BUILDING PESANTREN BRAND IDENTITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED TEACHING: A CO-DESIGN CASE AT HIDAYATULLAH MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren increasingly need to communicate an educational identity that remains grounded in Islamic values while responding to expectations for digital competence. This paper reports the initial co-design phase of a community development program conducted with Pondok Pesantren Hidayatullah Medan. The activity aimed to formulate a pesantren brand identity in which technology-enabled teaching functions as observable evidence of institutional quality rather than as a separate promotional claim. A qualitative descriptive design was applied through direct observation, a consultative group discussion, facility exploration, document review, and visual documentation during the partner visit on 9 June 2026. The analysis identified three baseline gaps: fragmented public messaging, limited translation of technology into visible pedagogical practice, and the absence of a structured content-governance system. The co-design process produced a brand architecture centred on five identity pillars: Islamic character formation, technology-enabled pedagogy, santri digital capability, community and economic contribution, and authentic institutional storytelling. The resulting framework links internal teaching practices with external digital communication and proposes staged indicators for literacy, content consistency, engagement, and stakeholder response. The paper concludes that credible pesantren branding should begin with lived educational practice and use social media to document, rather than manufacture, institutional identity.

Keywords: Pesantren Branding, Brand Identity, Technology-Enabled Teaching, Digital Storytelling, Community Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are educational institutions whose public identity is formed through a combination of religious values, daily routines, teaching practices, leadership, social contribution, and the experience of their communities. This makes pesantren branding different from a conventional promotional exercise. A credible educational brand must be supported by practices that students, parents, teachers, alumni, and partners can observe. In education, brand identity is not limited to a name, logo, or visual system; it is developed through institutional meaning, stakeholder experience, and internal alignment (Chapleo & Clark, 2016; Dean et al., 2016). University-brand research similarly shows that identification is strengthened when institutional values are experienced consistently and become relevant to stakeholders (Balaji et al., 2016; Xiao et al., 2023).

Digital transformation adds a new layer to this process. Technology can support participation, collaboration, content creation, feedback, and access to learning resources, but its educational value depends on pedagogy, teacher readiness, and institutional support. Evidence mapping by Bond et al. (2020) indicates that digital tools can be associated with behavioural, cognitive, and affective engagement, while Scherer et al. (2019) show that teacher acceptance remains an important condition for sustained adoption. Digital transformation therefore requires more than acquiring devices. It involves the redesign of practices, capabilities, governance, and institutional communication (Castro Benavides et al., 2020).

For a pesantren, technology-enabled teaching can also become a source of brand meaning. A classroom using digital media, a teacher producing interactive learning material, a santri developing a project, or a cooperative documenting product learning can provide concrete evidence that religious formation and contemporary competence are being developed together. When these practices are communicated through authentic digital content, social media can connect internal educational reality with external stakeholder perceptions. Strategic social-media use requires clear

objectives, governance, content choices, and performance monitoring rather than irregular posting (Felix et al., 2017; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Social media can influence educational brand awareness and recruitment, but its credibility depends on sustained interaction and consistency between claims and experience (Rutter et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Pondok Pesantren Hidayatullah Medan is located in Bandar Labuhan Village, Tanjung Morawa, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. The institution educates more than 750 male and female santri across different levels. Many students come from lower-middle-income households or receive educational support. The pesantren also manages a cooperative and productive units, creating a setting in which religious education, technology, youth capability, and community economic empowerment can be connected. The partner, however, had not yet translated these strengths into a unified brand identity or a systematic digital narrative. Existing communication was more likely to present isolated activities than a coherent educational promise.

On 9 June 2026, the leadership of Pondok Pesantren Hidayatullah Medan visited Bina Nusantara University Medan for an initial consultation. The meeting discussed social-media branding, the use of technology in learning and institutional management, and the relationship between educational quality and pesantren economic independence. The participants also observed technology-supported learning facilities. This visit became the diagnostic and co-design phase of a broader community service program. The present paper addresses two questions: (1) how can technology-enabled teaching be positioned as evidence of a pesantren brand identity, and (2) what content and governance architecture is required to communicate that identity consistently? The objective is to formulate an implementable identity framework, not to claim final changes in learning outcomes or social-media performance before the subsequent training and mentoring stages are completed.

2. METHOD

The activity used a qualitative descriptive community-development design. It was organized as the initial diagnosis and co-design stage of a Participatory Action Learning System planned in the grant proposal. The design treated the partner as a contributor to problem definition and solution formation, rather than as a passive recipient. This orientation is consistent with co-creation approaches that involve participants in shaping the meaning, process, and practical direction of an educational intervention (Bovill, 2020). Data were obtained through four sources. First, direct observation documented the meeting process, interaction among participants, and the partner's responses to technology-supported learning facilities. Second, a consultative group discussion involved pesantren leaders and representatives of the university team. The discussion covered institutional values, current communication practices, desired public positioning, technology needs, social-media management, and productive-economy activities. Third, the team reviewed the approved community-service proposal, which contained the partner profile, planned training modules, technology transfer, mentoring stages, and evaluation indicators. Fourth, photographs were used as visual documentation of the consultation, facility exploration, and institutional agreement.

The material was analysed thematically. Notes and documents were organized into five analytical domains: institutional identity, teaching and learning, technological capability, digital communication, and governance. Recurring problems were converted into a baseline diagnosis. The team then mapped each problem to an observable educational practice, a possible content expression, a responsible actor, and an evaluation indicator. This process produced the identity pillars and implementation roadmap reported in Section 3. Analytical credibility was strengthened by comparing observations, discussion records, proposal commitments, and visual documentation. The scope is deliberately limited to the initial phase. No post-test scores, follower growth, engagement rates, or business outcomes are reported because the training and mentoring cycle had not yet been completed at the time of writing.




Figure 1. Initial consultation and exploration of technology-supported learning facilities at BINUS University Medan

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Partner profile and baseline brand gap

The consultation confirmed that Hidayatullah Medan already possesses substantial identity resources. Its religious routines, disciplined boarding-school environment, large student community, scholarship orientation, cooperative, and productive units provide a strong basis for an institutional narrative. The main problem was not the absence of identity, but the absence of a system for selecting, organizing, and consistently communicating that identity. The public could encounter separate announcements, activities, or products without receiving a clear explanation of what makes the pesantren's educational approach distinctive.

Three baseline gaps were identified. First, the pesantren's values had not been converted into a concise and repeatable brand promise. Second, technology was viewed mainly as equipment or operational support, rather than as evidence of a teaching model. Third, social-media communication lacked a content architecture, approval process, visual consistency, and measurement routine. Table 1 summarizes how these gaps affect branding and how the co-designed response addresses them.

Table 1. Baseline diagnosis and proposed branding response

Baseline issue	Evidence from the co-design phase	Branding implication	Proposed response
Fragmented identity message	Activities, religious programs, learning, and business units were communicated as separate topics.	Stakeholders may recognise activities without understanding the institution's distinctive educational promise.	Define one core promise and use common identity pillars across all channels.
Technology not yet framed as pedagogy	Technology needs were discussed mainly in relation to tools, infrastructure, and social-media production.	Digital claims can appear cosmetic when they are not connected to teachers, learning tasks, and student outcomes.	Show technology through observable teaching practices and santri work.
Episodic social-media management	No shared content calendar, editorial workflow, or consistent measurement system was identified.	Irregular content weakens recognition, continuity, and accountability.	Establish content themes, approval rules, roles, templates, and performance indicators.

Co-designed pesantren brand identity architecture

The co-design process formulated the core brand promise as: faith-rooted, technology-enabled, and socially productive education. The wording positions Islamic values as the foundation, technology as an educational enabler, and community contribution as an outcome. It avoids presenting modernity as a replacement for pesantren tradition. Instead, technology becomes part of how the institution develops disciplined, capable, ethical, and productive santri.

Five identity pillars were developed to operationalize the promise. Each pillar must be supported by observable evidence before it is communicated. For example, the phrase technology-enabled pedagogy should be demonstrated

through teachers' use of digital media, project documentation, feedback tools, or blended resources. Santri digital capability should be shown through student-created outputs, not only through photographs of devices. Table 2 connects the pillars to evidence and content formats.

Table 2. Brand identity pillars, educational evidence, and digital content applications

Identity pillar	Observable teaching or institutional evidence	Illustrative digital content
Islamic character formation	Daily worship, mentoring, discipline, ethical communication, service, and responsible technology use.	Short documentary routines, teacher reflections, value-based student stories.
Technology-enabled pedagogy	Digital learning media, interactive presentation, blended resources, project documentation, and technology-supported assessment.	"Learning in action" reels, teacher demonstrations, classroom explainers.
Santri digital capability	Student production of presentations, designs, videos, data, business content, or other digital projects.	Project showcases, behind-the-scenes production, student portfolios.
Community and economic contribution	Kopontren learning, product development, entrepreneurship, service activities, and collaboration with surrounding communities.	Product-learning stories, community impact profiles, santripreneur journeys.
Authentic institutional storytelling	Consistent visual identity, verified information, consent procedures, and stories connected to real practices.	Thematic series, profiles, FAQ content, evidence-based campaign narratives.

Technology-enabled teaching as brand evidence

The consultation shifted the role of technology from an isolated innovation claim to a visible component of the teaching process. This is important because educational technology does not automatically generate engagement or learning quality. It must be linked to appropriate tasks, teacher capability, and meaningful student participation (Bond et al., 2020; Scherer et al., 2019). The proposed branding approach therefore begins with an evidence sequence: educational value, teaching practice, student activity, documented output, and public communication.

Under this sequence, social-media production is integrated with learning. A teacher may design a technology-supported lesson; santri complete a project; the work is documented; and the content team explains the learning purpose, values, process, and result. The resulting post is not a generic advertisement. It is a compact record of institutional practice. This distinction reduces the risk that the pesantren projects an image that is disconnected from daily experience. It also creates an internal incentive to maintain the practices being communicated.

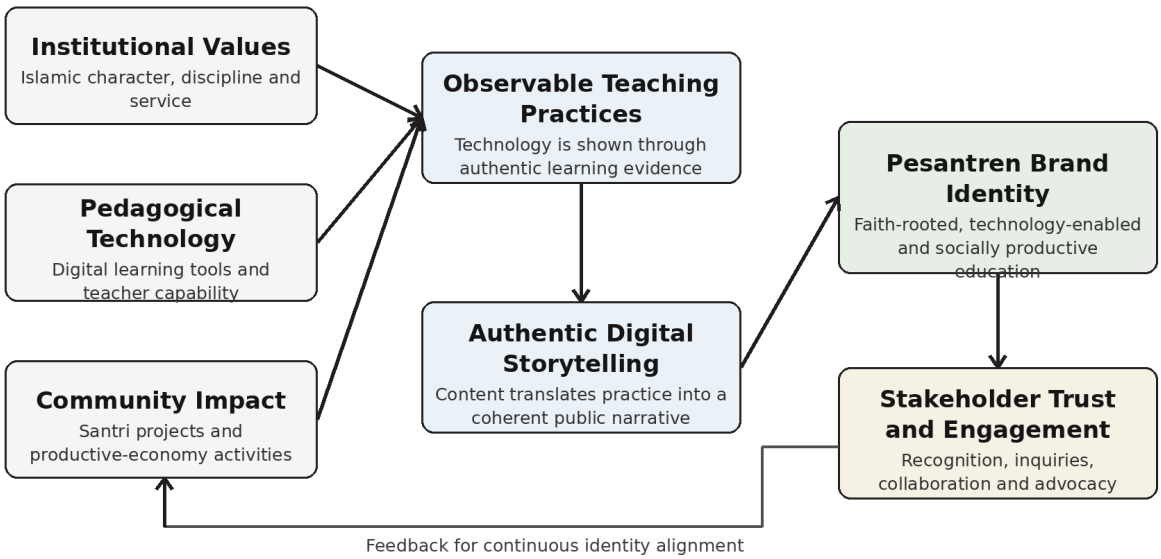

Figure 2. Co-designed framework linking technology-enabled teaching to pesantren brand identity

Digital storytelling and governance

The proposed digital storytelling system uses five recurring content themes: learning in action, teacher expertise, santri projects, Islamic values in daily routines, and community or economic impact. These themes allow the pesantren to repeat its identity without publishing identical content. Each item should explain what happened, why it matters educationally, which value it represents, and what evidence is visible. Authenticity is treated as factual correspondence between the narrative and the observed activity, not as an informal style alone. Governance is required because pesantren content may include minors, religious activities, internal spaces, and commercially relevant information. The framework assigns an institutional content coordinator, teacher or unit contributor, santri creative team, and final approver. Publication must follow consent, privacy, accuracy, modesty, account-security, and comment-response rules. Strategic social-media research similarly stresses the need to align scope, culture, structure, and governance (Felix et al., 2017). Content should be adapted to platform characteristics while retaining the same core identity (Manca, 2020). The system also avoids evaluating success only through follower counts. Digital content can build awareness, but trust and value depend on the quality and continuity of interaction (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). For this reason, performance indicators include brand-message consistency, the proportion of posts supported by observable educational evidence, content-production regularity, meaningful engagement, inquiries, collaboration interest, and stakeholder understanding of the core promise.

Implementation and evaluation roadmap

The next phase converts the architecture into capability and routine. The approved program includes the formation of a five-to-ten-member Digital Santripreneur Team, provision of a mobile content-production kit, training in platform strategy and authentic short-form video, development of a one-month content calendar, and a mentoring period. The branding focus changes the purpose of this equipment: the kit is not merely used to increase posting volume, but to document educational practices according to the identity pillars. Table 3 presents the staged roadmap. The indicators are designed to distinguish capability, implementation, communication, and stakeholder response. Such separation is important because a technically polished video does not necessarily indicate identity consistency, and an increase in reach does not by itself demonstrate educational quality.

Table 3. Staged implementation and evaluation roadmap

Stage	Main activity	Expected output	Evaluation indicator
1. Alignment	Validate the brand promise, pillars, ethical rules, and responsible actors with pesantren leadership.	Approved identity brief and governance map.	Agreement on terminology, roles, approval, consent, and account access.
2. Capacity building	Train teachers, staff, and santri in technology-supported learning documentation, storytelling, design, and platform use.	Trained content team and sample learning-based content.	Pre/post digital-literacy scores and content-quality rubric.
3. Field implementation	Execute the content calendar and document teaching, projects, routines, and community activities.	Two to three evidence-based posts per week during mentoring.	Consistency, production regularity, identity-pillar coverage, and approval compliance.
4. Performance review	Assess platform analytics and stakeholder responses without separating them from content quality.	Monthly dashboard and reflection notes.	Reach, meaningful engagement, inquiries, sentiment, and message recall.
5. Institutionalization	Transfer templates, account procedures, asset library, and evaluation routines to the partner.	Sustainable brand-management guideline.	Continuity of publishing, staff handover, and periodic identity audit.

Discussion

The findings support an inside-out view of educational branding. Chapleo and Clark (2016) note that institutional branding becomes difficult when internal actors interpret the brand differently. Dean et al. (2016) further describe brand meaning as co-created through stakeholder experience. In the Hidayatullah case, the consultation did not

begin by choosing promotional slogans or visual templates. It began by identifying the practices that the pesantren wants stakeholders to associate with it. This sequence strengthens internal legitimacy because the proposed identity can be traced to values, teaching, and community functions already present in the institution. The framework also expands the usual discussion of technology adoption. Digital transformation literature often focuses on infrastructure, management, teaching capability, and organizational change (Castro Benavides et al., 2020). The present case adds a communication dimension: pedagogical technology can become a brand signal when it is visible, understandable, and consistently connected to institutional values. This does not mean that every class must be publicized. It means that selected evidence can help external stakeholders understand how the institution teaches and what capabilities it develops.

The approach differs from promotion-led social-media practice. Research has shown that social-media interaction can affect university brand and recruitment performance (Rutter et al., 2016), while Nguyen et al. (2021) link social media to university brand value. However, attention metrics can encourage content that is popular but unrelated to educational identity. The co-designed architecture addresses this risk through identity pillars, evidence requirements, ethical review, and a balanced evaluation dashboard. The primary unit of branding is therefore the educational practice; the post is its mediated representation. A further contribution is the integration of teaching, branding, and community development. Santri are not positioned only as audiences or promotional objects. Through content-production and project documentation, they can participate as learners and co-creators. This reflects Bovill's (2020) argument that co-creation can be extended beyond a small selected group when learning roles and responsibilities are designed clearly. In the planned program, santri develop technical skills while documenting real institutional activities, and the pesantren gains a sustainable internal content team.

The initial phase nevertheless has limitations. It involved a single partner institution and produced a diagnostic framework rather than final outcome evidence. The June visit did not measure learning gains, brand recall, follower growth, enrollment interest, or economic impact. Leadership perspectives were more prominent than those of parents, alumni, and prospective students. The next cycle should therefore validate the identity pillars with broader stakeholder groups, conduct pre- and post-assessments, analyse platform metrics, and examine whether the perceived brand identity converges with the intended identity.



Figure 3. Representatives of Pondok Pesantren Hidayatullah Medan and BINUS University Medan after the co-design meeting

4. CONCLUSION

The initial co-design activity produced a pesantren brand-identity framework in which technology-enabled teaching acts as evidence of institutional quality. Three baseline gaps were identified: fragmented messaging, limited translation of technology into visible pedagogy, and the absence of content governance. In response, the team formulated a core promise—faith-rooted, technology-enabled, and socially productive education—and five identity pillars covering Islamic character, pedagogy, santri capability, community contribution, and authentic storytelling.

The strength of the framework lies in its inside-out logic: communication begins with observable educational practice and is supported by roles, ethical rules, content themes, and evaluation indicators. Its main weakness is that it represents an initial diagnostic stage at one institution; training effects and stakeholder outcomes have not yet been measured. Further development should test the framework through the planned capacity-building and mentoring stages, compare intended and perceived brand identity, and assess whether consistent educational storytelling improves trust, inquiries, collaboration, and long-term institutional recognition.

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