

Design Thinking Approach to Hybrid Identity Mascot for The Visual Communication Design Department at Bina Insani University

Bimahadi Ilmawan Ronggowarsito*, Zuhreini Amanda

Universitas Bina Insani, Indonesia

Email: bimahadi@binainsani.ac.id*, zuhreiniamanda@binainsani.ac.id

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Abstract

The development of visual identity in newly established academic programs presents a challenge in balancing institutional credibility with audience engagement. This study addressed this issue by exploring the design of a mascot for the Visual Communication Design Department at Bina Insani University as a strategic medium for identity representation and communication. The research aimed to develop a mascot that reflected the department's positioning as both accessible to prospective students and aligned with professional industry standards. This study employed a Design Thinking framework supported by an in-house practitioner reflexivity approach. Data were collected through passive observation, internal document analysis, market segmentation analysis, and internal focus group discussions. The analysis integrated narrative and descriptive semiotic approaches to translate contextual insights into visual design decisions. The results indicated that the primary design challenge involved reconciling accessibility and professionalism, which was addressed through the development of a hybrid identity model. This model was represented through a female "inspirer" character and refined through iterative prototyping involving exploration of outfits, attributes, and institutional color hierarchy. The testing stage confirmed that the final design effectively represented institutional identity, resonated with the target audience, and functioned as a communicative persona. The study concluded that mascot design in higher education should be approached as a context-driven and iterative process of identity construction. The findings contributed to design research by demonstrating how visual and verbal elements can be integrated to support institutional branding and audience engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Global and national creative industries continue to experience significant growth, with Generation Z emerging as a major contributor across sectors such as visual arts, animation, and digital media (Rusmini et al., 2022; Purbokusumo et al., 2025). In Indonesia, the expansion of the film, animation, and video subsectors, which have been projected as key drivers of the creative economy, has increased the demand for educational programs that align with industry needs (Kemenparekraf, 2024). Consequently, Visual Communication Design (VCD) has become one of the increasingly popular academic disciplines, particularly among younger generations.

In response to these developments, Bina Insani University (BIU) established a new VCD Department as part of its institutional expansion. However, beyond curriculum development, the department faces a critical challenge in establishing its strategic positioning and identity within a competitive higher education environment. As newly established academic programs often lack strong public recognition, the development of a distinctive visual identity is essential for communicating

institutional values and attracting prospective students (Dwitasari et al., 2025; Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Palav, 2024; Wu & Cheong, 2022).

Visual identity serves as a primary medium through which institutions communicate their character and positioning (Rahmadini, 2023; Febrian et al., 2024). Among its various components, mascots have gained increasing relevance as tools for strengthening memorability and emotional engagement, particularly among Generation Z audiences (Supriadi & Arianti, 2021; Kongdee et al., 2020). However, mascot design for educational institutions requires more than visual attractiveness; it must also reflect institutional values, audience characteristics, and strategic objectives.

Previous studies on mascot design in higher education contexts have primarily adopted designer-centered approaches, positioning designers as external actors who develop designs based on predefined briefs (Tjhie et al., 2023; Ariesta, 2020; Kongdee et al., 2020). Although these studies contribute to understanding visual outcomes, they often provide limited discussion of the internal, participatory, and reflective processes involved in identity formation, particularly within newly established institutions. Consequently, further exploration is needed regarding how design decisions emerge through contextual engagement and iterative reflection within the institution itself.

This gap highlights the need for an alternative methodological perspective that positions the design process as both a creative and analytical activity. The in-house practitioner reflexivity approach provides such a perspective by involving internal stakeholders as active participants in the design process, enabling deeper contextual understanding and more relevant design outcomes. To the best of the authors' knowledge, limited studies have applied the in-house practitioner reflexivity approach within a Design Thinking framework for mascot design in higher education, particularly in newly established Visual Communication Design departments in Indonesia. This represents the methodological contribution and novelty of the present study, distinguishing it from previous research that predominantly relies on external designer-centered approaches with limited institutional involvement (Britton, 2017; Kavakci, 2026; Koskinen, 2023; Tse, 2026).

Based on this rationale, this study aimed to: (1) design a mascot as part of the visual identity of BIU's VCD Department that represents institutional values and resonates with its target audience; and (2) analyze the design process using an in-house practitioner reflexivity approach within a Design Thinking framework. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching discussions on reflexive design methodologies and value-based visual identity development, as well as practically by providing a contextualized design framework applicable to similar educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Approach

This research employed a qualitative approach using an in-house practitioner reflexivity framework (Waruwu, 2024). This framework positioned the researchers as embedded actors within the design context, functioning simultaneously as designers and analysts. Rather than separating the subject and object of study, the research process integrated creative practice with reflective inquiry, allowing the design process itself to serve as a primary data source.

The research was conducted through the Design Thinking framework (Ardiansyah & Rosyani, 2023), which consisted of five iterative stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. These stages were applied in a flexible and cyclical manner to enable continuous refinement based on emerging insights throughout the design process.

Within this approach, reflexivity played a central role. The research team, consisting of faculty members from the Visual Communication Design Department, actively participated in identifying problems, determining design directions, generating solutions, and critically evaluating outcomes throughout the process. This dual role facilitated a deeper contextual understanding while maintaining analytical rigor through systematic reflection.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection employs a triangulation strategy (Soewardikoen, 2019) to ensure depth, credibility, and contextual richness. Three primary data sources are utilized:

Internal Document Study

Institutional documents were analyzed to establish the conceptual and strategic foundation of the design. These include:

- University and faculty vision, mission, and strategic plans
- Curriculum framework
- Existing visual identity elements

This data provides insight into the institutional values and positioning that inform the mascot design.

Passive Observation

Passive observation was conducted over a one-month period (December 2024–January 2025) within the BIU campus environment. The observation focused on:

- Student social interaction patterns
- Dress style and self-expression
- Visual characteristics of the physical environment

This method allows the researchers to capture natural, unaltered behaviors and visual tendencies, which are critical in understanding the contextual profile of the target audience.

Participatory Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Structured internal FGDs were conducted involving faculty members and institutional stakeholders. These discussions served multiple purposes:

- Synthesizing findings from observation and document studies
- Validating interpretations and design directions
- Refining conceptual and visual decisions

The Dean participated as a key decision-maker to ensure alignment with institutional expectations. The FGD process also functions as a reflexive mechanism, where insights are co-constructed through dialogue.

Data Validation

Data validity is ensured through methodological triangulation, which cross-verifies findings across different data sources. The integration of document analysis, observation, and FGD enables the researchers to confirm consistency of insights, identify converging patterns, and reduce subjective bias. Additionally, validation is strengthened through participatory verification, where interpretations and design outcomes are reviewed and approved by institutional stakeholders during the FGD process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is conducted using a combination of narrative analysis and descriptive semiotic analysis, allowing the study to examine both process and visual meaning.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is applied to qualitative data derived from:

- FGD discussions
- Internal reflections
- Document interpretations

This technique is used to construct a coherent account of the design process, identifying key themes, decision points, and the underlying rationale behind design choices.

Descriptive Semiotic Analysis

Descriptive semiotic analysis is applied to the visual outputs generated during the design process. This analysis examines:

- Denotative meaning (literal visual elements)
- Connotative meaning (symbolic and cultural interpretations)

Through this approach, each design element such as color, costume, and form is interpreted in relation to its role in communicating institutional identity.

Integration of Methods

The integration of reflexive practice, triangulated data collection, and dual analytical techniques enables a comprehensive understanding of both the design process (how decisions are made) and the design outcome (what the mascot represents). This methodological combination ensures that the study not only produces a design artifact but also contributes to design knowledge and research discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Empathize Stage: Contextualizing Institutional Identity and Audience

The empathize stage was conducted to construct a comprehensive understanding of the institutional context and target audience characteristics through the integration of passive observation, strategic segmentation analysis, and internal document studies. Within the in-house practitioner reflexivity framework, these findings are not treated as neutral or objective data, but as situated interpretations shaped through continuous interaction between researcher-designers and the institutional environment (Waruwu, 2024). This approach allows the research to capture not only observable patterns but also the underlying meanings that inform design decision-making.

Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Audience

Passive observation conducted over a one-month period reveals that student behavior at Bina Insani University (BIU) is strongly influenced by cultural norms emphasizing politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. Students consistently demonstrate respectful gestures toward lecturers, maintain formal communication, and exhibit collaborative interaction patterns among peers. These behaviors reflect an academic environment that prioritizes discipline, harmony, and mutual respect.

In terms of visual expression, students predominantly adopt a semi-formal style, characterized by collared clothing, modest appearance, and minimal use of highly expressive or experimental fashion elements. Notably, forms of self-expression commonly associated with global Generation Z culture, such as bold hairstyles, streetwear aesthetics, or highly individualized visual identity are rarely observed within the campus environment. Figure 1 shows how BIU students express their visual expression through fashion style.



Figure 1. BIU's Student Fashion Style

Source: Author's documentation from passive observation at Bina Insani University campus, December 2024 – January 2025

This finding indicates that the target audience represents a contextualized form of Generation Z, where visual expression is moderated by institutional norms and local socio-cultural values. Therefore, generational identity cannot be interpreted as a uniform global construct, but must be understood as situationally shaped by environmental and cultural conditions.

For the design process, this implies that adopting highly expressive or exaggerated visual styles may result in a mismatch with audience expectations. Instead, the mascot must operate within a bounded expressive range, where creativity is balanced with appropriateness and relatability. This insight becomes a key foundation for determining the acceptable level of stylization in the subsequent design stages.

Environmental and Institutional Visual Context

Observation of the physical campus environment shows a strong dominance of green color tones, with limited variation in complementary or contrasting palettes. This creates a visually consistent environment characterized by harmony, uniformity, and restraint. Figure 2 shows how BIU's exterior and interior environment.



Figure 2. BIU's Exterior & Interior Environment

Source: Author's documentation from passive observation at Bina Insani University campus, December 2024 – January 2025

This visual condition reflects the presence of an embedded institutional identity system, where repeated exposure to specific colors reinforces their association with the institution. In this context, green does not function merely as a decorative element, but as a visual sign that conveys meanings such as stability, growth, and institutional continuity.

Because of this, any new visual element introduced into the system including the mascot must maintain coherence with this established visual language. Introducing a character with a drastically different or contrasting color scheme could disrupt visual continuity and weaken the perception of identity consistency.

Therefore, the environmental findings justify the need for the mascot to adopt and adapt existing institutional colors, ensuring that it is perceived as an integral part of the visual identity rather than an isolated or disconnected element.

Strategic Segmentation and Positioning Context

The strategic segmentation analysis, conducted in collaboration with the university's digital marketing division, reveals that the VCD Department adopts an undifferentiated targeting strategy. The target audience includes high school graduates from various backgrounds, including those who may not have prior experience in creative fields.

The department's positioning combines two key dimensions. First, it emphasizes accessibility, offering affordable education and flexible entry pathways. Second, it highlights professional outcomes, aiming to produce graduates who are ready to enter the creative industry.

This combination creates a unique positioning that requires the department to appear both inclusive and credible. The mascot, as part of the visual identity, must reflect this positioning by being approachable for beginners while also representing a level of competence associated with professional development.

This insight introduces an important design implication: the mascot must function as both an entry point and an aspiration point, bridging the gap between initial interest and future expertise. This dual expectation becomes a central consideration in the define stage.

Institutional Value and Identity Framework

The internal document study provides insight into the university's vision, mission, strategic goals, and visual identity elements. BIU emphasizes values such as competence, integrity, collaboration, and continuous development, while its visual identity is represented through a combination of green and yellow colors.

These values establish the conceptual foundation for the mascot, positioning it as a symbolic representation of institutional identity rather than a purely decorative figure. The mascot is expected to communicate not only visual appeal but also the core principles of the institution.

From a design perspective, this means that every visual element—such as color, costume, and expression—must be aligned with these values. For example, the use of green may represent growth and stability, while yellow can introduce a sense of optimism and creativity. The integration of these elements allows the mascot to function as a visual narrative of institutional identity.

Synthesis through Internal Focus Group Discussion

The findings from observation, segmentation analysis, and document studies were synthesized through internal Focus Group Discussions involving faculty members and institutional stakeholders. In this stage, the FGD functions not only as a validation mechanism but also as a process of collective interpretation, where insights are discussed, refined, and aligned with institutional expectations. Through this process, the research team is able to:

- Cross-validate findings from multiple data sources
- Reduce individual bias through shared interpretation
- Ensure that design decisions remain relevant and acceptable within the institutional context

This participatory approach strengthens the credibility of the findings, as the resulting insights are not based solely on individual perspectives but are co-constructed through institutional consensus.

Synthesis of Empathize Stage

The integration of all findings produces three key insights that guide the design process:

Contextualized Audience Profile

The target audience represents a culturally moderated Generation Z, characterized by balanced visual expression and adherence to institutional norms.

Embedded Visual Identity System

Institutional colors and environmental visuals function as stabilizing identity elements that

must be preserved for coherence.

Dual Strategic Expectation

The need to balance accessibility and professionalism requires a design approach that integrates both inclusivity and aspiration. These insights establish a contextually grounded and evidence-based foundation for the define stage, ensuring that subsequent design decisions are guided by structured understanding rather than subjective preference.

Define Stage: Translating Contextual Insights into Strategic Design Framework

The define stage serves as a critical transition from contextual exploration to structured design direction. Based on the empathize stage, the findings from passive observation, segmentation analysis, internal document studies, and internal FGD were synthesized into a strategic framework for mascot development. Within the in-house practitioner reflexivity approach, this stage is not merely a summary of collected data, but an interpretive process in which the research team critically identifies the most relevant insights and translates them into design decisions. This is important because the mascot is not positioned only as a visual character, but as a communication medium representing the identity, values, and positioning of the Visual Communication Design Department at Bina Insani University

Problem Formulation

The central problem identified in this stage is how to design a mascot that can represent institutional identity while balancing inclusivity for prospective students and aspiration toward professional competence. This problem emerges from several tensions found in the empathize stage. First, passive observation indicates that the audience demonstrates moderated visual expression, polite interaction, and semi-formal appearance. Second, the segmentation analysis shows that the department targets students from diverse backgrounds, including those who may not yet have strong creative skills. Third, the department's positioning emphasizes both accessibility and industry readiness.

Therefore, the design problem is not simply about creating an attractive mascot, but about negotiating multiple identity demands. If the mascot appears too casual or childish, it may weaken the department's professional image. Conversely, if it appears too formal or advanced, it may reduce approachability for prospective students. This makes the design challenge strategic rather than merely aesthetic.

Design Criteria

Based on this problem formulation, the design criteria were developed to ensure that the visual exploration remained aligned with contextual findings. These criteria function as boundaries that guide the creative process, preventing the design from becoming arbitrary or detached from the institutional context.

The mascot should adopt a semi-formal visual direction, reflecting the observed appearance and behavior of BIU students. This does not mean the design must be rigid or overly formal, but it should communicate neatness, discipline, and academic credibility. At the same time, the mascot should still contain creative attributes that indicate its relation to the field of Visual Communication Design.

The color direction should also remain consistent with BIU's visual identity, particularly the green and yellow palette found in the institution's branding. Green functions as the dominant institutional color, while yellow may be used as an accent to introduce optimism, creativity, and visual energy. This color strategy is necessary to ensure that the mascot appears as part of the existing institutional identity system rather than as an isolated visual object.

In terms of expression and character personality, the mascot should be friendly, calm, and approachable. Extreme expressions, rebellious styling, or overly exaggerated anime tropes should be avoided because they may conflict with the socio-cultural characteristics observed in the BIU environment. Thus, the design criteria emphasize a balance between creativity, modesty, and professionalism.

Audience Reframing

Although the segmentation analysis identifies the target audience demographically as high school graduates (SMA/SMK) aged around 17–19 years old, this information alone is insufficient for mascot design. In the define stage, the audience must be reframed from a demographic category into a design oriented profile.

Based on the empathize findings, the target audience can be understood as prospective students who are interested in creative fields but may come from different levels of prior creative experience. They require a visual identity that feels welcoming and not intimidating. At the same time, because the department positions itself as industry-oriented, the audience also needs to see the mascot as a representation of future growth and professional possibility.

This reframing is important because it shifts the design focus from “what young people generally like” to “what this specific audience needs to feel represented.” In this context, Generation Z should not be treated as a universal group with identical visual preferences. Instead, BIU’s target audience represents a localized and culturally moderated Generation Z profile, shaped by institutional norms, semi-urban context, and practical career expectations.

Conceptual Direction

The conceptual direction developed from this stage is a hybrid identity model. This model combines two main roles: the mascot as a relatable student figure and the mascot as an aspirational professional figure. The student aspect allows the character to feel accessible and familiar to prospective students, while the professional aspect communicates the department’s outcome-based positioning.

This hybrid concept directly responds to the tension between accessibility and professionalism. Rather than choosing one side, the mascot is designed to bridge both. It represents the journey of students entering the department as beginners and gradually developing into competent creative professionals.

In this sense, the mascot functions not only as a brand character but also as a narrative symbol of transformation. It communicates that the VCD Department is a place where students can start from various backgrounds, develop creative competence, and move toward professional readiness.

From Insight to Strategy

The define stage transforms fragmented findings into a coherent design strategy. The socio-cultural findings inform the need for moderated visual expression. The segmentation analysis informs the need for accessibility and inclusivity. The institutional document study informs the need for value alignment and visual consistency. The internal FGD validates these interpretations and ensures that the design direction remains acceptable within the institutional context.

As a result, the define stage produces a strategic foundation for the ideate stage. The mascot design should be semi-formal, friendly, visually consistent with BIU identity, creatively relevant to VCD, and symbolically positioned as a bridge between beginner identity and professional aspiration.

Through this process, the define stage demonstrates that design thinking is not only a creative workflow, but also a structured method for translating contextual research into design logic. The output of this stage is not yet a visual solution, but a justified framework that guides the generation and evaluation of visual alternatives in the next stage.

Synthesis of Define Stage

The define stage transforms contextual findings from the empathize phase into a structured design framework by identifying a central tension between accessibility and professionalism. The VCD Department must present itself as inclusive to attract diverse prospective students, while simultaneously communicating competence and industry readiness. This dual demand reframes the mascot design problem as a strategic negotiation rather than a purely aesthetic

task, requiring a solution that integrates both relatability and aspirational value within a single visual system.

To address this, the study establishes a constraint-based design approach, where audience characteristics, institutional identity, and strategic positioning are translated into guiding parameters. The audience is reframed as a context-specific Generation Z profile shaped by socio-cultural norms, while institutional elements such as color and tone reinforce the need for visual consistency. These insights lead to the formulation of a hybrid identity model, positioning the mascot as a symbolic bridge between entry-level engagement and professional development. This synthesis provides a clear and justified foundation for the ideation stage, ensuring that subsequent design exploration remains aligned with contextual and strategic objectives.

Ideate Stage: Translating Keywords into Visual Exploration and Concept Selection

The ideate stage focuses on translating the strategic framework established in the define phase into visual exploration and design alternatives. In this study, the ideation process is systematically guided by keywords derived from the define stage, which serve as the foundation for determining the key visual direction of the mascot. Figure 3 shows the ideate process.



Figure 3. Visual Exploration & Concept Selection

Source: Author's design process documentation based on ideation stage, 2025

These keywords such as accessibility, professionalism, growth, and balance are translated into visual parameters, including shape language, character proportion, costume, and expression. This translation process ensures that the ideation stage remains grounded in contextual insights, allowing abstract concepts to be materialized into visually testable design alternatives.

Exploration of Character Typologies

Based on the defined key visual directions, the design exploration is conducted through a range of character typologies, spanning from anthropomorphic characters to humanoid representations. This spectrum of exploration is intentionally structured to identify which form most effectively represents the institutional identity and ideological values of Bina Insani University.

Anthropomorphic character explorations emphasize friendliness, memorability, and symbolic expression, making them effective in representing accessibility and emotional

engagement. However, several variations are perceived as overly playful, which may limit their ability to communicate academic credibility and professional orientation.

In contrast, humanoid character explorations provide stronger alignment with the identity of students and future professionals. These designs allow for clearer integration of semi-formal attire and creative attributes, making them more suitable for representing the institutional context. Nevertheless, purely functional humanoid representations may lack distinctiveness if not supported by a strong conceptual role.

Iterative Exploration and Stakeholder-Based Evaluation

The exploration process is conducted through iterative sketching, where multiple character alternatives are generated and evaluated based on their alignment with the predefined keywords and key visual directions. Each alternative is assessed in terms of its ability to:

- Represent institutional values
- Resonate with the contextual audience profile
- Maintain visual consistency with BIU identity
- Balance accessibility and professionalism

A crucial aspect of this stage is the involvement of institutional stakeholders, particularly the dean and internal decision-makers, in evaluating the proposed design alternatives. Through this participatory evaluation process, design decisions are not determined solely by the researcher, but are validated through institutional perspective and strategic alignment.

From this evaluation, the design that is most strongly favored is the fourth humanoid character alternative, representing a female figure positioned as an “inspirer”. This character is perceived as effectively embodying the hybrid identity concept, as it combines approachability, confidence, and aspirational qualities within a single representation. Figure 4 shows the female figure that is the most favored by stakeholders.



Figure 4. Selected Character Design Concept

Source: Author's design based on stakeholder evaluation and concept selection, 2025

Concept Selection: Female “Inspirer” as Hybrid Identity Representation

The selection of the female “inspirer” character represents the convergence of visual exploration, conceptual alignment, and stakeholder validation within the ideation process. Through iterative comparison of alternatives, this character is identified as the most capable of integrating the key design dimensions established in the define stage, particularly the balance between accessibility and professionalism.

From a visual perspective, the character demonstrates a moderated and semi-formal appearance, aligning with the socio-cultural profile of the target audience identified in the empathize stage. Its calm and approachable expression supports relatability, while its structured attire and confident posture reinforce a sense of competence and credibility. This combination enables the character to function as both a familiar representation of students and a projection

of future professional identity.

The selection is further strengthened by the involvement of institutional stakeholders, including the dean and internal decision-makers, who favor this alternative based on its ability to represent the values and aspirations of the Visual Communication Design Department. Compared to other explored typologies, the female “inspirer” character is considered more effective in communicating a balanced and aspirational identity, while remaining accessible to prospective students from diverse backgrounds.

Conceptually, positioning the mascot as an “inspirer” extends its role beyond a representational figure into a symbolic agent of guidance and transformation. The character embodies the educational journey promoted by the institution, reflecting the transition from entry-level engagement to professional readiness. This aligns with the department’s positioning as an accessible yet industry-oriented academic program.

The selection of this concept establishes a clear and validated direction for the subsequent prototype stage, where the character will be further developed through detailed exploration of visual attributes, including outfit variations, accessories, and color application, as well as the construction of its overall identity system.

Prototype Stage: Iterative Development of Visual and Identity System

The prototype stage focuses on translating the selected concept of the female “inspirer” character into a refined and coherent visual system through an iterative design process. Building upon the validated direction from the ideate stage, this phase does not immediately produce a final design, but instead develops the character through a series of controlled explorations, including alternative outfit configurations, accessory variations, and color schemes.

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Exploration of Outfit Variations

The initial stage of prototyping focuses on exploring multiple outfit alternatives to identify the most appropriate visual representation of the character’s hybrid identity. Based on the visual references, the exploration includes variations ranging from more casual, layered clothing to semi-formal and studio-oriented attire. Figure 5 shows character outfit and accessories exploration process.



Figure 5. Character Outfit & Accessories Exploration

Source: Author's design process documentation based on prototype stage, 2025

Some variations emphasize a more expressive and dynamic appearance through layered clothing and accessories, reflecting creativity and flexibility. However, these alternatives are evaluated as potentially too informal for representing institutional credibility. Other variations

adopt a more structured and minimal approach, reinforcing professionalism but risking a loss of relatability.

Through iterative comparison, a balanced outfit direction is identified, combining semi-formal structure with casual flexibility. Elements such as a jacket layered over modest clothing, combined with practical footwear and functional silhouettes, allow the character to remain approachable while still conveying discipline and readiness. This outcome directly reflects the hybrid identity framework established in the define stage.

Exploration of Accessories and Attributes

In addition to outfit development, the prototype stage includes the exploration of accessories and character attributes that reinforce the mascot's role within the Visual Communication Design context. Based on the visual references, various elements such as drawing tools, sketch tubes, tote bags, and wearable items are tested.

These accessories function not only as decorative additions but as symbolic indicators of creative practice, helping to situate the character within the design discipline. However, the iterative process reveals that excessive or overly complex attributes may reduce clarity and visual focus.

As a result, the selected approach prioritizes functional and minimal accessories, where each element has a clear purpose and contributes to the overall narrative. For example, the inclusion of a sketch tube or drawing tool emphasizes the character's creative identity, while a tote bag reinforces its student-oriented context. This ensures that the character remains visually readable while still communicating its disciplinary relevance.

Exploration of Color Variations

The prototype stage also involves the development of multiple color alternatives, exploring different configurations of BIU's institutional palette. Based on the visual references, variations include adjustments in the dominance of green and yellow, as well as the introduction of neutral supporting tones. Figure 6 shows the color exploration process.



Figure 6. Color Exploration

Source: Author's design process documentation based on prototype stage, 2025

Some variations emphasize green as the dominant color, reinforcing institutional identity and visual stability. Others explore yellow as a more prominent element to introduce energy and creative expression. Additional variations experiment with softer or alternative color accents to test emotional tone and visual differentiation.

Through evaluation, the selected color direction prioritizes green as the primary identity anchor, supported by yellow as a strategic accent. This configuration maintains visual consistency with BIU's identity while allowing enough flexibility to express creativity and warmth. Neutral tones are used to balance the composition and prevent visual overload.

Final Prototype and Persona Identity Development

The result of the iterative design process is a cohesive character that integrates outfit,

accessories, and color into a unified visual system. The character presents a calm and confident expression, supported by a semi-formal appearance and minimal yet meaningful attributes. This configuration reflects the hybrid identity concept established in the define stage, balancing accessibility and professionalism within a single representation.

As the visual design reaches a stable form, the development process indicates the need to extend the character beyond visual appearance into a persona identity. This step becomes necessary to support the character’s function as a communication medium, particularly in enhancing recognition, memorability, and audience engagement. While the visual form establishes how the character is perceived, the presence of a persona allows the character to be more easily identified, referenced, and interacted with within institutional communication contexts.

Based on this need, the character is further developed through the introduction of a naming construct that strengthens its relational quality. The name “BIU-chan” emerges from this process by combining the institutional acronym “BIU” with the suffix “-chan,” which is commonly associated with familiarity and interpersonal closeness, particularly toward female figures. In this context, the use of the suffix is not intended to position the character strictly within an anime or popular culture framework, but rather to adapt its communicative function in conveying friendliness and approachability. Figure 7 shows the final prototype design.



Figure 7. Final Prototype Character Design

Source: Author's design process documentation based on prototype stage, 2025

The integration of the name “BIU-chan” reinforces the character’s role as an “inspirer” and a learning companion, supporting its ability to engage with prospective students in a more personal and relatable manner. At the same time, the visual design maintains a controlled and semi-formal appearance, ensuring that the character remains aligned with institutional values and professional expectations. This combination allows the character to operate within a

balanced identity, where formal representation and informal engagement coexist.

Overall, the final prototype demonstrates that mascot development involves not only visual refinement but also identity construction, where visual and verbal elements work together to communicate meaning. The resulting character, represented through the persona of BIU-chan, functions as both an institutional symbol and an engaging communication figure that supports the positioning of the Visual Communication Design Department.

Test Stage: Evaluation and Validation of Character Design

The test stage focuses on evaluating the developed prototype to determine how effectively the character represents the intended identity and communicates within the institutional context. This stage is conducted through internal validation involving stakeholders, including faculty members and institutional decision-makers, to ensure that the design aligns with the objectives established in the define stage.

The evaluation is carried out by reviewing the character in relation to key design criteria, particularly its ability to:

- Represent institutional identity
- Balance accessibility and professionalism
- Resonate with the target audience
- Function effectively across communication contexts

Stakeholder-Based Evaluation

The testing process involves structured discussions with internal stakeholders, including the dean and academic representatives. During this process, the character is presented in its refined prototype form, including variations of outfit, color application, and persona identity.

The feedback indicates that the character successfully reflects the intended hybrid identity, combining a professional appearance with a friendly and approachable presence. The semi-formal outfit and controlled expression are perceived as appropriate for representing the academic environment, while the overall visual style remains relatable to prospective students.

The persona identity, including the use of the name “BIU-chan,” is also positively received as it enhances the character’s memorability and emotional connection without diminishing institutional credibility.

Refinement Based on Evaluation

Although the overall design is well received, several minor refinements are identified during the evaluation process. These adjustments primarily focus on improving visual clarity and consistency, such as:

- Simplifying certain accessory details
- Adjusting color balance to strengthen contrast
- Refining proportions for better readability across different scales

These refinements demonstrate that the testing stage is not only confirmatory but also corrective, allowing the design to be improved before finalization.

Validation of Design Outcome

Based on the evaluation results, the character is considered to have met the primary design objectives established in earlier stages. The design successfully:

- Aligns with institutional identity through consistent color and visual tone
- Represents the target audience through a balanced and relatable appearance
- Communicates aspirational value through its “inspirer” role
- Functions as a communication persona through its verbal identity

This validation confirms that the design is not only visually appropriate but also strategically aligned with the positioning of the Visual Communication Design Department.

Conclusion of Testing Stage

The test stage demonstrates that the character design, developed through an iterative process, is able to effectively integrate visual, conceptual, and communicative elements. The

involvement of stakeholders ensures that the final outcome reflects not only the designer's interpretation but also the expectations and values of the institution.

As a result, the character is established as a validated mascot prototype, ready to be implemented as part of the department's visual identity and communication strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mascot design within an educational context is not merely a visual exercise but also a strategic and analytical process of identity construction. Through the application of the Design Thinking framework combined with an in-house practitioner reflexivity approach, this research successfully developed a mascot representing the institutional identity of the Visual Communication Design Department at Bina Insani University. The findings indicate that effective mascot design should be grounded in contextual understanding, including audience characteristics, institutional values, and strategic positioning. The empathize and define stages revealed that the primary challenge involved balancing accessibility and professionalism, reflecting the department's dual role as an inclusive entry point and a pathway toward professional development. This challenge was addressed through the development of a hybrid identity model, which was translated into the selected character concept of a female "inspirer." Through iterative exploration and stakeholder validation, the prototype stage refined this concept into a coherent visual system by integrating outfit design, character attributes, and institutional color hierarchy. The addition of a persona identity further strengthened the character's communicative function, enabling it to operate not only as a visual symbol but also as a relatable and engaging figure. The test stage confirmed that the final design fulfilled the established criteria, demonstrating alignment with institutional identity, resonance with the target audience, and effectiveness as a communication medium. Consequently, the mascot was validated as a strategically grounded visual identity element that is ready for implementation. Overall, this study highlights that mascot design in higher education requires a context-driven, participatory, and iterative approach, in which design decisions emerge from structured analysis rather than solely from aesthetic considerations.

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations remain and provide opportunities for further research. The evaluation process was primarily conducted within an internal institutional context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to different educational environments. Future studies should expand the test stage by involving external participants, such as prospective students from diverse backgrounds, to evaluate broader audience perceptions and measure design effectiveness. Furthermore, future research may investigate the implementation of mascots across various communication media, including digital platforms, promotional campaigns, and interactive content, to examine their influence on audience engagement and institutional branding. Comparative studies involving institutions with different cultural and strategic contexts are also recommended to provide deeper insights into how mascot identities can be adapted and optimized across diverse educational settings.

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