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Experiential Marketing in Educational Services: Evaluating the "Student for a Day" Program through Schmitt's Framework

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ABSTRACT

Educational services are intangible, making it difficult for prospective students and parents to assess their quality before experiencing them. This challenge highlights the importance of experiential marketing as an approach to communicating educational service value and creating meaningful experiences for prospective students. This study aims to analyze the implementation of experiential marketing through the "A Day as an MA Student" program based on Schmitt's (1999) five experiential modules: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that the act dimension was the most clearly documented, while think was partially documented. The sense and relate dimensions were identified implicitly, whereas the feel dimension lacked supporting evidence. Furthermore, most prospective students obtained information about the madrasah through family members, neighbors, and alumni rather than social media. This study implies that experiential marketing should be developed as part of a sustainable educational marketing management strategy, with systematic planning, implementation, measurement, and evaluation across all five experiential dimensions. Such an approach can help educational institutions communicate their service value more effectively and strengthen prospective students' engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays an essential role in improving human development and providing opportunities for individuals and society. However, educational institutions increasingly operate in an environment characterized by diverse

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educational choices and growing expectations regarding service quality (Salsabila & Rohmah, 2026; Sunarto, 2025; Thobroni, 2026). The development of educational alternatives requires institutions to communicate their distinctive values and demonstrate the quality of their services to prospective students and parents (Smith et al., 2023; Smolentseva, 2023; Furqon et al., 2026). One major challenge is that educational services are intangible, making their quality difficult to evaluate before direct experience. Consequently, conventional promotional activities may be insufficient to communicate the actual educational experience. Educational institutions therefore need marketing strategies that not only disseminate information but also establish meaningful interactions and strengthen public confidence (Cindy et al., 2025; Nurohman, 2024; Naimah, 2026).

The intangible nature of educational services creates difficulties for prospective students and parents when comparing institutions and making enrollment decisions (Dermawan & Yusuf, 2026; Hasiana, 2024). Promotional messages, institutional profiles, and digital content provide information, but they do not always represent the actual learning environment, educational culture, and social interactions experienced by students. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of digital marketing, institutional branding, service quality, and communication in attracting prospective students (Pawar, 2024; Cingillioglu et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2025). Nevertheless, marketing activities need to extend beyond information delivery by providing opportunities for prospective students to experience educational services directly. This situation highlights the relevance of experiential marketing as an approach to reducing uncertainty and communicating institutional value through meaningful experiences.

This issue is reflected in the enrollment situation of a pesantren-based Islamic senior secondary school, where the number of students decreased from 168 in the 2022/2023 academic year to 158 in 2023/2024 and 134 in 2024/2025. The decline indicates a challenge in maintaining student enrollment, although it cannot be attributed exclusively to marketing performance. The institution has implemented a program called "A Day as an MA Student," which allows prospective students to experience the school's educational environment and activities directly. Furthermore, initial findings indicate that prospective students predominantly obtain information about the institution through family members, neighbors, and alumni rather than social media. This phenomenon raises questions about how direct experiences are designed and utilized within educational marketing activities.

Previous studies on experiential marketing have established its relevance in creating meaningful consumer experiences and strengthening relationships with brands. Schmitt (1999) introduced five strategic experiential modules: sense,

feel, think, act, and relate, which explain how experiences engage individuals through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions. Subsequent studies have developed this perspective by examining experiential marketing in relation to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Carmo et al., 2022), brand experience and consumer engagement (Davey et al., 2024), and brand experiences among Generation Z through virtual reality (Bogicevic et al., 2024). Other research has also examined experiential marketing in building brand relationships through events and consumer participation (Altschwager et al., 2024). However, these studies predominantly address commercial brands and consumer contexts, leaving opportunities to examine the application of experiential marketing in educational services.

Research on educational marketing has predominantly examined digital promotion, student recruitment, institutional image, and service quality. Studies have investigated social media strategies for student acquisition (Tran et al., 2026; Cingillioglu et al., 2024), higher education marketing and recruitment (Omata, 2025), and social media marketing in educational institutions (Pawar, 2024). Other studies have explored school choice and parental preferences (Haderlein, 2022; Thompson, 2024), institutional image and student loyalty (Erkan et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2024), and the relationship between service quality and institutional reputation (Romero et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024; Qodriah et al., 2026). Although these studies provide important insights into educational marketing, they do not specifically explain how direct educational experiences are implemented and examined through Schmitt's five experiential dimensions in a pesantren-based Islamic secondary school. This constitutes an important research gap.

The novelty of this study lies in examining experiential marketing as an educational service marketing strategy through a direct-experience program for prospective students in a pesantren-based Islamic secondary school. Rather than assessing marketing performance solely through promotional channels or enrollment outcomes, this study analyzes how the five experiential dimensions are manifested in actual institutional activities. It also distinguishes between explicitly documented experiences, implicitly identifiable elements, and dimensions for which supporting evidence remains unavailable. This approach provides a more comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of experiential marketing implementation while avoiding unsupported assumptions about its effectiveness. Furthermore, the study offers an analytical perspective for evaluating whether educational experience programs have been systematically designed to communicate institutional identity, learning environments, and educational values.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research problem: How is experiential marketing implemented through the "A Day as an MA Student" program, and how are its five dimensions manifested in the educational experiences provided to prospective students? This study argues that experiential marketing should not be understood merely as an occasional promotional activity but as an integrated component of sustainable educational marketing management. Its implementation requires systematic planning, meaningful engagement, appropriate documentation, and evaluation across the sense, feel, think, act, and relate dimensions. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the program through these five dimensions, identify the documented and undocumented aspects of the experiences provided, and formulate practical implications for developing more structured and evaluable experiential marketing strategies in educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and interpret the implementation of experiential marketing in educational service marketing. This approach was selected because the research focuses on understanding institutional practices, participant experiences, and the meaning of marketing activities within their natural context. Rather than measuring statistical relationships or determining causal effects, the study describes how the "A Day as an MA Student" program is implemented through Schmitt's (1999) five experiential dimensions: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. These dimensions served as the analytical framework for examining the experiences provided to prospective students. The descriptive qualitative approach also enabled the researcher to identify documented practices, interpret relevant activities, and distinguish between explicit findings and aspects that were not sufficiently documented.

The research was conducted at MA Miftahul 'Ulum Cijambe, Purwakarta Regency, West Java, during the 2025–2026 academic year. The institution was selected because it is a pesantren-based Islamic senior secondary school that implements the "A Day as an MA Student" program as part of its educational marketing activities. Another consideration was the decline in student enrollment, from 168 students in 2022/2023 to 134 students in 2024/2025, which provides an important context for examining the institution's marketing practices. The research focused on understanding how the program introduces educational services through direct experiences rather than assuming that the enrollment decline resulted from marketing weaknesses or that the program directly influences enrollment decisions.

Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, direct observations of student recruitment activities, and documentation. Three informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their authority, experience, and involvement in educational marketing management: the principal, the vice principal for student affairs, and the head or committee coordinator of student admissions. Primary data were obtained from these informants and observations, while secondary data included institutional profiles, student enrollment records, promotional materials, and relevant academic literature. The research instruments consisted of the researcher as the primary instrument, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and a document analysis matrix. The instruments were developed based on Schmitt's (1999) five experiential modules to ensure that data collection remained aligned with the research objectives.

Data were analyzed interactively through four interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, organizing, and coding information relevant to the implementation of the experiential marketing program. Data display was conducted by arranging the findings into analytical categories based on Schmitt's (1999) five dimensions: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. Each finding was classified according to its level of evidence: explicit (directly documented), implicit (interpreted from available information), or undocumented (no supporting evidence identified). Conclusion drawing involved interpreting patterns and comparing empirical findings with the theoretical framework and previous studies. Verification was conducted by reviewing the consistency of findings across interviews, observations, and documentation, supported by theoretical triangulation and careful examination of the available evidence.

Table 1. Operationalization of Experiential Marketing Dimensions for Document Analysis

Dimension	Meaning (Schmitt, 1999)	Indicators examined in the documents
Sense	Sensory experience	Visual, physical, or environmental stimuli experienced by participants, including the learning environment, facilities, uniforms, and institutional attributes.
Feel	Emotional experience and responses	Statements or evidence concerning participants' impressions, comfort, emotional responses, and enthusiasm.
Think	Cognitive engagement	Information and understanding of the madrasah's characteristics, including learning activities, flagship programs, and extracurricular activities.
Act	Actions and behaviors	Activities directly performed by participants, such as wearing uniforms, participating in classroom learning, and joining educational activities.
Relate	Social relationships and connections	Interactions with teachers, students, alumni, and the madrasah community, including connections with the pesantren identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Educational Marketing Context and Student Enrollment Trends

The student enrollment records indicate a declining trend in the number of students over the three academic years examined. The enrollment figures are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Student Enrollment at MA Miftahul 'Ulum Cijambe

Academic Year	Number of Students	Change from Previous Year
2022/2023	168	–
2023/2024	158	−10 students (−6.0%)
2024/2025	134	−24 students (−15.2%)

The data show that the number of students decreased from 168 in 2022/2023 to 158 in 2023/2024 and further declined to 134 in 2024/2025. The total reduction was 34 students over the observed period. The largest annual decrease occurred between 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, with a reduction of 24 students.

The marketing planning process was documented as beginning around January through coordination meetings involving the principal, vice principals, student admissions committee, and teachers. These meetings were conducted while awaiting the official student admission guidelines. The resulting activities included establishing the admissions committee, preparing work programs, determining schedules and target groups, and selecting promotional media. The primary target consisted of prospective students interested in religious education, particularly those from lower-middle-income families. However, the available documents did not contain a comprehensive marketing strategy document specifying environmental analysis, measurable targets, performance indicators, or systematic evaluation procedures.

The documented marketing activities covered several institutional aspects. The madrasah's pesantren-based identity, tahfidz program, community service activities, extracurricular programs, and student achievements were presented as institutional features. The extracurricular activities included sports, photography, journalism, public speaking, information technology, the Youth Red Cross, and Scouting. Financial support was provided through affordable educational costs, scholarships, and fee reductions. Registration was available through both online and offline procedures.

Promotional activities included the distribution of approximately 1,500 brochures, the installation of banners and promotional signs, and the use of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Teachers, alumni, and members of the surrounding community also participated in disseminating information about the madrasah. The "A Day as an MA Student" program was recorded as one of

the promotional activities. Other documented institutional aspects included the involvement of school personnel, student admission services, registration procedures, and the availability of facilities and the school environment.

Implementation of the "A Day as an MA Student" Program

The documentation identifies the "A Day as an MA Student" program as one of the promotional activities conducted to introduce the madrasah to prospective students. The program provided opportunities for prospective students to experience several aspects of school life directly rather than receiving information exclusively through brochures, banners, or digital media.

Three main activities were identified in the available documents. First, prospective students wore the madrasah uniform, allowing them to participate in an aspect of the students' daily school identity. Second, they attended classroom learning activities. Third, they were introduced to various activities conducted within the madrasah.

These activities indicate that the program involved direct participation in the educational environment. However, the available documentation did not provide detailed information regarding the program's duration, activity schedule, number of participants, sequence of events, or specific procedures for evaluating participants' experiences.

Furthermore, no systematic records were identified concerning participants' responses, levels of satisfaction, emotional impressions, or subsequent enrollment decisions. Consequently, the findings concerning the program are limited to the activities explicitly recorded in the available research data.

Mapping the Five Dimensions of Experiential Marketing

The implementation of the "A Day as an MA Student" program was examined through five experiential dimensions. The findings were classified according to the level of supporting evidence identified in the interviews, observations, and documentation. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Mapping the "A Day as an MA Student" Program Across Experiential Marketing Dimensions

Dimension	Findings Identified in the Research Data	Level of Evidence
Sense	Participants were present in the madrasah environment and wore the school uniform. The documents also recorded the physical environment and facilities, but did not describe participants' specific sensory experiences.	Implicit
Feel	No data were identified concerning participants' impressions, feelings, emotional responses, or enthusiasm during the program.	Undocumented

Think	Participants attended classroom learning activities and were introduced to madrasah activities. However, specific learning materials and participants' resulting understanding were not documented or measured.	Explicit (activities); Implicit (understanding)
Act	Participants wore the school uniform, attended classroom learning activities, and participated in madrasah activities.	Explicit
Relate	The involvement of madrasah personnel and alumni in promotional activities was documented. However, specific interactions between program participants, teachers, and students were not described in detail.	Implicit

The findings indicate differences in the availability of evidence across the five dimensions. The act dimension had the clearest supporting evidence because the documents explicitly described activities performed by prospective students. The think dimension was partially documented through participation in classroom learning and introductions to school activities, although the resulting understanding was not measured.

The sense and relate dimensions were identified implicitly through descriptions of the school environment, uniforms, and institutional involvement in promotional activities. However, the available data did not provide detailed descriptions of participants' sensory experiences or their direct social interactions during the program. Meanwhile, the feel dimension had no supporting evidence concerning participants' emotional responses.

Information Channels, Supporting Factors, and Inhibiting Factors

The research findings indicate that most prospective students became familiar with the madrasah through family members, neighbors, and alumni rather than social media. These communication channels were identified as important sources of information during the student recruitment process.

Several supporting factors were identified in the implementation of educational marketing activities. These included the madrasah's pesantren-based identity, the involvement of teachers and other institutional personnel, support from alumni and the surrounding community, and educational costs adjusted to the economic circumstances of prospective students' families. The availability of scholarships and fee reductions was also recorded as part of the institution's efforts to facilitate access to education.

The research also identified several inhibiting factors. These included competition among educational institutions, changing community preferences in selecting schools, limited human resources, and the relatively limited utilization

of digital media. In addition, direct promotional visits to students' previous schools had not been resumed during the two years preceding the research. Alumni management had not been organized systematically, while limitations in facilities and infrastructure were also identified as institutional challenges.

Evaluation Practices and Availability of Supporting Evidence

The evaluation of student admission activities was conducted through meetings involving the principal, admissions committee, and teachers after the admission process. These meetings addressed the implementation of promotional activities, the number of newly admitted students, and problems encountered during the recruitment process.

However, the available research data indicate that the evaluation process had not been supported by systematically established performance indicators, standardized evaluation instruments, or comprehensive documentation of program outcomes. No specific measurement system was identified for assessing the effectiveness of individual promotional activities, including the "A Day as an MA Student" program.

Furthermore, the available records did not provide a systematic comparison between program participation and subsequent enrollment decisions. Information concerning the number of prospective students participating in the program, their responses, and the proportion who eventually enrolled was not documented.

Consequently, the research findings establish the existence and recorded implementation of the experiential program but do not provide sufficient empirical evidence to determine its direct contribution to increasing or decreasing student enrollment.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the "A Day as an MA Student" program provides prospective students with opportunities to experience educational services directly through wearing school uniforms, attending classroom activities, and becoming familiar with the madrasah environment. These findings support Schmitt's (1999) perspective that experiential marketing creates value through direct engagement rather than relying exclusively on promotional messages. This is particularly relevant to educational services, whose intangible characteristics make their quality difficult to assess before actual experience. Consistent with Carmo et al. (2022), who examined the relationship between experiential marketing, customer satisfaction, and loyalty, the present findings

highlight the importance of experience in service marketing. However, unlike studies examining measurable consumer responses, this research focuses on identifying how experiential activities are implemented and documented without claiming their direct effects on enrollment decisions.

The analysis of the five experiential dimensions reveals an uneven implementation and documentation pattern. The act dimension is the most clearly demonstrated through participants' direct involvement in educational activities, while think is partially reflected in their exposure to classroom learning and institutional programs. In contrast, sense and relate are only implicitly identified, and feel lacks supporting evidence. This finding provides an important distinction from Davey et al. (2024), who revisited experiential marketing through brand experience, and Bogicevic et al. (2024), who examined experiential engagement through virtual reality. Whereas these studies emphasize the development of brand experiences, the present research identifies the extent to which experiential dimensions are evidenced in an actual educational program. The findings suggest that providing activities alone does not necessarily demonstrate the integration of all five experiential dimensions.

In educational marketing, previous studies have predominantly emphasized promotional communication, digital recruitment, and institutional branding. Cindy et al. (2025) highlight the importance of promotion and communication in educational services, while Cingillioglu et al. (2024) examine social media marketing strategies for student recruitment. Similarly, Omata (2025) identifies student recruitment as an important focus of higher education marketing research. The present findings complement these studies by demonstrating that direct educational experiences can serve as another means of communicating institutional characteristics. The "A Day as an MA Student" program introduces prospective students to learning activities and the pesantren-based educational environment. Thus, this research extends the discussion of educational marketing beyond promotional communication by examining the actual experiences offered to prospective students.

Another important finding concerns the dominant role of family members, neighbors, and alumni as sources of information about the madrasah. This finding indicates that interpersonal relationships remain relevant in communicating institutional identity and attracting prospective students. Nofrizal et al. (2024) demonstrate the importance of social media and brand strategy in shaping reasons for choosing a higher education institution, while Naheen and Elsharnouby (2024) examine the relationship between university brand personality, student identification, and student participation. Although these studies focus on higher education branding and student relationships, their findings provide a relevant perspective for understanding the importance of

institutional identity and social connections. The present study adds an important contextual observation: alumni and family networks are prominent information channels, but their involvement has not yet been supported by systematic relationship management.

The limited utilization of digital media identified in this study differs from the growing emphasis on digital recruitment strategies in contemporary educational marketing research. Pawar (2024) highlights social media as an important area of higher education marketing, while Tran et al. (2026) specifically examine the use of social media for student acquisition. The present findings indicate that although Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are used for promotional purposes, they have not become the primary information sources for prospective students. This difference suggests that digital communication and interpersonal recommendations operate within different institutional contexts. The experiential program could provide authentic material for digital communication through documentation of classroom activities, institutional facilities, and student interactions. However, this represents a strategic opportunity rather than an established outcome of the current program.

The declining enrollment trend also needs to be interpreted within the broader context of institutional marketing and service quality. The reduction from 168 students in 2022/2023 to 134 students in 2024/2025 occurred alongside several identified challenges, including institutional competition, changing community preferences, limited human resources, and inadequate promotional activities. Previous research by Hossain et al. (2025) examines the relationship between educational service quality, institutional image, and student satisfaction, while Nguyen et al. (2024) investigate the relationship between service quality, student satisfaction, and loyalty. These studies demonstrate the relevance of institutional service quality and image in educational contexts. Nevertheless, the present research does not establish a causal relationship between the enrollment decline and the marketing program. Instead, it identifies the need for more systematic marketing planning, documentation, and evaluation.

The main contribution and novelty of this study lie in applying Schmitt's five experiential dimensions to examine a direct-experience program within a pesantren-based Islamic secondary school. Unlike previous educational marketing studies that primarily emphasize digital promotion, institutional image, or recruitment strategies, this research distinguishes between explicitly documented, implicitly identifiable, and undocumented experiential dimensions. This evidence-based classification provides a more precise understanding of the implementation and limitations of experiential marketing in educational services. Practically, the findings suggest that madrasah

management should develop structured activities across all five dimensions, document participants' experiences, strengthen alumni engagement, and establish measurable evaluation indicators. In line with the importance of institutional image and service quality discussed by Nurohman (2024), experiential marketing should be integrated into sustainable educational marketing management rather than treated as an isolated promotional activity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the "A Day as an MA Student" program provides prospective students with direct opportunities to experience educational services, although its implementation is most clearly demonstrated in the act dimension, partially reflected in think, implicitly identified in sense and relate, and undocumented in feel. The main lesson is that providing direct experiences does not automatically constitute comprehensive experiential marketing; rather, meaningful experiences require systematic planning, documentation, and evaluation across all five dimensions. The implications of the research findings highlight the importance of integrating experiential marketing into sustainable educational marketing management through participant feedback, alumni engagement, digital communication, and measurable performance indicators. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in extending Schmitt's experiential marketing framework to the context of pesantren-based Islamic secondary education and introducing an evidence-based classification of explicit, implicit, and undocumented experiential dimensions. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on available institutional data and the perspectives of school administrators, without directly measuring participants' emotional responses or the program's influence on enrollment decisions. Future research should incorporate prospective students' and parents' perspectives, longitudinal observations, and measurable enrollment outcomes to examine the relationship between experiential marketing implementation, institutional image, and student recruitment.

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