

Experiential Marketing Strategy In The Boarding School Education Ecosystem As An Effort To Increase The Loyalty Of Student Guardians At Islamic Boarding Schools

Maulidatul Adzimah*, Muthi'ah Rahman, Annisa Tri Ananda Dewi, Moh. Mohlas, Ahmad Rausyan Fikri, Mohammad Abdul Aziz Al Wahedi, Abdullah
Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

Email : maulidatuladzimah99@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to explore the implementation of experiential marketing within the boarding school ecosystem and identify the key factors that enhance parental loyalty. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed using data reduction, presentation, and interpretive conclusion techniques. Findings indicate that experiential marketing is not formally structured but naturally embedded in students' spiritual, social, and academic experiences. Critical success factors include firsthand student experiences, service quality, effective communication, adherence to religious values, and the positive institutional image conveyed through documentation. These elements contribute to heightened parental satisfaction, trust, engagement, and loyalty, often manifested through recommendations and continued enrollment. The study underscores that a comprehensive, experience-based marketing strategy grounded in religious and educational values is more effective for fostering long-term parental loyalty than traditional marketing approaches, offering a practical framework for boarding schools seeking sustainable relationship-building strategies while enhancing their reputation and perceived educational quality.

How to Cite:

Adzimah, M., Rahman, M., Dewi, A. T. A., Mohlas, M., Fikri, A. R., & Al Wahedi, M. A. A. (2024). Experiential Marketing Strategy In The Boarding School Education Ecosystem As An Effort To Increase The Loyalty Of Student Guardians At Islamic Boarding Schools. *Educazione: Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(2), 78-86.

INTRODUCTION

The growing competition among Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions has made marketing an essential component for institutional sustainability and parental engagement (Agus R et al., 2025; Dermawan et al., 2024; Sari & Fikri, 2026). Unlike conventional educational promotions, which primarily focus on administrative and informational content, modern marketing theory emphasizes the importance of creating emotional and sensory experiences—such as sense, feel, think, act, and relate to foster stronger bonds between the institution and students' guardians (Maulana & Yuliaji, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2025; Tamin & Kusuma, 2025). Experiential marketing enables institutions to engage guardians directly, building trust, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty (Ardini et al., 2024; Marwan, 2022; Mundiri &

Article History

Received :12/January/2024
Revised :24/March/2024
Accepted :27/June/2024

Keywords:

Experiential Marketing, Boarding School Education Ecosystem, Parental Loyalty, Islamic Boarding School

Firdausy, 2022). Given that guardians often act as primary decision-makers for enrollment and continued education, understanding how to create meaningful experiences is critical. Therefore, investigating experiential marketing strategies within the boarding school ecosystem is socially significant, offering insights that can enhance both institutional reputation and the quality of educational services, ultimately benefiting society by improving educational continuity and parental satisfaction.

Despite the theoretical recognition of experiential marketing's value, most Islamic boarding schools still rely on conventional administrative communication to interact with students' guardians (Meliawati & Mulyawan, 2025; Setiawan & Windayanti, 2025). This approach largely limits emotional involvement and fails to leverage opportunities for deep engagement, leaving a gap between institutional potential and actual marketing practice. Research indicates that low emotional involvement from guardians is associated with weak loyalty, as evidenced by frequent student transfers between institutions (Faiz et al., 2023; Fauzi et al., 2025). The lack of structured experiential initiatives limits the institution's ability to foster trust, satisfaction, and recommendation behaviors among guardians. Consequently, institutions are unable to fully capitalize on the educational ecosystem to strengthen bonds. This challenge highlights the urgent need to shift from one-way informational interactions to strategies that integrate sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational experiences, forming a foundation for more effective loyalty-building in the context of Islamic boarding school education.

Observations from the field reveal that interactions between Islamic boarding schools and guardians remain largely transactional and administrative (I. H. Firdaus et al., 2026; Musthofa & Yakin, 2024). Moments with high potential for engagement—such as guardian visits, student activities, academic celebrations, and digital communication are seldom utilized to create emotional closeness (Abas & Jamila, 2025; Baharun & Asrani, 2024). Additionally, management teams often exhibit limited understanding of experiential marketing concepts, resulting in minimal innovation in providing engaging educational services. Guardians, on the other hand, demonstrate higher loyalty toward institutions that offer a sense of security, participation, and visible involvement in students' learning and social development. These patterns suggest that the boarding school ecosystem contains latent opportunities for experiential engagement, yet these remain underutilized. Recognizing these gaps is crucial, as effectively integrating experiences into daily interactions could transform routine educational processes into meaningful touchpoints that build trust, satisfaction, and sustained parental commitment.

Prior studies on experiential marketing in education highlight its potential to create emotional bonds and increase consumer loyalty through immersive experiences (Maulidy et al., 2025; Permanasari & Haryanti, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2026). Key experiential elements including "sense," "feel," "think," "act," and "relate" have been shown to positively influence satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty across multiple sectors. However, much of the research focuses on conventional schools or education-related businesses without boarding-based structures, leaving the specific application in Islamic boarding schools underexplored. This presents a critical research gap, as boarding schools operate in unique contexts characterized by religious values, collective life, and continuous guardian-student-institution interactions, which cannot be fully captured by studies on standard educational institutions. The absence of

tailored research limits guidance for administrators seeking to implement holistic, experience-driven marketing strategies within their institutions.

Moreover, while experiential marketing has been examined extensively in business contexts, few studies specifically address the Islamic boarding school environment, where academic, social, and spiritual elements converge to form a unique educational ecosystem. Previous research primarily emphasizes information dissemination and administrative processes (Meliawati & Mulyawan, 2025; Setiawan & Windayanti, 2025), overlooking how experiential factors could be systematically integrated into institutional practices. This study therefore fills an important knowledge gap by situating experiential marketing within the boarding school context, providing a foundation to examine not only educational outcomes but also the relational and emotional dimensions of guardian engagement. By doing so, it extends existing literature and offers practical insights for administrators on how to leverage experiences to strengthen trust, satisfaction, and loyalty.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of experiential marketing with the boarding school ecosystem, a context that combines academic rigor, religious values, and communal life. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on conventional educational marketing, this study positions the guardian experience as a central strategic component, recognizing that loyalty is shaped by emotional and social interactions as well as academic quality. Preliminary evidence suggests that when institutions actively craft meaningful experiences, guardians exhibit higher levels of engagement, trust, and willingness to maintain long-term relationships with the institution. This state-of-the-art perspective emphasizes a holistic approach to educational marketing, bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications, and highlights the potential for experiential strategies to transform traditional administrative interactions into powerful tools for sustaining parental loyalty.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the implementation of experiential marketing strategies within the boarding school ecosystem to enhance guardian loyalty. The primary research questions focus on how experiential marketing is operationalized, which factors influence its success, and the extent of its impact on parental engagement and loyalty. This study argues that integrating experiential elements across academic, social, and spiritual dimensions can generate sustained positive experiences, strengthening trust and fostering long-term commitment. The expected contribution lies in offering a systematic framework for Islamic boarding schools to operationalize experiential marketing, providing empirical evidence on its effectiveness, and serving as a model for enhancing the relational and emotional bonds between institutions and guardians. Ultimately, this research addresses both the theoretical gap in experiential marketing literature and the practical need for strategic innovation in boarding school education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena within their social and cultural contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The case study method allows the exploration of experiential marketing strategies in a real-life boarding school setting, capturing the interactions and experiences of students, guardians, and administrators as they unfold naturally. This approach is particularly suitable for

examining processes, relationships, and contextual influences that cannot be adequately addressed through quantitative methods, enabling a holistic view of how experiential marketing affects parental loyalty in the boarding school ecosystem. The method facilitates the collection of rich, detailed data and supports the analysis of multiple perspectives, making it ideal for uncovering patterns, themes, and insights that contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications.

The research was conducted in the Azzainiyah area of Probolinggo, selected for its structured dormitory management system, active communication with parents, and large, diverse student population, providing a representative sample for investigating experiential marketing practices. The location offers opportunities to examine the variety of experiences students' guardians encounter, reflecting different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Its established management and communication systems enable access to key stakeholders, including regional heads, boarding school administrators, guardians, and students, ensuring that the data collected is comprehensive and relevant to the research objectives. The choice of location was guided by the potential to obtain rich, varied, and contextually meaningful data that could illustrate the practical implementation of experiential marketing strategies.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, allowing for triangulation and enhancing the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Interviews targeted key informants such as boarding school administrators and guardians to explore perceptions, experiences, and engagement with the institution's services. Participant observation provided direct insights into the daily activities, interactions, and environment reflecting experiential marketing practices, while documentation including archives, promotional materials, and communication media supplemented primary data. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how experiential marketing is integrated into the boarding school ecosystem, capturing both formal and informal strategies used to engage and retain parental loyalty.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and categorizing raw data into relevant themes related to experiential marketing and parent loyalty, continuously refined throughout the study. Data display organized information into narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic categories to reveal relationships, patterns, and emerging insights. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through iterative interpretation, source triangulation, and discussions to ensure consistency and validity. Analytical methods included content analysis of communications, discourse analysis of interactions, and interpretive analysis of subjective experiences, allowing the study to produce comprehensive findings with theoretical and practical contributions to experience-based educational marketing strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of Experiential Marketing Strategy in the Boarding School Ecosystem

The implementation of an experiential marketing strategy in the boarding school ecosystem in the Azzainiyah Region is defined as a systematic effort by Islamic boarding schools to build immersive experiences for students through the integration

of academic, spiritual, social, and cultural activities. This concept focuses not only on promoting the institution but also on creating emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experiences that remain with students during their stay in the boarding school. Experiential marketing is realized through the habituation of congregational worship, Islamic boarding school activities, and interactions between students and their caregivers, as well as the collective environment that shapes character. This aligns with findings that experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools emphasizes the aspects of "sense," "feel," "think," "act," and "relate" as experiential stimuli that build loyalty and the institution's image.

An interview with the Head of the Azzainiyah Region explained that "Students learn not only in the classroom but also live a 24-hour life, starting from waking up, praying in congregation, maintaining cleanliness, and being trained in discipline, including how they interact with their peers." Meanwhile, one student stated that "the experience of living in a boarding school makes us more independent because we are far from our parents and teaches us to be more disciplined." From these two statements, the researcher interpreted that experiential marketing is implemented through the students' experiences, which touch on cognitive and affective aspects. Experience provides an added value that non-boarding educational institutions do not have, thus strengthening the appeal of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions.

Observations show that the students' daily activities are structured, encompassing formal school activities, religious activities, mass duty, and character development within the dormitory. The dormitory environment also reflects religious culture, such as the practice of congregational prayer five times a day, recitation of the yellow text, and social interactions emphasizing the value of brotherhood. This situation represents a concrete form of experiential marketing, where direct experiences serve as an effective promotional tool through word of mouth. This conducive environment and experiences can strengthen the image of the Islamic boarding school in the eyes of the community.

Based on interviews and observations, it can be reiterated that the implementation of experiential marketing is carried out through the creation of a comprehensive and sustainable educational experience within boarding life. This experience encompasses spiritual, academic, and social aspects, integrated into the students' daily activities, thus fostering a positive perception of the boarding school.

The implementation of experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools is integrated into the dormitory system, not a formally designed marketing strategy. This is evident in the direct experiences that are at the heart of the students' learning process and character development. All activities, from academics to religious activities to social interactions, are integrated within a cohesive educational ecosystem. Religious values and togetherness are the primary foundations that are continuously instilled through daily practices. These repeated experiences then form the students' emotional attachment to the Islamic boarding school, which ultimately fosters loyalty and a positive image of the institution in the eyes of the community.

Factors Influencing the Success of Experiential Marketing in Increasing Guardian Loyalty

Based on documentation obtained from Islamic boarding school activity archives, program reports, and administrative data, it was found that the success of

experiential marketing in increasing guardian loyalty is influenced by several key interrelated factors. Documentation demonstrates the consistency of student activity programs, the quality of educational services, and the intensity of communication between the Islamic boarding school and guardians. Furthermore, documentation in the form of activity photos, student progress reports, and publications about flagship programs indicate that students' experiences at the Islamic boarding school are key indicators in shaping guardian perceptions. Other identified factors are trust, satisfaction with services, and a positive image of the institution, formed through documented, real-life experiences. This aligns with research showing that effectively documented and communicated customer experiences can increase loyalty through satisfaction and positive perceptions.

Table 1. Of Factors That Influence The Success Of Experiential Marketing

Main Factors	Indicators in Documentation	Impact on loyalty
Student Experience	Photos of activities and daily reports	Increasing guardian trust
Service Quality	Curriculum documents and superior programs	Increasing satisfaction
Communication	Guardian communication reports and media publications	Strengthening emotional bonds
Religious Values	Documentation of ubudiyah and coaching activities	Increasing guardian confidence
Institutional Image	Documentation of ubudiyah and coaching activities	Forming positive perceptions

The table shows that each factor has concrete indicators in the form of documents that can be observed and analyzed. Documentation serves not only as an archive but also as evidence of the students' experiences and serves as a consideration for guardians in assessing the quality of the Islamic boarding school.

Researchers interpret that the success of experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools depends heavily on the institution's ability to systematically and sustainably manage and present the students' experiences. Well-documented experiences can strengthen guardians' perceptions of the quality of education and life at the Islamic boarding school. In other words, guardian loyalty is shaped not only by verbal information but also by tangible evidence seen through documentation of students' activities and achievements. Therefore, it can be reiterated that factors such as direct experience, service quality, intensive communication, religious values, and the institution's image are key elements that collectively shape guardians' loyalty to the Islamic boarding school.

The pattern emerging from the documentation data indicates that the factors for successful experiential marketing have integrated and mutually reinforcing characteristics. The students' experiences are central to all factors, supported by service quality and religious values as the primary foundation. Furthermore, effective communication acts as a bridge between the students' experiences and their guardians' perceptions. This pattern culminates in the formation of a positive institutional image, which ultimately increases guardian loyalty. Thus, the resulting pattern is cyclical, where experience generates satisfaction, satisfaction builds trust, and trust strengthens loyalty. This confirms that experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools works holistically through a combination of real-life experiences and documentation-based perception reinforcement.

The Impact of Experiential Marketing Strategies on the Loyalty of Islamic Boarding School Guardians

The impact of experiential marketing strategies on the loyalty of Islamic boarding school guardians, in the context of this research, is defined as changes in the attitudes, perceptions, and commitment of Islamic boarding school guardians, arising from the students' real experiences during their time in the dormitory. This impact is not only evident in the satisfaction of the guardians, but also in their level of trust, involvement, and tendency to recommend the Islamic boarding school to others. In practice, experiential marketing in the Azzainiyah region is realized through religious experiences, discipline, character building, and social interactions with students, which are documented and communicated to the guardians. This impact aligns with studies that suggest that positive customer experiences will foster satisfaction and lead to sustained loyalty.



Figure 1. The Impact of Experiential Marketing Strategies

The figure 1 show that same Interviews with students' guardians revealed that "we are pleased to see the changes in our children's attitudes, leading to them becoming more disciplined and religious after studying here." Meanwhile, the boarding school administrators stated that "many parents recommend this boarding school to their families or neighbors after seeing their children's development and changes in their attitudes when they return home." Based on these statements, researchers interpret that the impact of experiential marketing goes beyond individual satisfaction and develops into active loyalty. This suggests that students' positive experiences are a key factor in shaping parents' trust and commitment to the boarding school.

Observations revealed a strong emotional connection between parents and the boarding school, reflected in their active participation in boarding school activities, such as regular visits, participation in religious events, and intensive communication with the boarding school administrators. Furthermore, many parents continue to encourage their children to continue their education at the same boarding school. Researchers interpret this situation as a tangible impact of experiential marketing, where the positive experiences felt by students result in sustained satisfaction and

strengthen the loyalty of their guardians. This loyalty is not only emotional but also reflected in concrete actions that support the sustainability of the Islamic boarding school.

Based on interview and observation data, it can be reaffirmed that the experiential marketing strategy in the Azzainiyah area has had a significant impact on guardian loyalty. This impact is evident in increased trust, satisfaction, involvement, and the tendency of guardians to continue choosing and recommending the Islamic boarding school as an educational institution for their children.

The pattern emerging from the data indicates that the impact of experiential marketing on guardian loyalty is gradual and continuous. Positive student experiences serve as the starting point for guardian satisfaction, which then develops into trust. This trust then forms an emotional bond and long-term commitment. This pattern is reinforced by concrete actions, such as recommendations to others and students' continued education at the same Islamic boarding school. Thus, the pattern demonstrates a strong causal relationship between experience, satisfaction, trust, and guardian loyalty.

Discussion

The research findings show that the implementation of experiential marketing at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in the Azzainiyah region is implicitly implemented through an integrated 24-hour dormitory life system. This finding aligns with research by Munawwir (2025), which asserts that experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools places greater emphasis on the emotional experiences (senses and feelings) experienced by students in their daily lives (Khoiroh, 2025). This alignment suggests that students' authentic experiences are the primary means of building positive parental perceptions. However, this study found that the experiential dimension extends beyond the emotional dimension, encompassing a more dominant spiritual and social dimension. Consequently, Islamic boarding schools possess a competitive advantage because they are able to provide a holistic experience not available in non-boarding educational institutions, thereby strengthening the ongoing loyalty of students' parents.

In terms of impact, the research findings indicate that experiential marketing contributes directly to increased parental loyalty through satisfaction and trust. This is consistent with the findings of Imaroh (2026) and Firdaus (2024) who stated that customer experience significantly influences loyalty, with satisfaction as an intervening variable. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, positive experiences of students, such as increased discipline and religiosity, are the main factors influencing parents' decisions to remain loyal. Loyalty not only impacts the continuity of students' education but also expands promotion through word of mouth.

The research results also indicate that communication and documentation play a crucial role in strengthening the impact of experiential marketing. This finding aligns with research by Nurohayati (2025), which emphasizes the importance of communication in building emotional relationships with parents of students. However, this study found that effective communication is not merely informative but must also be able to realistically represent the students' experiences through documentation of activities. The implication is that if communication is not supported by authentic experiential evidence, there will be a mismatch between expectations and reality,

potentially eroding trust (Adzimah & Yaqin, 2024). Therefore, the success of experiential marketing depends heavily on the alignment between actual experiences and the narratives conveyed to parents.

Furthermore, this study found that religious values and Islamic boarding school culture are key differentiating factors in shaping the loyalty of parents of students. This finding supports research by Islamic (2024), which states that loyalty in Islamic boarding schools is not only rational but also emotional and spiritual. However, this study expands on these findings by demonstrating that religious values are not only an identity, but also an experience directly felt by students and felt by parents. The implication of this finding is that value-based experiential marketing has greater power in building long-term loyalty than conventional marketing strategies. Causally, the internalization of religious values results in changes in student behavior, which in turn strengthens parental trust.

Overall, the pattern of findings in this study indicates that experiential marketing in Islamic boarding schools works holistically through the relationship between experience, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. This aligns with the customer loyalty model in educational services marketing proposed by Yatnosaputro (2025), where loyalty is formed through a multistep process. An important implication of this finding is that Islamic boarding schools need to maintain the consistency of the student experience as a core marketing strategy. If this experience is disrupted or inconsistent, it will lead to dysfunction in the form of decreased satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, the success of experiential marketing depends not only on the program designed, but also on the sustainability of the quality of the experience felt by the students and validated by their parents.

CONCLUSION

The key findings of this study reveal that experiential marketing within the boarding school ecosystem is not applied as a formal strategy but is embedded organically in the daily spiritual, social, and academic experiences of students. These authentic, direct, and continuous experiences play a critical role in shaping parental satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, demonstrating that promotional activities alone are insufficient to cultivate long-term engagement. The lesson learned emphasizes that emotional connections grounded in lived experiences and religious values are central to sustaining parental loyalty, reinforcing the importance of integrating institutional values and holistic student experiences into educational marketing strategies. This study also provides a significant scientific contribution by extending the application of experiential marketing beyond conventional business and formal education contexts into the boarding school environment, highlighting a values-based, holistic approach. Methodologically, the use of qualitative techniques—including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis—offers rich, nuanced insights into the relational and emotional dimensions of parental loyalty, complementing and expanding upon prior research dominated by quantitative approaches.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations that warrant consideration and guide future research. First, the investigation was confined to a single boarding school location, limiting the generalizability of the findings across institutions with diverse structures, pedagogical models, and cultural contexts. Second, the sample was restricted to a specific group of participants, which may not fully capture variations in parental perspectives across gender, age, or socioeconomic

status. Third, the qualitative design precludes objective measurement of causal relationships between experiential marketing and loyalty. Future research should involve multiple types of Islamic boarding schools, incorporate more heterogeneous participant profiles, and employ quantitative or mixed-method designs to assess the magnitude and direction of experiential marketing's impact on loyalty. Such extensions would strengthen the empirical foundation for developing evidence-based educational marketing policies and strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author sincerely expresses gratitude to all who contributed to this research, including his academic advisor for guidance and scientific input, institutional parties for support, and individuals who assisted technically during data collection and processing. Special appreciation is also extended to family and colleagues for their moral encouragement. The author confirms that all mentioned parties have consented to publication and that their contributions are appropriately acknowledged.

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