



DIGITAL BRANDING AS CURRICULUM IDENTITY REPRESENTATION IN AN INTEGRATED ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF SMP IT CENDEKIA TAKENGON

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital media has encouraged educational institutions to utilize online platforms to build institutional identity and strengthen public engagement. In the context of Islamic schools, digital branding serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium for representing curriculum identity. This study examines how the distinctive curriculum identity of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) is represented through the digital branding practices of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis involving the principal, public relations staff, teachers, students, and parents. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña and interpreted through Stuart Hall's theory of representation. The findings reveal that digital branding represents curriculum identity through the publication of distinctive educational programs, including Qur'anic Learning, Arabic Language Instruction, Islamic Character Development (BPI), Agribusiness Education, and Outing Class. These programs reflect the values, culture, and educational orientation of the integrated Islamic school model. Theoretically, this study extends the educational branding literature by proposing the perspective of digital branding as curriculum identity representation, integrating educational branding, identity representation, and the integrated Islamic curriculum into a coherent analytical framework.

Keywords: digital branding; curriculum identity; representation; Integrated Islamic School; JSIT.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the ways educational institutions construct their identities and engage with the public. Amid increasing competition among schools, social media, institutional websites, and various digital platforms have become strategic channels for communicating institutional strengths, cultivating a positive public image, and enhancing organizational competitiveness (Bujangga et al., 2025; Marulloh & Susilo, 2026; Nafilah et al., 2025)

This phenomenon is also evident in Islamic educational institutions, particularly *Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu SIT)* operating under the *Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT)* of Indonesia. Unlike conventional schools, SITs implement a distinctive curriculum that integrates the national curriculum with Qur'anic learning, Arabic language instruction, character education, and an Islamic school culture as integral components of their educational identity (Asrulla et al., 2026; Purwanto, 2022; Sholehah et al., 2025). Within the context of digital communication, these educational programs function not only as learning activities but also as representations of curriculum identity



communicated to the public through digital media (Hermanto et al., 2024; Ilmi & Harahap, 2025; Khonsa et al., 2026; Sulaiman & Munawir, 2023).

According to Stuart Hall, identity is not fixed or essential; rather, it is continuously constructed through processes of representation manifested in language, symbols, images, and discourse. Representation does not merely reflect reality but actively produces meanings that shape how institutions are perceived and understood by the public (Hall, 1997). From this perspective, educational branding can be understood as a representational practice through which institutional values, culture, and distinctive characteristics are communicated to stakeholders. The concept of internal branding further suggests that institutional identity is established through the internalization of organizational values, which are subsequently communicated externally through various forms of institutional communication (Aji et al., 2025; Balmer et al., 2011; Putri et al., 2025). As digital technologies continue to evolve, social media and other online platforms have become essential instruments for strengthening institutional identity, expanding organizational visibility, and fostering stronger relationships between schools and their communities (Siti Aisyah et al., 2024; Wahyunto et al., 2024). Within this framework, the dissemination of Islamic educational programs, Qur'anic learning, Arabic language instruction, and Islamic school culture can be understood as representational practices through which curriculum identity is constructed and communicated within the digital sphere.

One institution that exemplifies this phenomenon is SMP IT Cendekia Takengon, which actively utilizes digital media to publicize its Islamic educational programs and distinctive curriculum. This context makes the school an appropriate case for examining how curriculum identity is represented through digital branding practices.

Previous studies on digital branding in education have demonstrated that social media and digital platforms play a significant role in strengthening institutional identity, enhancing school visibility, and fostering public trust (Abdurrofi & Susilo, 2026; Badarwan et al., 2026a; Constantinides & Stagno, 2011; Sukarji Sukarji, 2024). These studies consistently indicate that digital branding contributes to institutional image building and enhances the attractiveness of educational institutions. Nevertheless, the existing literature predominantly conceptualizes digital media as a promotional and reputational tool, providing limited explanation of how institutional identity is constructed and represented through continuously produced digital content.

Meanwhile, studies on the curriculum of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) emphasize that the integration of Islamic values, character education, school culture, Qur'anic learning, and Arabic language instruction constitutes the core foundation of the integrated Islamic educational identity (Agung Putra Bhayangkara et al., 2024; Irdiyanti et al., 2023; Khusniyati Sururiyah et al., 2023; Robingatin, 2015; Sholehah et al., 2025). However, these studies primarily focus on curriculum implementation within schools and pay limited attention to how this curriculum identity is represented and communicated to broader audiences through digital media.

Based on the foregoing review, this study identifies three major research gaps. First, studies linking digital branding with curriculum identity in Islamic education remain limited. Second, the representation of distinctive JSIT curriculum components—such as Qur'anic learning, Arabic language instruction, and Islamic school culture—through digital media has received little scholarly attention. Third, integrated Islamic schools located in



non-metropolitan regions remain underrepresented in studies of digital educational branding.

To address these gaps, this study conceptualizes digital branding not merely as an educational marketing strategy but as a mechanism for representing curriculum identity. The novelty of this research lies in the development of the concept of digital branding as curriculum identity representation, which explains how the distinctive curriculum identity of JSIT is constructed, communicated, and interpreted through digital media in shaping the institutional identity of Islamic schools.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how the curriculum identity of JSIT is represented through the digital branding practices of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon, identify the curriculum elements most prominently communicated, and explain their contribution to the construction of institutional identity and school image. Theoretically, this study extends the literature on educational branding by integrating perspectives from curriculum identity and digital communication studies. Practically, it offers insights for developing value-based and curriculum-oriented branding strategies for Islamic schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine how curriculum identity is represented through the digital branding practices of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of identity representation as it is constructed within a particular social and institutional context (Lim, 2025). According to Creswell, qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social phenomena within their natural settings.

The study was conducted at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon, Central Aceh Regency, Indonesia, from January to March 2026. The research site was selected purposively because the school actively utilizes multiple digital platforms—including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and its official website—to communicate educational programs that reflect the distinctive characteristics of its curriculum.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in curriculum implementation and the school's digital branding practices. A total of 18 participants were involved, comprising one principal, two members of the public relations team, five teachers, five students, and five parents. In addition to interview data, the study also utilized curriculum documents and digital content published through the school's official online platforms as supporting data sources. Throughout the research process, the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain an in-depth understanding of curriculum implementation and the school's use of digital media. Non-participant observations were undertaken to examine educational activities as well as the school's digital communication practices. Document analysis included curriculum documents, photographs of school activities, archived social media posts, and various forms of digital content published through the school's official platforms (Busetto et al., 2020).



The unit of analysis comprised representations of curriculum identity identified in interview narratives, curriculum documents, and digital content disseminated through the school's social media accounts and official website.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. During the data condensation stage, open coding was conducted on interview transcripts, observation notes, curriculum documents, and digital content to identify initial concepts relevant to the research focus. Codes with similar meanings were subsequently grouped into categories and further developed into broader themes representing the school's curriculum identity. These themes were then organized through data display and interpreted using Stuart Hall's theory of representation before conclusions were drawn and systematically verified (Hall, 1997).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, public relations staff, students, and parents. Methodological triangulation involved comparing findings generated from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Furthermore, member checking was undertaken to verify that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Arabic Language Instruction as a Representation of Islamic Scholarly Identity

The findings indicate that Arabic language instruction constitutes a fundamental component of the curriculum identity at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon. Rather than being positioned merely as a formal subject, Arabic is embedded within the integrated Islamic education system, serving to support Qur'anic learning and strengthen students' Islamic competencies.

The principal explained:

"To prepare graduates who are proficient in international languages, particularly in relation to understanding the Qur'an, students are provided with Arabic language instruction to support this objective."

The principal further emphasized that Arabic language instruction follows a curriculum specifically developed within the JSIT network:

"Within the JSIT network, Arabic language textbooks have been specifically developed, rather than using the textbooks issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs."

These findings demonstrate that Arabic occupies a strategic position within the school's curriculum structure. Beyond developing students' linguistic competence, Arabic functions as an essential medium for enhancing Qur'anic comprehension and strengthening Islamic education. The use of instructional materials specifically developed by the JSIT network further reflects a distinctive curriculum framework that differentiates SMP IT Cendekia Takengon from conventional junior secondary schools.

Overall, the findings suggest that Arabic language instruction constitutes a distinctive representation of the school's curriculum identity and is consistently maintained as one of the defining characteristics of integrated Islamic schools. Its inclusion reinforces an



educational orientation that integrates academic competence, religious literacy, and Islamic character development within a unified curriculum framework.

Qur'anic Learning Program as a Representation of the School's Religious Identity

In addition to Arabic language instruction, the school's curriculum identity is also represented through its Qur'anic Learning Program, which constitutes one of the flagship programs of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon. The program encompasses *tahsin* (Qur'anic recitation improvement), *tahfiz* (Qur'an memorization), *muraja'ah* (memorization review), *tasmi'* (memorization recitation), and the daily practice of *tilawah* (Qur'anic recitation), all of which are implemented as continuous components of the school's educational program.

A member of the public relations team explained:

"Our content includes Qur'anic memorization recitation (tasmi'), classroom and outdoor learning activities, extracurricular programs, students' achievements, and other important school information. We strive to post content every day from Monday to Saturday to keep our social media accounts active."

An examination of the school's digital platforms further revealed that various Qur'anic learning activities are regularly disseminated through photographs, videos, and other forms of digital documentation. These publications showcase students' memorization achievements, *tasmi'* sessions, *tahsin* instruction, and a wide range of other religious learning activities.

These findings indicate that the Qur'anic Learning Program functions not only as an instructional component of the curriculum but also as one of the educational programs most prominently communicated to the public. The digital portrayal of students' participation in Qur'anic learning serves as a representation of the school's educational orientation, which is firmly grounded in Islamic values.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the school's religious identity is constructed through authentic educational practices that are consistently documented and communicated via digital media. Consequently, the Qur'anic Learning Program emerges as one of the most prominent elements in shaping the school's institutional image and curriculum identity within the digital sphere.

Islamic Character Development (BPI) as a Representation of Curriculum Identity

The findings further reveal that *Bina Pribadi Islam* (BPI, *Islamic Character Development*) constitutes a core component of the curriculum identity at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon. The program is implemented through small mentoring groups facilitated by teachers, focusing on character formation, the strengthening of religious practices, the internalization of Islamic values, and the cultivation of the school's Islamic culture.

Interviews with the principal and teachers indicate that BPI is designed to foster students who demonstrate noble character, independence, discipline, and leadership. Rather than functioning as a supplementary extracurricular activity, the program is integrated into the school's educational framework as a systematic approach to Islamic character development.

The findings also show that BPI activities are consistently featured across the school's digital media platforms. Mentoring sessions, discussions on Islamic values, collective worship practices, and various character-building activities are regularly disseminated



through photographs, videos, and other forms of digital content, portraying these activities as integral components of students' everyday educational experiences.

These findings demonstrate that the school's digital branding extends beyond showcasing students' academic achievements to highlighting the continuous process of character formation. Through the representation of BPI activities, the school communicates a distinctive educational orientation that emphasizes moral and spiritual development alongside academic excellence. This representation distinguishes the integrated Islamic school model from conventional schools, which tend to prioritize academic achievement as the primary indicator of educational quality.

Overall, the findings suggest that Islamic character development constitutes a central dimension of the school's curriculum identity. By consistently communicating BPI activities through its digital platforms, the school represents its educational philosophy and reinforces the distinctive values underpinning the JSIT curriculum. In this regard, digital branding functions as a representational mechanism through which curriculum identity is constructed, communicated, and understood by the wider public.

Agribusiness Education and Outing Class as Representations of Curriculum Identity

Beyond its religious education programs, the curriculum identity of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon is also represented through its Agribusiness Education and Outing Class programs. These initiatives are designed to provide students with contextual learning experiences while fostering practical life skills that complement their academic and religious development.

The Agribusiness Education program engages students in plant cultivation and the management of small-scale entrepreneurial activities, encompassing the entire process from production to the marketing of agricultural products. Meanwhile, the Outing Class program facilitates experiential learning beyond the classroom by utilizing natural environments, government institutions, and business sectors as authentic learning resources.

According to a member of the school's public relations team, both programs are systematically documented and regularly disseminated through the school's digital media platforms alongside other educational activities.

An examination of the school's digital content further revealed that publications featuring the Agribusiness Education and Outing Class programs consistently portray students' active engagement in experiential learning. Rather than merely presenting the outcomes of these activities, the published content highlights the learning process itself, emphasizing students' direct participation in real-world educational experiences.

These findings suggest that the school's curriculum identity extends beyond its religious dimension to encompass life skills development, student independence, and contextual learning experiences as integral characteristics of the integrated Islamic education model. By consistently communicating these programs through digital media, the school projects a holistic educational philosophy that integrates Islamic values, academic learning, and practical competencies. Consequently, digital branding serves as a representational mechanism through which the school's distinctive curriculum identity is continuously communicated and reinforced in the public sphere.



Students as Representations of Curriculum Identity in the Digital Sphere

The findings reveal that students serve as the primary agents through which the school's curriculum identity is represented in its digital branding practices. A substantial proportion of the school's social media content features students actively participating in the educational programs that characterize the distinctive curriculum of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon.

One student stated:

"I enjoy watching videos of our daily school activities and classroom learning the most. I feel proud because my activities can be seen by many people."

Another student explained:

"I follow the school's Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube accounts. I especially enjoy videos showing our school activities and the sense of togetherness among students. My parents also feel proud when they watch them."

These statements indicate that students are not merely participants in educational activities but also serve as the public face of the school across its digital platforms. Their involvement in Arabic language instruction, the Qur'anic Learning Program, Islamic Character Development (BPI), Agribusiness Education, and Outing Class is consistently featured in the school's digital content, making students the principal medium through which the curriculum is communicated to the wider public.

The findings further suggest that curriculum identity in the digital sphere is constructed through students' lived educational experiences. Rather than representing abstract curricular concepts, the school's digital content portrays students' authentic participation in everyday educational practices, demonstrating how the distinctive elements of the JSIT curriculum are enacted in practice. In this regard, students function as living representations of the school's curriculum identity, enabling digital branding to communicate not only educational programs but also the institutional values and educational philosophy underpinning the integrated Islamic school model.

Digital Media as a Representational Space for Curriculum Identity

The findings demonstrate that digital media functions not merely as a channel for disseminating school-related information but as the primary representational space through which the curriculum identity of SMP IT Cendekia Takengon is constructed and communicated to the public. The school strategically utilizes multiple digital platforms—including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and its official website—to document and communicate the educational programs that characterize its distinctive curriculum.

A member of the school's public relations team explained:

"We use Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp to communicate the school's activities."

The principal further emphasized the strategic importance of digital media in shaping the school's public image:

"Today, people learn about schools primarily through social media, so it plays a crucial role in school branding."

From the parents' perspective, digital media serves as the primary source of information for understanding the school's identity before deciding to enroll their children. One parent stated:



"I first learned about this school through social media. After seeing its various activities, I became confident about enrolling my child. Once my child started studying here, I found that the school's actual practices truly reflected what had been presented online."

An examination of the school's digital platforms revealed that the published content extends far beyond administrative announcements or student admission campaigns. Instead, the majority of the content focuses on educational activities that reflect the implementation of the school's curriculum, including Arabic language instruction, Qur'anic memorization (*tahfiz*) and recitation improvement (*tahsin*), Islamic Character Development (BPI), Agribusiness Education, Outing Class, and students' everyday learning experiences within the school environment.

These findings indicate that digital media functions as a representational space in which diverse curriculum components are integrated into a coherent narrative of institutional identity. Arabic language instruction represents the school's commitment to Islamic scholarship, the Qur'anic Learning Program reflects its religious identity, Islamic Character Development (BPI) embodies its commitment to character education, while Agribusiness Education and Outing Class represent its holistic and contextual approach to learning. Collectively, these curriculum components are communicated through students' authentic educational experiences, which are systematically documented and disseminated through the school's digital platforms.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital branding at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon is not primarily constructed through institutional slogans, logos, or promotional campaigns. Rather, it is built through the sustained representation of the school's distinctive curriculum as enacted in everyday educational practices. In this sense, digital media serves as a representational arena that connects curriculum implementation, students' lived learning experiences, and public perception, enabling the school's institutional identity to be continuously constructed, communicated, and reinforced through the consistent publication of educational activities.

Digital Branding as a Representation of the JSIT Curriculum Identity

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital branding at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon functions not merely as a promotional instrument but as a representational mechanism through which the school's curriculum identity is communicated to the public. The consistent dissemination of educational programs—including Qur'anic Learning, Arabic Language Instruction, Islamic Character Development (BPI), Agribusiness Education, and Outing Class—indicates that the school's digital content is strategically centered on curriculum components that embody its distinctive educational identity. Rather than relying primarily on slogans, logos, or conventional promotional messages, the school constructs its institutional identity through the continuous representation of everyday educational practices within the digital sphere.

These findings can be interpreted through Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which argues that identity is not fixed or inherent but is continuously constructed through processes of representation manifested in language, symbols, images, and various forms of public communication (Hall, 1997). From this perspective, digital media functions not simply as a channel for information dissemination but as a site of meaning production through which institutional identities are constructed and negotiated. Consequently, the



publication of learning activities, religious programs, and school culture extends beyond documenting educational practices; it simultaneously communicates who the school is, the values it upholds, and the educational philosophy it seeks to promote. In this sense, digital branding becomes a representational process through which curriculum identity is made visible and meaningful to the wider public.

This interpretation extends previous studies that have primarily conceptualized digital media as an instrument for educational marketing, institutional visibility, and reputation building (Abdurrofi & Susilo, 2026; Badarwan et al., 2026b; Constantinides & Stagno, 2011; Sukarji Sukarji, 2024). While earlier research has demonstrated the strategic role of digital platforms in enhancing institutional competitiveness, it has paid comparatively limited attention to their role in representing curriculum identity. In contrast, the present study argues that, within the context of Islamic schools, digital media serves not only promotional purposes but also functions as a representational space through which curriculum identity is continuously constructed and communicated. Accordingly, what is presented to the public is not merely the school as an organization but also the educational values, pedagogical orientation, and curriculum philosophy that underpin its educational practices.

These findings further suggest that digital branding in Islamic schools is more appropriately understood as a form of value-based communication rather than merely an educational marketing strategy. By consistently communicating curriculum implementation through students' authentic educational experiences, digital media becomes a mechanism through which institutional values are translated into publicly recognizable meanings. This perspective contributes to the growing body of literature on educational branding by demonstrating that digital branding can function as a medium for representing curriculum identity, thereby shaping public perceptions of educational institutions beyond conventional notions of branding and institutional promotion.

Curriculum as a Source of Institutional Differentiation and Brand Identity in Islamic Schools

The findings of this study demonstrate that the distinctive curriculum components of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) constitute the primary source of institutional identity formation at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon. The prominent representation of Qur'anic Learning, Arabic Language Instruction, Islamic Character Development (BPI), and life skills education across the school's digital platforms indicates that institutional differentiation is established through educational practices rather than merely through institutional symbols or promotional messages. These findings suggest that the curriculum extends beyond its pedagogical function to serve as a strategic source of institutional identity that distinguishes the school from other educational institutions.

Among these curriculum components, Arabic Language Instruction occupies a particularly significant position. The findings reveal that Arabic is represented not merely as an academic subject but as a symbol of Islamic scholarship that supports students' understanding of the Qur'an while reinforcing the distinctive educational orientation of the integrated Islamic school model. Furthermore, the use of instructional materials specifically developed within the JSIT network reflects a curriculum identity that differs from those of conventional public schools and Islamic schools (*madrasahs*) that follow the national



curriculum prescribed by the government. Within the context of digital representation, Arabic language instruction functions as a symbolic marker that connects formal education, Islamic literacy, and the educational vision underpinning the school's institutional identity.

These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that the JSIT curriculum serves as a framework for integrating Islamic values, character development, and students' holistic competency development (Agung Putra Bhayangkara et al., 2024; Khusniyati Sururiyah et al., 2023; Robingatin, 2015; Sholehah et al., 2025). However, existing studies have largely concentrated on curriculum implementation within the internal context of schools. The present study extends this body of knowledge by demonstrating that the curriculum also performs a symbolic function as a source of institutional identity that is actively represented and communicated to the public through digital media. In doing so, this study broadens the understanding of curriculum beyond its instructional dimension by positioning it as an essential component of institutional branding and identity construction.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that not all curriculum components receive equal representation within the digital sphere. Instead, the school selectively emphasizes educational programs that most effectively communicate its distinctive institutional characteristics, particularly Arabic Language Instruction, the Qur'anic Learning Program, and Islamic Character Development (BPI). This pattern suggests that digital branding involves a process of symbolic selection in which curriculum components possessing the strongest differentiating value are prioritized to strengthen institutional legitimacy and foster public trust. Consequently, curriculum representation in digital media should not be understood as a neutral reflection of all school activities; rather, it constitutes a selective process of identity construction through which particular educational values and institutional characteristics are strategically communicated to external audiences.

Digital Branding as a Process of the Co-Construction of Institutional Identity

The findings further reveal that the school's institutional identity is not constructed unilaterally by its management but rather emerges through the active participation of multiple stakeholders involved in the process of digital representation. The principal, teachers, the public relations team, students, and parents each contribute to shaping the institutional narratives that circulate within the digital public sphere. Accordingly, digital branding should be understood as a collaborative communicative process through which institutional identity is continuously negotiated and constructed.

Within this process, students occupy a particularly significant role, serving as the primary embodiments of the curriculum as represented to the public. Their participation in Arabic language instruction, the Qur'anic Learning Program, Islamic Character Development (BPI), and other educational activities is communicated through authentic learning experiences that are openly visible across the school's digital platforms. Rather than relying on institutional claims or promotional narratives alone, the school's digital branding presents observable educational practices that enable the public to evaluate the authenticity of its educational identity. Consequently, students function not merely as participants in educational activities but as the principal representational agents through whom the school's curriculum identity is communicated.

These findings are consistent with the internal branding perspective, which positions organizational members as key actors in the construction of institutional identity (Balmer



et al., 2011). However, this study extends that perspective by demonstrating that, within the context of digital media, institutional identity is constructed not only through the internalization of organizational values but also through a participatory process of digital representation involving multiple stakeholders in the creation and dissemination of digital content (Eriani et al., 2025; Irdiyanti et al., 2023). Accordingly, institutional identity emerges as a process of co-construction, shaped through the dynamic interaction among the institution, members of the school community, and the wider public who engage with and interpret the school's digital content.

The findings also help explain why authenticity constitutes a fundamental element of digital branding in educational institutions. Public trust is established not simply through the frequency or intensity of promotional activities but through the consistency between the identity represented in digital media and the lived experiences of students and parents. In this regard, institutional legitimacy is derived from the alignment between digital representation and everyday educational practice. The effectiveness of digital branding therefore depends not on persuasive promotional messages but on the institution's ability to consistently communicate authentic educational experiences that reflect its curriculum identity and educational values.

Theoretical Contribution: Digital Branding as Curriculum Identity Representation

Conceptually, this study proposes the perspective of digital branding as curriculum identity representation, arguing that digital branding in Islamic schools should be understood not merely as a promotional or marketing strategy but as a representational process through which curriculum identity is continuously reproduced, communicated, and interpreted in the construction of institutional identity. From this perspective, digital media functions as a representational space where educational values, curriculum practices, and institutional meanings are made visible and negotiated through ongoing digital communication.

This perspective differs from the dominant stream of educational branding literature, which has primarily conceptualized digital branding in terms of educational marketing, institutional reputation, and organizational visibility. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that the curriculum itself constitutes the principal source of institutional identity represented through digital media. Within the context of integrated Islamic schools, curriculum components—including Qur'anic Learning, Arabic Language Instruction, Islamic Character Development, and contextual learning—function not only as educational programs but also as symbolic representations through which the school's educational philosophy, institutional values, and distinctive identity are communicated to the public (Pendidikan et al., 2025).

Accordingly, this study extends the educational branding literature by shifting its analytical focus from marketing-oriented perspectives toward the representation of institutional identity. The findings demonstrate that digital media should be understood not merely as an organizational communication tool but as an arena of meaning production that connects curriculum implementation, school culture, students' lived educational experiences, and public perception in the continuous construction of institutional identity. In doing so, this study contributes a conceptual framework that integrates educational branding, curriculum identity, and representation theory, offering a broader perspective for



understanding how Islamic schools construct and communicate their distinctive identities within the contemporary digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital branding at SMP IT Cendekia Takengon functions not only as a means of promoting the school but also as a representational mechanism through which curriculum identity is communicated to the public. Through multiple digital platforms, the school consistently represents the distinctive components of the JSIT curriculum—including Qur'anic Learning, Arabic Language Instruction, Islamic Character Development (BPI), Agribusiness Education, and Outing Class—as defining characteristics that differentiate it from other educational institutions. In this context, digital media serves as a representational space in which educational values, school culture, and curriculum orientation are continuously constructed and communicated to broader audiences. Theoretically, this study extends the educational branding literature by demonstrating that digital branding can be understood as a process of curriculum identity representation, rather than merely as a strategy for educational marketing or institutional promotion. Accordingly, the study proposes the perspective of digital branding as curriculum identity representation, which integrates educational branding, representation theory, and the integrated Islamic curriculum into a coherent analytical framework. This perspective provides a broader understanding of how Islamic schools construct and communicate their institutional identity through the digital representation of curriculum practices. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of consistent and authentic digital communication in strengthening institutional identity, enhancing curriculum differentiation, and reinforcing public trust in Islamic educational institutions. These findings have important practical implications for Islamic educational institutions. Rather than emphasizing institutional promotion alone, digital branding strategies should prioritize the authentic representation of curriculum implementation to strengthen institutional identity, reinforce curriculum differentiation, and foster sustainable public trust. Future research is encouraged to examine the applicability of the digital branding as curriculum identity representation perspective across different educational contexts, including public schools, *madrasahs*, and other Islamic educational institutions. Comparative and mixed-method studies may also provide deeper insights into how institutional contexts influence the representation of curriculum identity through digital media and further refine the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

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