

# Experimental marketing at pondok pesantren Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

One of the objectives of this research is to find out how Experiential Marketing is implemented at Pondok Pesantren. Judging from the growth and development experienced by Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul from 2018 to 2022, public interest continues to increase, so that the number of students at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul currently stands at 1500 students. Seeing this potential, the researcher was interested in conducting research on experiential marketing conducted by Pondok Pesantren. This research is a qualitative descriptive study using triangulation to test the validity of the data. The data collection techniques are interviews, observation, documentation and questionnaires. Based on data analysis, strategies for implementing experiential marketing, namely in terms of sense, feel, think, act and relate marketing. The result of data analysis show that Pondok Pesantren implements experiential marketing well.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of national education, madrasahs at every level hold an important position within the education system of Indonesia. This opinion is based on the first assumption that Pancasila, as a philosophical foundation of national education, is an integral part of Islamic philosophy. Second, the Islamic education system in Indonesia, which directs Islamic teachings, philosophically has never contradicted Pancasila, where the concept of the formulation of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System opens up opportunities for Islamic educational institutions to develop themselves. Third, there is a growing movement for educational reform that has a significant impact among the educated community. Fourth, the assumptions above lead to progress in education in Indonesia. However, all of this will demand new, more strategic cases, as well as anticipatory and operational steps (Usman Abu Bakar 2005). Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs are regarded as institutions of moral reference in Islam based on the Qur'an and Hadith. In this context, pesantren hold a strategic position to enhance the overall quality of Indonesian people through the cultivation of the heart, mind, and emotions, enabling them to be competitive in facing global challenges.

According to M. Arifin, a Pondok Pesantren is an Islamic educational institution that grows and is recognized by the surrounding community, featuring a dormitory system where students (santri) receive religious education through a system of lectures or madrasahs that are entirely under the authority of one or several charismatic and independent leaders (kiai). The Islamic institution defines Pesantren as a place available for students to receive lessons in Islamic teachings, as well as a gathering place and their residence. (Komariah 2016).

As time goes by, Islamic boarding schools have become educational institutions that are highly sought after by the community. Moreover, Islamic boarding schools are now competing on equal footing with other general schools, thanks to the unique advantages they offer, such as proficiency in foreign languages, academic and non-academic achievements, and other social skills. As institutions that provide educational services, Islamic boarding schools must always meet the needs and desires of the community. The competitive advantage of an educational institution is required to understand the demands of its customers, in this case, the students, parents, and society.

Ibn Kathir interprets QS. Ali Imran verse 59 in his tafsir book, stating that this verse was revealed by Allah SWT to the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a reminder of the blessings bestowed upon him and the believers. When Allah SWT softened his heart towards his community who followed his commands and avoided his prohibitions, He also made him speak kindly to them. If you were to speak harsh words and have a hard heart towards them, they would surely distance themselves from you and abandon you. However, Allah united them all with you. Allah softened your heart towards them to draw their hearts closer to you, as Abdullah bin 'Amr said, "I saw the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in the earlier scriptures, where he did not speak harshly nor have a hard heart, did not like to shout in the market, and never repaid evil with evil, but he always forgave." (Katsir 2004). Based on the interpretation above, it is clear that just as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) acted with gentleness through the mercy of Allah (glory be to Him), every Muslim who takes the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a role model is encouraged to act gently and refrain from harsh words or actions so that their message can reach the hearts of others. Therefore, experiential marketing, as a form of strategy that provides positive experiences, is a manifestation of treating others with gentleness.

Marketing strategy is essentially a comprehensive and integrated plan that unifies efforts in the marketing of goods and services. In other words, a marketing strategy is a series of objectives and policy goals, as well as guidelines that provide direction for the marketing efforts of goods and services. A marketing strategy also represents a targeted plan in the field of marketing, aimed at achieving optimal results. (Anam 2013) Experiential Marketing is an approach that provides information beyond just details about a product or service. There are several theories related to experiential marketing, which include : (Andreani 2007) 1) Sense relates to the style and verbal and visual symbols that can create a cohesive impression. To create a strong impression, whether through advertisements, packaging, or websites, a marketer needs to choose colors that align with the

company's profile. This color choice must be appealing to capture the attention of customers. 2) Feel, the feelings referred to here are quite different from sensory impressions because they pertain to a person's mood and emotional state. This is not just about beauty, but also involves moods and emotions that can evoke happiness or even sadness. 3) Think, thinking can stimulate a person's intellectual capacity and creativity. 4) Act, concerns tangible behavior and a person's lifestyle. This is related to how to encourage people to take action and express their lifestyle. 5) Relate relates to an individual's culture and their reference group, which can create social identity. A marketer must be able to create a social identity (generation, nationality, ethnicity) for their customers through the products or services offered.. (Andreani 2007). Experiential Marketing is a way to create customer experiences through engagement with the senses, encouraging customers to feel good, which can lead to positive thoughts and opinions. Customers are prompted to think about the brand or slogan used by the school, creating customer experiences linked to social interactions that are reflected in behavior and lifestyle. It also involves creating experiences that customers perceive, whether related to the school or their relationships with fellow users of educational services. (Imam Junaris 2022)

According to Schmitt, experiential marketing can be utilized and provide advantages in various situations, including but not limited to revitalizing a declining brand, differentiating a product from its competitors, creating an image and identity for the company, developing and promoting innovations, encouraging or motivating trials, purchases, and most importantly, fostering loyal usage of products or services. (Schmitt 1999). In his book, he also writes that experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation (e.g., as provided by marketing efforts before and after purchase), meaning experiences are events that happen to an individual in response to the stimuli received.(Schmitt, 1999). The most important thing is to create loyal customers; customers seek companies and brands that have a good image to become a part of their lives. (Rian Andriani 2018) This strategy aims to create loyal customers by appealing to their emotions and fostering positive feelings towards the products and services. (Handal 2010). Despite this, nowadays many new schools and Islamic boarding schools (Pondok Pesantren) are emerging, leading to increasingly tight competition. As a result of this fierce competition, quite a few schools and Islamic boarding schools have been forced to close. In Kuantan Singingi Regency, there are around 9 Islamic boarding schools, some of which have been established for a long time and others that are new. Among these 9 Islamic boarding schools, Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul has become the most sought-after in recent years. While all other Islamic boarding schools in Kuantan Singingi Regency are stagnating or even experiencing a decline, this situation has motivated the author to conduct research on the experiential marketing strategy implemented by Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul in Teluk Kuantan, Riau.

## 2. METHODS

The type of research used by the author includes descriptive research, which is research that merely describes the state of an object or issue and does not aim to draw general conclusions. This

research aims to present a depiction of the data obtained through interviews and observations. Therefore, in the research report, the data presented and analyzed consists of the results of interviews and observations. Qualitative research methods are research methods based on post-positivist or interpretative philosophy, used to study objects in their natural conditions, where the researcher acts as the primary instrument. (Sugiyono 2019).

The sources of data in this research are the leaders of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, the head of the MtsS and MAS schools, the head of the public relations department, the 12th-grade students of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school in Teluk Kuantan-Riau, as well as documents and questionnaires related to Experiential Marketing at the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school. The results of this research will be validated through data validity testing. The validity test used in this study is method triangulation. Method triangulation involves comparing data obtained from one source using various methods. For example, the results from one interview will be compared with existing documents, and then observations related to the interview results will be conducted to ensure the accuracy of the interview findings. If the interview results, when compared with the documentation and observations, show the same data, then according to method triangulation, that data can be considered valid.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 The Application of Experiential Marketing in Islamic Boarding Schools**

The strategy of experiential marketing involves using an approach that engages all sensory experiences, feelings, cognition, physical aspects, and lifestyle, as well as relationships with specific cultures, which ultimately creates an imagination that leads to the emergence of experiential value in a product or service. (Alma 2008). The experiential marketing strategy at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is implemented by prioritizing Sense Marketing. Sense marketing focuses on experiences through the five senses with the aim of providing aesthetic pleasure, joy, beauty, and satisfaction through stimulation of those senses. The strategic objectives are to differentiate from other products/services, to generate motivation, and to possess unique value. The experiential marketing strategy at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is implemented by prioritizing Sense Marketing. Sense marketing focuses on experiences through the five senses with the aim of providing aesthetic pleasure, joy, beauty, and satisfaction through stimulation of those senses. The strategic objectives are to differentiate from other products/services, to generate motivation, and to possess unique value (Alma 2008). Based on the data obtained by the researcher, it can be concluded that the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school effectively implements sense marketing. This can be seen from the design of the facilities at the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, which appears unique and refreshing. This certainly stimulates a comfortable learning environment for the students, as they feel satisfied

and at ease with the facilities and the building's design. Furthermore, to address the comfort and interests of the students, the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school offers various extracurricular activities that can develop the potential, interests, and talents of the students. At the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, there are several extracurricular activities that are highly popular, so it is not uncommon for prospective students to enroll due to their interest in these activities at the Syafa'aturrasul boarding school, which include acrobatics, marching band, calligraphy, pencak silat, and scouting. These five extracurricular activities are the most popular ones. Furthermore, the comfort offered by the Syafa'aturrasul boarding school is the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure. Infrastructure certainly plays an important role in creating a comfortable learning environment, so the availability of facilities will attract students.

Feel Marketing, a boarding school is an institution that provides education to its students 24 hours a day. Learning activities are not only academic but also religious and non-academic. Since the students live 24 hours in the boarding school, the services provided must also be extra. The Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School provides the best services in both academic and non-academic aspects, always with a friendly approach and by implementing the 3S culture (Greetings, Smiles, and Welcomes). Additionally, showing concern for education customers is one of the efforts made by Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School in applying feel marketing. Feel Marketing by organizing the selection of new students according to the established plan, which includes providing a schedule and the requirements that prospective students must meet. This demonstrates that an educational institution already possesses good quality as seen from the selection process of new students. The arrangement of the selection for new students is carried out well in advance, thanks to the planning from the marketing team or educational staff. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, the researcher found that the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school effectively implements feel marketing, which is a form of marketing that creates positive experiences and memories for customers.

What is implemented by the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school is providing good service to the students and their guardians. With the presence of good service from the boarding school, it certainly becomes a unique assessment and experience for both the students and their guardians. Customers will feel valued and respected, so they won't hesitate to return. Furthermore, the implementation of the selection process for prospective students must adhere to the established procedures. This is certainly an important point as it will create the first impression for the students and their guardians regarding the pesantren. If the selection activities are not carried out according to the procedures, it will not run smoothly and will cause discomfort for the students and their guardians, leading to a negative image. The marketing strategy at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul includes the Daarul Huffazh program. This is a special memorization class for the students of Syafa'aturrasul, where the program is not conducted in a classroom but in the mosque during regular school hours. Therefore, the students participating

in the Daarul Huffazh program only attend classes for 1-2 months, and then for the next 3-4 months, they will memorize the Quran in the mosque. This is one of the flagship programs of Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, where parents now prioritize their children becoming hafizh/ah. As a result, interest in Syafa'aturrasul has significantly increased.

Think Marketing di Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, ialah bahwa santri-santri Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul diasuh oleh kebanyakan alumni Timur-Tengah. Think Marketing at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is that the students of Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul are mostly mentored by alumni from the Middle East. The leadership of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School, Dr. KH. Hamdani Purba, Lc, MA, is an alumnus of the undergraduate program at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, and holds both a master's and doctoral degree from Omdurman University in Sudan. Meanwhile, the Deputy Leader of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School and a member of the Board of Trustees, Ustadz Irsyad Azizi, LC, MA, is an alumnus of both the undergraduate and master's programs at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and is currently completing his doctoral program at Al-Azhar in Cairo. Additionally, several other Ustadz/ah are alumni of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the International University of Africa, Omdurman University in Sudan, Yarmouk University in Jordan, and several other universities both domestically and internationally. The leadership of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School emphasizes that the brand of Syafa'aturrasul is "Nurtured by Alumni from the Middle East." This has become the image of Syafa'aturrasul that helps the community recognize Syafa'aturrasul.

The importance of social media today means that people cannot detach themselves from their gadgets. As a traditional educational institution, Islamic boarding schools must be able to blend in and adapt to the increasingly advanced times by utilizing existing technology. Because if the Islamic boarding school cannot keep up with current trends and developments, it will be seen as outdated and old-fashioned. The Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School has successfully balanced all of that by utilizing existing technological advancements, so it is not considered left behind and can still exist to this day.

Relational marketing involves conducting studies and regular meetings with the guardians of students. This study aims to strengthen the ties of friendship between the Islamic boarding school and the parents and local community. It is usually held at the Pesantren Mosque for the guardians of students who are still in the vicinity of Taluk Kuantan and the community, while those outside the Kuantan Singingi district participate through live broadcasts or Zoom meetings. The Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School engages in relationship marketing by organizing and participating in activities that involve the community, such as holding an arts performance every August to commemorate Indonesia's independence, organizing competitions and tournaments, and taking part in local community events, such as the anniversary parade of Kuantan Singingi district, the takbiran parade, and others. The next marketing strategy for

Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is to build relationships with other educational institutions both domestically and internationally. This aims to facilitate mutual evaluation and enhance the quality of the Pondok Pesantren, such as comparing whether the education at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is on par with that of other top educational institutions, or adopting exemplary programs implemented at these leading institutions. Additionally, it will ease the process for Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul to gain admission to the best universities both at home and abroad, such as in Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Jordan, and so on. It has also established collaborations with various Pesantren across Indonesia.

### **3.2 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of Experiential Marketing in Islamic Boarding Schools**

One of the factors that supports the improvement of the quality of Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is the figure of its leader. Where previously the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School was a marginalized institution and its existence was not recognized by the general public of Kuantan Singingi Regency. Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School is a private (non-government) Islamic educational institution that was established on June 14, 1988. The teaching and learning process at that time took place in 2 classrooms of the Masjid Raya Pasar Teluk Kuantan mosque that were not used in the morning. At that time, the number of students was around 20, who were alumni from several elementary schools in the vicinity of Teluk Kuantan City. Gradually, the local development and dormitory construction began. Every year, the number of students increases, although many still commute and are not required to stay in the dormitory. To build a pesantren, it is certainly necessary to have human resources with aligned vision and mission, meaning there need to be people with the same goals so that a strong organization can be formed. In this regard, the leadership of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School is developing human resources by placing individuals in their respective fields. Then seeking alumni from the Middle East who have progressive insights, to collaboratively build a pesantren.

According to the leadership of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, when building a system, it is more likely to endure over time compared to physical structures. Physical buildings may only last 30-40 years, after which they may collapse. However, a good system, along with creative ideas and thoughts, can be continued indefinitely. Then, to shape and build students or a generation that can continue the strong system at the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School. The Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school has three sources of funding. First, there are both permanent and non-permanent donors, whether from the government or not. These donors are also made into guardians for the orphaned students who attend the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School for free. Infrastructure is one of the important supporting factors in improving the quality of Islamic education in order to achieve the desired educational goals. External

supporting factors in enhancing the quality of Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul include support from the government and the community. In this case, the support provided by the government comes in the form of both permanent and temporary donations, and every event or activity organized by the government takes place at the Syafa'aturrasul campus. Not only that, the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School continues to build good relationships by sending students to participate in activities organized by the government. The positive support provided by community leaders and local residents includes helping to promote Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul to the public, enrolling their children in Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, and even donating and contributing to the establishment of Syafa'aturrasul.

The Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, located somewhat far from the main road and the city, creates a more comfortable atmosphere for studying. Its location, away from noise and traffic, is more calming, allowing the students to learn more comfortably. Alumni support for Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is also one of the supporting factors in the implementation of experiential marketing at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul. The form of alumni support is through service at the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School and by making annual donations in the form of endowments. This is evidenced by the many alumni who have joined the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School. One of the inhibiting factors or obstacles in improving the quality of Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is the increasing number of students, which makes supervision more difficult.

The ratio of teachers to students is 1:10. Currently, the students at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul number 1,200, and in the upcoming academic year 2022/2023, this will reach 1,500 in campuses 1 and 2. Meanwhile, the number of teachers and staff is around 150. Based on this ratio, the leadership of Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul admits that this is actually an undesirable and unhealthy number. However, to weigh the options, due to the high interest of the community in Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, the leadership continues to strive to find ways to accommodate students who have a strong desire to save the current generation of Islam. Facilities and infrastructure are supporting elements for achieving the desired educational goals. With the aim of developing the abilities and personalities of students in the Islamic boarding school. Therefore, its maintenance should be done properly. The next inhibiting factor is financial issues or funding. The issue at hand is that many students are still delaying or postponing their tuition payments, while the necessary facilities and infrastructure need to be met.

From an external perspective, the factors hindering the improvement of the quality of Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul are the sometimes unstable weather conditions. When it rains, some teachers will experience delays in getting to school, which results in the learning process being postponed and not optimal. The next external factor is the emergence of



new Islamic boarding schools. This certainly makes the competition even tighter, necessitating efforts to improve the quality of Islamic education in order to maintain the standards of Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul. Another external factor is the presence of guardians of students who do not share the same vision as Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, which can disrupt the system. This was expressed by the leader of the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic boarding school, stating that it's not that the guardians of the students do not want to understand, but rather that many of them still do not comprehend the background of the boarding school. The leadership's efforts to address this issue involve maintaining good communication with the guardians of the students, holding monthly studies, and introducing the history of the Islamic boarding school along with its vision and mission.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the research on "Experiential Marketing at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, the following conclusion can be drawn: Experiential marketing at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul is running well." The five indicators, Sense, Feel, Act, Think, Relate, are implemented by Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul by providing facilities with a good design, offering a variety of extracurricular activities, ensuring adequate infrastructure, delivering the best services, conducting a well-organized selection process for new students, having the Daarrul Huffazh program, possessing a unique brand "Mentored by alumni from the Middle East," participating in various activities and competitions, effectively using social media, holding regular studies and meetings with parents both offline and online, organizing and participating in community-involved activities, and building relationships with educational institutions both domestically and internationally. The internal supporting factor is, first, the leadership style of the leaders and the headmaster at Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul, which is very good, allowing them to be role models, guides, and effective controllers for the students, teachers, and staff. Second, the Syafa'aturrasul Islamic Boarding School has a strong financial source derived from three aspects: regular and irregular donors, student tuition fees, and the business units owned by the boarding school. Third, the boarding school provides adequate facilities, as the extensive land of the school facilitates the construction and provision of infrastructure to support the students' learning activities. Fourth, the support from alumni of the Islamic boarding school who provide assistance in both moral and material forms. Like carrying out a service, dedicating time, resources, and effort to contribute to the development and advancement of the community, the quantity of human resources is increasing, which will facilitate the achievement of the goals and vision of Pondok Pesantren Syafa'aturrasul in the future. The supporting factors from an external perspective include the support from the government and the community, which benefits the Islamic boarding school. Additionally, there is positive backing from religious scholars and community leaders, leading many people to trust and send their children to the Syafa'aturrasul

Islamic boarding school. Another supporting factor is the strategic location of the Islamic boarding school, which serves as an educational place far from the hustle and bustle of the city, creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for learning.

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