

Beyond Enrollment: Managing Student Recruitment Campaigns in Social Media as an Outcome of Learning

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Abstract

Amid an increasingly intense digital landscape, student recruitment promotion in Islamic boarding schools often remains merely an administrative practice rather than a pedagogical space. This gap raises fundamental questions about the possibility of integrating social media into an authentic learning process. This study aims to examine the management of student recruitment promotion as an outcome of social media learning at PPATQ Raudlatul Falah Pati, using a qualitative case study approach and employing participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and digital content analysis. The research findings indicate that promotional activities have evolved into a dynamic learning practice. Students do not merely serve as the subjects of promotion but as active content creators who construct religious narratives, visual aesthetics, and institutional identity. This process integrates digital literacy with spiritual character development, resulting in content that is not merely communicative but also reflective and educational. On the other hand, this practice reveals a tension between educational ideals and the logic of digital visibility, which demands a balance between authenticity and representation. This study proposes the concept of pedagogical branding as an integration of learning, student participation, and value-based promotional strategies. These findings contribute to the development of social media theory in Islamic education and offer practical implications for the design of adaptive, participatory, and meaningful learning in the digital age.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has shifted the global educational landscape from a knowledge-transmission model toward a participatory ecosystem supported by social media (García-Ruiz & Pérez-Escoda, 2020; Makhachashvili & Semenist, 2024). In various countries, digital platforms are no longer merely channels for distributing information but have become spaces for the production of meaning, identity, and social relations that influence learning practices and educational institutions (Falloon, 2020; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Kimmons et al., 2021). In this context, the promotion of educational institutions has undergone a shift in function: from an administrative activity toward a strategic practice intersecting with pedagogy, branding, and public participation. This phenomenon is relevant to major global issues in digitalization, education governance, and well-being, as the way institutions present themselves in digital spaces has

implications for access, trust, and students' character development (Selwyn, 2019; Taufikin, 2021).

In the field of Islamic education studies, this shift presents a new and complex landscape. Pesantren, as traditional institutions, demonstrate an adaptive capacity toward technology; however, this adaptation is often interpreted solely within the framework of administrative modernization or marketing strategies (Azra, 2018; Hasan, 2020). Recent literature in Islamic education, the sociology of education, and media studies positions social media as a tool for da'wah, institutional communication, and image building (Briandana et al., 2020; Sahin, 2018; Sule & Sulaiman, 2021; Utami et al., 2024). Researchers generally focus on the effectiveness of digital communication, reputation management, and audience reach, while the pedagogical dimensions of these practices remain relatively sidelined. In other words, scholars mostly focus on the instrumental function of social media in expanding institutional visibility rather than its role as a learning space that develops competencies and values.

Several key studies highlight the dominant direction of research. Greenhow and Chapman (2020) examined the role of social media in distance learning and student participation. Kimmons (2021) developed a framework for critical digital pedagogy that emphasizes student content production. Aslan (2021) and Yan et al. (2024) examined the impact of student-generated content on learning engagement. Livingstone & Third (2017) explored the ethical implications of children's engagement in digital spaces. In the context of Islamic education, Hasan (2020) and Sahin (2018) highlight the importance of institutional modernization and branding. Existing studies predominantly examine the use of social media as a communication tool, learning engagement, and branding strategies, while paying limited attention to the integration between institutional promotion and the learning process carried out simultaneously by students.

However, empirical studies that specifically examine how student recruitment promotional activities function as social media-based learning outcomes in the context of Islamic boarding schools remain very limited. Little is known about how students, as internal actors, produce promotional content while simultaneously developing digital and spiritual literacy competencies. Previous research has not sufficiently addressed the integration of branding, pedagogy, and student participation within a coherent conceptual framework, particularly in children's tahfidz pesantren. Furthermore, research combining the perspectives of Islamic education with digital pedagogy in the concrete practice of institutional promotion has also been scarce, leaving significant conceptual and empirical gaps.

Based on this gap, this study aims to examine the management of student recruitment promotion as a learning outcome of social media at PPATQ Raudlatul Falah Pati. Operationally, this study addresses the following questions: how are promotional practices constructed as a learning space; how do students, teachers, and administrators produce digital content; and how are spiritual values integrated into this process. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, involving interviews with kiai, ustaz from the digital creative team, murobbi, students, and parents, accompanied by participant observation and social media content analysis.

This research contributes on several levels. Theoretically, this study introduces the concept of pedagogical branding as an integration of learning, student participation, and value-based promotional strategies, thereby expanding the discourse on social media learning and Islamic education. Empirically, this research provides in-depth data

on children's tahfidz in pesantren, a sector that has been underrepresented in the global literature. Methodologically, this study integrates participatory observation, multi-stakeholder interviews, and digital content analysis into a comprehensive design. Socially, the findings of this study have implications for the development of adaptive, participatory, and character-building educational practices in the digital age, while also affirming that promotion can serve as an authentic and meaningful pedagogical space.

RESEARCHS METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; de Vries, 2020). This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of promotional management practices as learning outcomes of social media within a complex, contextually rich real-world setting (Yin, 2014). Case studies provide space to understand the relationships between actors, practices, and meanings holistically, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly defined. This approach aligns with the research objective, which seeks to explore processes rather than merely measure outcomes.

Research Setting & Context

The research was conducted at PPATQ Raudlatul Falah Pati, a children's tahfidz boarding school that integrates Quranic education with social media for communication and expression. This institution was selected because it demonstrates a unique practice in which student recruitment activities are carried out not only as an administrative function but also as part of the students' learning process. This characteristic makes it a relevant research site capable of representing digital transformation in Islamic education based on Islamic boarding schools.

Participants / Data Sources

The research participants were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account their direct involvement in the practices under study (S. Campbell et al., 2020). There were a total of 15 participants, consisting of one kiai as a policy-maker, two ustaz who were part of the digital creative team, five ustaz who were teachers, two murobbi who served as character mentors, five santri who were content producers, and five parents as external parties who consumed and evaluated the content. Inclusion criteria included active involvement in social media-based learning or promotional processes, while participants without direct experience in such practices were excluded. In addition to primary data, this study also utilizes secondary data in the form of social media content from Islamic boarding schools (videos, captions, comments) published over the past year.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using three main methods (Bowen, 2009; Knott et al., 2022; Ponticell et al., 2018): first, semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections. The interview guide was designed flexibly to focus on content production practices, promotional objectives, and the integration of learning values. Second, participatory observation was conducted during the content production process, including recording, editing, and publication. Third, analysis of

digital documents, such in social media content, to understand the forms of representation and the narratives constructed. Data collection took place over three months, with repeated interactions between the researcher and participants to ensure data depth. The primary instrument in this study was the researcher themselves, supported by interview guidelines and field notes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). The analysis process took place through several stages: first, familiarization with the data through repeated reading; second, an initial coding process to identify units of meaning; third, grouping codes into thematic categories; fourth, interpretation of themes within the study's conceptual framework. The analysis was conducted inductively while taking into account the previously established theoretical framework. To enhance accuracy, the analysis was conducted iteratively and reflectively, allowing adjustments to the categories in response to the data's dynamics.

Trustworthiness

Data credibility is ensured through several strategies. Credibility is achieved through triangulation of sources (religious leaders, teachers, students, parents) and methods (interviews, observations, documents), as well as member checking to ensure that interpretations align with participants' experiences (Denzin, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Transferability is strengthened by providing rich contextual descriptions. Dependability is maintained through an audit trail that systematically documents the research process. Confirmability is achieved by maintaining the researcher's reflexivity and minimizing interpretive bias.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the principles of research ethics. Each participant was provided with an explanation of the study's objectives and asked to give informed consent before participating. Participant identities were protected using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected was used solely for academic purposes and was not disclosed without permission.

Limitations

This study has limitations in its geographical scope, focusing on a single Islamic boarding school; therefore, any generalizations from the findings must be made with caution. Furthermore, the qualitative approach emphasizes depth over breadth; thus, it is not intended to produce statistical generalizations but rather to provide a deep contextual understanding. Nevertheless, this study's findings still make a significant contribution to enriching our understanding of the integration of social media and learning in Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Promotion as a Structured and Authentic Learning Space

The first finding indicates that promotional practices for student recruitment are structured as a learning space integrated into students' daily activities. Promotion is not treated as an additional task, but rather as part of the experiential learning process.

Students are directly involved in content production, from planning to publication, thereby internalizing both skills and values.

Table 1. Findings on Promotional Practices as a Learning Space

Data Source	Quote/Observation	Theme	Frequency	Interpretation
Kiai	“This promotion isn't just about recruiting students; it's part of their education”	The Pedagogical Aspect of Promotion	High	Promotion is positioned as part of the implicit curriculum
Creative Teacher	“Children learn while creating content”	Learning by doing	High	Hands-on practice reinforces learning
Students	“We're happy to be able to perform and learn”	Active engagement	High	Intrinsic motivation increases
Observation	Students record their recitations and edit videos	Authentic practice	High	Real-world activities as a learning medium
Documentation	Promotional videos based on students' activities	Educational representation	High	Content reflects the learning process

Source: Thematic analysis of primary data by researcher

Referring to Table 1, Kiai emphasizes the ontological repositioning of promotion from an instrumental activity to a pedagogical praxis. When promotion is understood as part of education, it no longer stands outside the curriculum but transforms into an implicit curriculum that operates through real world experiences. This perspective suggests that the institution consciously integrates external functions into internal processes, thereby blurring the boundaries between learning and representation. Given its high frequency in the data, this finding indicates a structural awareness that every promotional activity serves as a medium for shaping students' character and competencies.

The ustaz's creative narrative underscores the dominance of the “learning by doing” approach as the core of teaching practices. Content production is not merely a technical activity; it serves as a platform for experimentation, where students learn through direct engagement. The frequency with which this theme emerges indicates that learning is no longer based on one-way instruction, but rather on experiences that allow for reflection and improvisation. In this context, digital practices serve as a pedagogical laboratory that enables the integration of technical skills and conceptual understanding.

The students' responses reveal a strong affective dimension in the learning process. Active engagement not only increases participation but also fosters intrinsic motivation, which serves as the foundation for sustained learning. The sense of joy that emerges is not merely a side effect, but an indicator that the learning process has successfully integrated with the students' personal experiences. The high frequency of this theme suggests that promoting the classroom as a learning space can create an environment that is not only productive but also emotionally meaningful.

The observational data support the finding that the students' activities are authentic and contextual. The process of recording their recitations and editing videos demonstrates that learning takes place in real-world situations, not simulations. This marks a shift from representation-based learning toward direct-experience-based

learning. These authentic practices enable students to develop skills relevant to the digital world while preserving the academic substance of what they are learning.

Analysis of the documentation reveals that the content produced serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a representation of the learning process itself. Videos depicting students' activities provide a vivid reflection of the educational practices in the pesantren. This finding, observed frequently, underscores that digital output is not separate from the pedagogical process but rather serves as an extension that expands the learning space into the public sphere. The content produced, therefore, holds educational value while authentically building the institution's image.

Digital Content Production as a Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Practice

The second finding reveals that producing digital content is not an individual endeavor but a collaborative one, involving students, teachers, and administrators simultaneously. Each actor plays a specific role, complementing the others in creating content that is both educational and engaging.

Table 2. Content Production as a Collaborative Practice

Data Source	Quote/Observation	Theme	Frequency	Interpretation
Ustaz Creator	"We provide guidance, and the students also contribute many ideas when discussing the content"	Horizontal collaboration	High	Non-hierarchical relationships
Ustaz	"The content must remain consistent with the pesantren's values"	Value curation	High	Normative control remains
Students	"We discussed it before making the video"	Co-creation	High	Dialogue-based production
Parents	"The content is educational and engaging"	Public perception	Moderate	External validation
Observation	Team discussion before production	Collective planning	High	Process

Source: Thematic analysis of primary data by researcher

The creator's statement (table 2) reveals a redistribution of authority in the content production process. Pedagogical relationships are no longer vertical in nature but are shifting toward horizontal collaboration, where creative ideas often originate from the students themselves. The ustaz's role is shifting from being the primary source of knowledge to that of a facilitator and curator of the process. This frequent occurrence signifies a transformation of the pedagogical structure toward a more dialogic and participatory model, while simultaneously opening space for the emergence of student agency in digital practices.

The ustaz's statement emphasizes that although content production is collaborative, normative control is strictly maintained. Value curation serves as a crucial mechanism to ensure that all content produced does not deviate from the principles of the pesantren. This demonstrates a balance between creative freedom and moral responsibility. The high frequency of this theme indicates that digital innovation is not detached from an ethical framework, but is instead reinforced through a continuous process of value selection and validation.

The students' accounts of the discussion process before production indicate that digital content emerges from a dialogue-based co-creation process. Ideas are not

imposed from above, but rather negotiated through interactions among team members. This creates a deliberative space where students learn to articulate their ideas, listen to other perspectives, and reach a mutual agreement. The high frequency of this finding demonstrates that content production is not merely a technical activity, but also a social process that strengthens communication and collaboration skills.

Parents’ perspectives provide an important external dimension for understanding the quality of the content produced. The assessment that the content is both educational and engaging indicates a successful effort to bridge pedagogical needs and public expectations. Although the frequency of such feedback is moderate, this finding provides social validation that the collaborative practices undertaken are not only meaningful internally but also positively received by external audiences. This reinforces the legitimacy of the production model being implemented.

The observational data indicate that before the production process, there is a collective planning phase involving various actors. Team discussions serve as a strategic space for developing concepts, assigning roles, and determining the direction of the content. The high frequency of this finding indicates that content production is not merely spontaneous but is systematically designed. This collective planning reflects structured creative management and enhances the quality of the output, both in aesthetics and substance.

Integration of Spiritual Values in Digital Content Production

The third finding confirms that the content produced is not value-neutral, but rather imbued with Islamic spiritual values. Each piece of content is designed not only to attract attention but also to convey moral and religious messages.

Table 3. Integration of Spiritual Values in Content

Data Source	Quote/Observation	Theme	Frequency	Interpretation
Kiai	“Content must embody Qur’anic values”	Spirituality	High	Values as the foundation
Mentor	“Children are guided to remain civilized”	Digital Ethics	High	Character building
Students	“We say a prayer before recording”	Spiritual practice	Moderate	Internalization of values
Documentation	Content containing verses and memorization	Religiosity	High	Representation of values
Observation	Content moderation by religious scholars	Value control	High	Validation

Source: Thematic analysis of primary data by the researcher

The cleric’s statement affirms that all digital content production is rooted in a Qur’anic orientation as its epistemological and axiological foundation. Spiritual values are not treated as mere adornments but as the primary source guiding the content’s substance, form, and purpose. The high frequency of this finding indicates that institutions are consciously constructing a normative framework that positions digital media as an extension of their da’wah and educational missions, ensuring that every visual representation remains anchored to the transcendent message intended to be conveyed.

The role of the murobbi in guiding students' conduct demonstrates that the integration of values extends beyond content to the very process of their formation. Digital ethics has become a new medium in character education, where students are taught how to behave, speak, and represent themselves responsibly in the digital public sphere. With high frequency, these findings indicate that the practice of content production simultaneously serves as an arena for the internalization of etiquette, expanding the meaning of character education into the contemporary digital world.

The students' accounts of their habit of reciting prayers before the recording process reflect the ritualization of digital activities. This practice demonstrates that technology does not separate students from the spiritual dimension but, in fact, integrates with it. Although the frequency is moderate, this finding is of profound significance, as it indicates the internalization of personal and reflective values, with technical activities understood as part of worship and as a means of strengthening religious consciousness.

Analysis of the documentation reveals that the content explicitly includes verses from the Qur'an and memorization activities, thereby presenting a strong religious representation. The high frequency of these findings indicates that institutional identity is constructed through consistently displayed religious symbols and practices. The content functions not only as a communication medium but also as a vehicle for transmitting values, demonstrating the integration of digital aesthetics and religious substance.

The supervision of content by religious teachers underscores the existence of a values-based control mechanism that serves as a normative validation. Content is not published immediately upon production but undergoes a selection process to ensure alignment with the principles of the pesantren. The high frequency of this finding indicates that creative freedom remains within well-maintained ethical boundaries, ensuring that content production does not fall into a value-free logic but is instead guided by clear moral and spiritual standards.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a fundamental shift in educational promotion practices at Islamic boarding schools. The promotion of student recruitment is no longer viewed merely as an administrative activity or a marketing strategy, but has transformed into a vibrant, collaborative, and value-rich learning space. Students are not merely objects of representation, but active subjects who produce content, construct narratives, and simultaneously internalize spiritual values. Digital content production takes place within fluid, multi-actor relationships, where ustaz, administrators, and students interact in a simultaneous creative process. Furthermore, the integration of spiritual values serves as the foundation guiding all digital practices, ensuring that social media does not lose its ethical orientation.

Theoretically, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of social constructivism, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and the joint construction of meaning (Nardo, 2021; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). In this context, promotional activities serve as a medium for the construction of authentic knowledge. Santri learn not through formal instruction, but through direct engagement in meaningful social practices. This is also in line with Jenkins's (2009) concept of participatory culture, in which individuals act as both producers and consumers of

content (Chaudron et al., 2023; Loudoun et al., 2023). However, this study goes a step further by demonstrating that such participation is not neutral, but rather guided by structured spiritual values.

Compared to previous studies, these findings expand our understanding of digital pedagogy. Greenhow and Chapman (2020) demonstrate that social media enhances learning engagement, while Aslan (2021) and Yan et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of student-generated content in improving learning outcomes. Kimmons (2021) adds a critical dimension to digital pedagogy. However, these studies generally take place within the context of modern formal education and have not yet addressed integrating learning, promotion, and spirituality into a single, holistic practice.

In the context of Islamic education, the research by Hasan (2020) and Sahin (2018) highlight the modernization and branding of Islamic boarding schools as a response to globalization. However, their approaches still treat branding as an external strategy. This study demonstrates that branding can actually emerge from within, as a logical consequence of the learning process. Consequently, an epistemological shift occurs: from branding as an image to branding as a process.

However, these findings should be interpreted critically within the broader global context, particularly in light of critiques of digital capitalism and the commodification of education. Recent literature indicates that social media is not neutral but operates within the logic of digital capitalism, which emphasizes visibility, algorithms, and the monetization of attention (Srnicek, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). In the context of education, this has the potential to shift pedagogical values into commodities packaged for public consumption. Education risks being reduced to visual performativity that pursues engagement rather than depth of meaning.

From this perspective, the pedagogical branding practices identified in this study can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, they represent pedagogical innovations that empower students as creators. On the other hand, there is latent potential for the commodification of the learning experience, in which educational activities are selectively represented to build the institution's image. In line with Selwyn's critique (Selwyn, 2019), the digitization of education often introduces a subtle yet powerful market logic (Brancaleone & O'Brien, 2011; Tyrkba et al., 2022).

However, the findings of this study reveal a significant distinction. In contrast to the global trend of framing education within a capitalist framework, practices at PPATQ Raudlatul Falah demonstrate cultural resistance. Spiritual values are not merely present as symbols but function as an ethical control mechanism that limits excessive commodification. Thus, pedagogical branding in this context is not entirely subject to market logic but is negotiated through living religious values.

Based on a synthesis of findings and a dialogue with existing theories, this study develops the concept of pedagogical branding as an integrative model that connects three main dimensions: the learning process, digital content production, and the construction of institutional identity, with the addition of a critical dimension involving the negotiation of pressures from digital capitalism. This model demonstrates that branding no longer stands as a result, but as a product of the learning process itself. Thus, there is a paradigm shift from branding as an external strategy toward branding as a pedagogical outcome. This can be explicitly seen in Table 4 and Figure 1 below:

Table 4. Pedagogical Branding Model

Component	Description	Position of Findings
Learning Process	Promotion as a learning space	Internal Pedagogy
Content	Multi-stakeholder collaboration	Social Process
Production		
Value Integration	Spiritual values in content	Normative foundation
Branding Output	Process-based institutional image	Strategic Output
Critical Filter	Ethical-spiritual mechanisms that filter the logic of digital capitalism	Value Control

Source: Synthesis of findings by the researcher

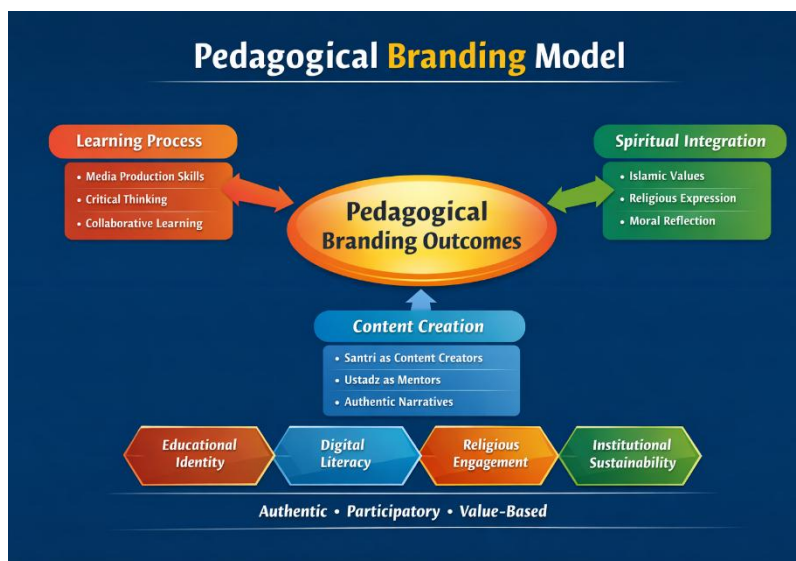


Figure 1. Pedagogical Branding Outcomes Model

Referring to Table 4 and the visual model (Figure 1), this represents a digital learning ecosystem that is not linear, but rather circular and mutually reinforcing. Each component does not stand alone, but operates within dynamic relationships that shape both the learning experience and the construction of institutional identity.

First, the Learning Core serves as the primary foundation. At this level, learning activities are no longer based on the transfer of knowledge, but on hands-on practice (experiential learning). Students engage in real-world processes such as recording their memorization, crafting narratives, and editing content. Learning occurs through action, not merely through instruction. At this point, social media transforms into a vibrant pedagogical laboratory (Gutiérrez-Pequeño et al., 2023; Pequeño & Rodriguez, 2021).

Second, Participatory Production demonstrates that content creation is not an individual activity, but a collaborative one. Students, teachers, and administrators are all involved in the co-creation process. Students serve as the primary creators; teachers act as curators of values and mentors; and the institution provides direction and structure. This relationship reflects a shift from hierarchical pedagogy toward participatory pedagogy (Manouchehri & Burns, 2023; Thi et al., 2023; Zimmerman, 2008).

Third, Value Integration is the dimension that distinguishes this model from general digital practices. Every content production process is not value-neutral but is guided by the internalization of Islamic spiritual values. From the selection of themes

and language to the visuals, everything is designed to reflect proper conduct, ethics, and Qur'anic messages. Thus, digital literacy goes hand in hand with spiritual literacy (Boyd, 2014; H. A. Campbell, 2010).

Fourth, Branding Outcome is the result that emerges organically from the entire process. An institution's image is not built through manipulative strategies but rather emerges as an authentic representation of the learning practices that occur. In this model, branding is not the initial goal, but rather the logical consequence of a meaningful and consistent process (Cristancho et al., 2019; Pinar et al., 2011).

Fifth, the Critical Filter serves as a key element that reinforces this model's critical position in the global landscape. In the context of digital capitalism, which emphasizes visibility, algorithms, and commodification, this model introduces a filtering mechanism grounded in spiritual values. This filter ensures that the content produced does not get trapped in the logic of virality alone, but maintains ethical integrity and educational objectives. In other words, technology is not rejected, but consciously negotiated (Davis, 1989; Ghani et al., 2022).

Overall, this model demonstrates that pedagogical branding is not merely the integration of learning and promotion but an epistemological reconstruction of how education unfolds in the digital age. The learning process, content production, spiritual values, and institutional image are interwoven within a cohesive ecosystem, with a critical filter serving as a guiding force to prevent being swept away by the tide of global commodification. This model also underscores that Islamic boarding schools are not only adaptable to technology but also capable of building an elegant cultural resistance, utilizing digital media without losing the spiritual essence that underpins them.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in developing a concept of pedagogical branding that is not only integrative but also critical of power structures within the digital ecosystem. Empirically, this study examines the context of children's tahfidz boarding schools, a topic that has rarely been studied in the global literature. Methodologically, integrating multi-stakeholder interviews, participatory observation, and digital content analysis provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the phenomenon.

In practical terms, these findings have important implications for educational institutions. Social media needs to be designed as a learning space that is not only effective but also ethical. Students can be trained to become creators who are aware of algorithmic dynamics and the risks of commodification, enabling them to produce authentic content without getting caught up in the logic of virality alone.

However, this study has limitations. The focus on a single institution limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, this study has not explicitly measured the extent to which platform algorithms influence the form of the content produced. Future research could integrate platform studies analysis or quantitative approaches to examine these dynamics more broadly. Thus, this study not only offers an empirical description but also opens space for critical reflection on how Islamic education can navigate the forces of digital capitalism without losing the core values that underpin it.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the practice of promoting student recruitment at PPATQ Raudlatul Falah Pati Central Java has undergone a significant epistemological transformation: from an external communication activity to a productive and

meaningful pedagogical space. The primary novelty lies in conceptualizing pedagogical branding as a dynamic integration of learning processes, digital content production, and the internalization of spiritual values that simultaneously serves as an ethical mechanism against the pressures of digital capitalism. The findings indicate that students not only produce content but also develop digital literacy competencies, reflective awareness, and religious identity within a single, holistic process. Furthermore, the presence of a critical filter grounded in spiritual values underscores that digital practices in Islamic boarding schools are not entirely subject to the logic of commodification but are consciously negotiated through a living ethical framework. Thus, branding is no longer understood as an image constructed from the outside but as a natural consequence of an authentic learning process.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study expands the discourse on social media-based learning by incorporating dimensions of spirituality and a critique of digital capitalism, thereby presenting a new, more integrative and contextual framework within the field of Islamic education. In practice, these findings guide educational institutions to design social media as an ethical, participatory, and value-oriented learning space rather than merely a promotional tool. However, this study has limitations in its focus on a single context and has not yet thoroughly examined the structural influence of platform algorithms. Therefore, further research is recommended to test this model in a broader context, including through quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, and to integrate perspectives from platform studies. Thus, this study contributes to enriching the body of knowledge while opening space for critical reflection on the future of education amidst the increasingly complex tide of digitalization.

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