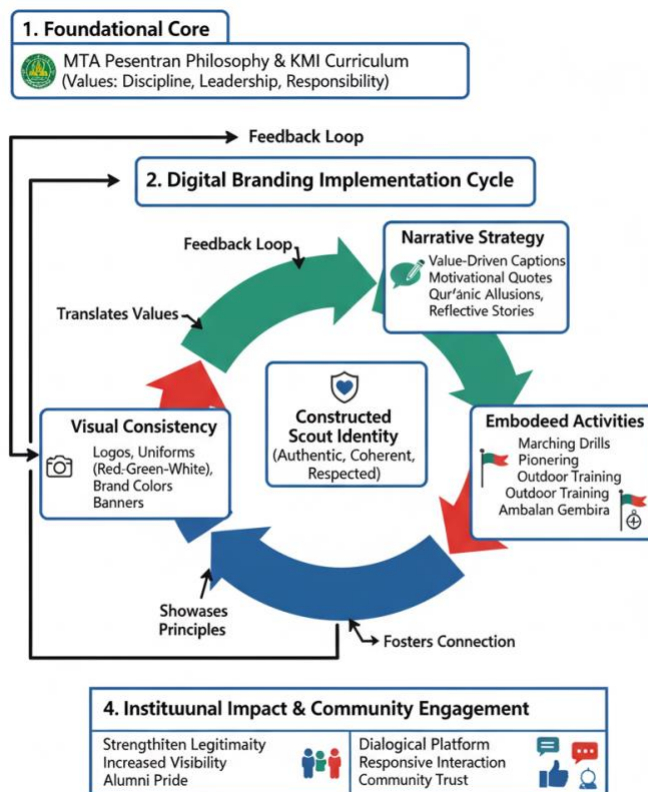


Figure 3. Digital Branding Implementation of MTA Scouts

4.2 Positioning Findings within Digital Branding Scholarship and Addressing Contextual Research Gaps

This study builds upon, complements, and extends the existing body of scholarship on digital branding and organizational communication. Consistent with Ferbita et al. (2020), this research reaffirms the importance of visual consistency in institutional branding, where repetition of logos and colors establishes credibility. Similarly, Aji et al. (2022) noted that organizations need to balance religious narratives with accessible communication styles; findings here confirm that MTA Scouts achieve this by embedding Islamic values into motivational captions and interactive posts, maintaining both authenticity and audience engagement. Unlike prior research that primarily situates digital branding in corporate or governmental contexts (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Metzler & Garcia, 2023), this study shows that co-curricular educational practices, specifically scouting, can function as branding assets in values-based institutions. This contradicts assumptions that branding in education is limited to

institutional logos, websites, or official events, extending the literature to include student-led, activity-based forms of identity performance.

A major gap identified in prior studies was the lack of research at the intersection of digital branding, scouting, and pesantren-based character education (Batubara & Harahap, 2022). This study fills that gap by showing how digital communication strategies not only represent but also reinforce character education practices. By documenting structured activities like marching drills or leadership events, Instagram posts provide evidence of authenticity, thereby addressing concerns in the literature about the superficiality of branding in educational institutions. The central research question asked how the Scout organization at MTA Islamic Boarding School implements digital branding through Instagram to reflect scouting principles and educational values. Findings show that this is achieved through four interrelated strategies: (1) visual identity consistency, (2) value-driven narratives, (3) responsive audience communication, and (4) symbolic representation of scouting activities. Together, these strategies construct a digital identity that is coherent with pesantren educational philosophy, thereby answering the research aim while addressing gaps in the literature.

4.3 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Future Research in Digital Branding of Educational Institutions

This study enriches Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism by demonstrating how visual, cultural, and relational dimensions operate synergistically in digital educational contexts. It also extends Albert & Whetten's Organizational Identity Theory by highlighting how core markers of identity (centrality, distinctiveness, timelessness) can be embodied in digital performance through co-curricular activities. A theoretical proposition emerging from this study is that values-based organizations construct identity not only through symbolic assets but also through the digital mediation of embodied practices. This calls for future refinement of brand identity frameworks to incorporate the role of activities as branding mechanisms. For practitioners, especially managers of Islamic boarding schools, this study provides a concrete model (Figure 2) of digital branding implementation. It emphasizes that effective branding is not about follower counts but about visual coherence, authentic storytelling, and active engagement. School administrators can adopt structured content calendars that highlight both daily practices and co-curricular activities, ensuring that posts consistently reflect institutional values. At a policy level, findings underscore the importance of digital literacy training for educational staff to ensure that social media communication is professional, strategic, and

aligned with core missions. The MTA Scouts implement their digital branding. Here's a breakdown of each component:

1. **Visual Identity:** This part is all about what the brand looks like. It focuses on the consistent use of logos, colors, and uniforms. This consistency helps people recognize the brand instantly, whether they're looking at a post, a profile picture, or an event photo.
2. **Digital Narrative:** This is the story the brand tells online. It's not just about posting pictures; it's about sharing educational and value-driven content. This could include captions that explain the meaning behind an activity, motivational quotes, or posts that highlight the organization's core principles.
3. **Organizational Communication:** This element highlights how the brand interacts with its audience. The key here is responsive engagement with followers. This means actively replying to comments, answering questions, and creating a two-way conversation, rather than just broadcasting information.
4. **Scouting Activities:** This component connects the digital brand to real-world actions. The model shows that the content should be a direct reflection of leadership and teamwork. By showcasing activities that demonstrate these skills, the brand proves it lives up to the values it promotes online.

The study demonstrates the value of combining interviews, observation, and document analysis to capture both intended strategies and actual practices of digital branding. The use of semi-structured interviews alongside visual content analysis provided a holistic understanding, though future studies could benefit from quantitative measures of engagement (e.g., sentiment analysis, analytics tracking) to complement qualitative insights.

Three main limitations should be acknowledged. First, as a single-case study, findings are context-specific and not broadly generalizable. Second, audience interaction analysis was limited to qualitative coding of comments and likes, without quantitative depth. Third, reliance on institutionally managed accounts may reflect curated or idealized images, which might not capture the full lived experience of students. Future research should adopt a comparative approach, analyzing how multiple pesantren or faith-based institutions implement digital branding to identify cross-case similarities and differences. A longitudinal design could track the evolution of digital identity strategies over time, revealing how visual and narrative patterns shift with changing leadership or audience expectations. Additionally, incorporating audience-centered methods such as surveys or focus groups would provide external validation of how

branding messages are actually perceived, bridging the gap between institutional intention and public reception.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the digital branding strategy implemented by the MTA Islamic Boarding School Scout Organization through its Instagram account @pramukaponpesmta operates across three interrelated dimensions: consistency of visual identity, the use of character education-based narratives, and strategies of audience engagement. Together, these dimensions illustrate how social media can function not merely as a promotional tool but as a medium for articulating institutional identity and reinforcing Islamic educational values in the digital public sphere. More broadly, the findings highlight that values-based organizations such as pesantren can appropriate branding practices to simultaneously project identity and fulfill their educational mission, thereby extending the application of strategic communication beyond commercial contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by contextualizing strategic communication theory, the Brand Identity Prism, and Organizational Identity Theory within Islamic educational institutions. It underscores that visual and narrative elements on digital platforms should be understood not only as communication techniques but also as symbolic resources that mediate identity construction. In doing so, the study advances the conversation on how digital branding can integrate educational, cultural, and religious values in non-profit and faith-based settings, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Practically, the research provides insights for administrators of pesantren and other religious schools seeking to engage with digital audiences. The findings suggest that institutional social media strategies should prioritize alignment between visual identity and organizational values, integrate narratives that foreground moral and character education, and manage audience interaction in ways that foster community participation. By adopting these approaches, institutions can transform social media into a platform for identity reinforcement, moral education, and long-term reputation building, rather than using it solely as a promotional outlet.

Nevertheless, the study's scope presents certain limitations. Its reliance on a single Instagram account and a limited number of informants restricts the transferability of findings to other pesantren contexts. Similarly, the focus on likes and comments provides only a surface-level understanding of engagement, while the institutional management of the account introduces the possibility of representation bias, emphasizing idealized

aspects of scouting and character education. These limitations, while not undermining the credibility of the findings, suggest that results should be interpreted as contextually grounded rather than universally generalizable.

Future research could extend this study in several directions. Comparative analyses across multiple pesantren or other values-based institutions could assess whether similar branding patterns emerge in different cultural or organizational contexts. Longitudinal studies would allow researchers to examine how digital branding strategies evolve over time and how they influence institutional image sustainability. Incorporating audience-centered approaches, such as surveys or focus groups with parents, alumni, or the broader community, could reveal how external stakeholders interpret and respond to pesantren's digital identity. Additionally, mixed-methods or quantitative designs such as sentiment analysis, engagement metrics, or network analysis could complement qualitative insights by providing measurable indicators of branding effectiveness. These directions not only build on the present study but also open new avenues for exploring how digital branding can contribute to the broader mission of Islamic education in the digital era.

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