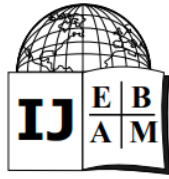


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### The Influence of Experiential Marketing and Islamic Branding on Word of Mouth and The Decision of Choosing a Private College

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| ARTICLE INFORMATION                                                                         | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Section<br>Research Articles                                                                | This research aims to test and analyze the influence of experiential marketing and Islamic branding on word of mouth and the decision to choose a private university. The research approach used in this study is quantitative. This study's collection technique was distributing questionnaires online via google forms to 200 respondents. The method used in this study is PLS-SEM using SmartPLS software. The results of this research are experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on college decisions, islamic branding has a positive and significant effect on experiential marketing, experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth, islamic branding has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth, islamic branding has a positive and significant effect on college decisions, word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on college decisions, the role of word of mouth can be a mediator in the relationship between experiential marketing and college decisions and word of mouth can be a mediator in the relationship between islamic branding and college decisions. |
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| Keywords<br>experiential marketing<br>islamic branding<br>word of mouth<br>college decision |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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### INTRODUCTION

Social media is an excellent tool for creating and growing brand communities. Beyond brand building, social media is also seen as a useful tool for acquiring new customers, introducing new products and services, retaining current customers, offering promotions, engaging with



employees and marketing research. Social media has become an important communication platform in Higher Education marketing as the younger generation moves away from traditional media. Social media strategies are now a key part of brand marketing, including for educational institutions (Maresova, Hruska and Kuca, 2020). A strong brand provides universities with an edge over competitors. It is built on students' experiences during their studies. Student loyalty grows when universities effectively communicate and meet students' needs, especially through social media. Technology and human civilization are developing rapidly, so without good human resources, a country can decline. This is a challenge that must be solved by every country in the world. To obtain quality human resources, every country is competing to improve its education standards (Murdowo, 2018).

High-quality teaching is the main focus of the higher education sector. Although important and crucial to the success of the sector, the quality of research, not teaching, has become the main focus of university quality assurance activities and ranking metrics in various countries and globally. A number of factors in the national and international higher education environment have led to an increase in the dedication of resources to measuring and improving the quality of teaching. Teaching excellence can be measured at the individual, faculty, or institutional level in higher education. University selection factors can be defined as the criteria that prospective students use to evaluate available options. Such choice factors are often considered by prospective students during the information search and evaluation of alternatives stage. At this stage, prospective students look for information on factors that help reduce uncertainty and risk. In this study, three key variables were often highlighted that is pathway, location, and reputation.

Experiential marketing can produce memorable and recountable consumer experiences. However, to win and retain target market (share of mind and share of heart) of customers, long-term marketing consisting of emotions and experiences is needed. Long-term benefits, such as positive word of mouth, can be achieved through experiential marketing (Alfiyan, Iriani and Witjaksono, 2023). Islamic marketing is based on the emotional attachment that is needed between Muslim consumers and the brands they use. The existence of an emotional attachment between the brand and the customer ensures customer loyalty and active engagement with the brand. Consumers adopt, use and retain brands that they consider to be part of themselves (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024).

There are several previous studies that discuss students' decisions in choosing a university. Brands are the basis for choosing one product over another to meet the same needs. Islamic marketing refers to the use of marketing principles that are in line with the values and teachings of Islam (Nafis, 2024). Some of these studies are based on the influence of experiential marketing on word of mouth. Based on the results of the study, the results of the experiential marketing variable have a significant positive effect on word of mouth, meaning that if experiential marketing is high, it will affect a person's level of word of mouth (Alfiyan, Iriani and Witjaksono, 2023). This research study aims to analyze the relationship between the variables of experiential marketing and islamic marketing to word of mouth in college decisions. The motivation for this research is to find out how influential experiential marketing and Islamic marketing are to word of mouth in decision making in choosing a private university.

## LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS

### Theoretical Foundations

#### Theory of Planned Behaviour

This research is based on the theory proposed by Ajzen, (2020), namely The Theory of Planned Behavior (hereinafter abbreviated as TPB). TPB has been proven effective in explaining and predicting behavior in various fields. This theory states that the intention to perform a behavior is influenced by three main factors, namely attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms about behavior, and perceptions of behavioral control. Ajzen (2020) argues that most of the behaviors that are of concern to researchers in the field of social behavior are generally under the control of strong will and perceptions of control.

#### Experiential Marketing

Marketing experience is a marketing approach that focuses on engaging consumers through their senses and emotions (Larocca *et al.*, 2020). Marketing experience on purchasing decisions, emphasizing the importance of creating positive and effective experiences to drive consumer behavior (Suardana *et al.*, 2024).

#### Islamic Branding

Religious knowledge and principles are often considered as factors that affects people's values and actions (Daas, 2018). In order for a business to develop an effective marketing strategy, they must first understand the behavior of the target consumer group properly. Religious beliefs are an important instrument for better understanding consumer behavior. A person's religious beliefs influence every moment of their life, including their purchasing behavior (Temizkan, 2022).

#### Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is an activity of someone in conveying personal information to others regarding a particular product or service, which is a form of informal communication between consumers where they exchange information about product and service attributes, including benefits and producers (Temaja and Yasa, 2019). Before making a decision, prospective students often seek information from current students about the university to shape their perceptions, which helps support their decision-making process in choosing a university.

#### College Decisions

The increasing competition between universities in Indonesia encourages higher education institutions to seek competitive advantages and attract students, both from within and outside the country. For prospective students, choosing a university is an important decision that affects commitment, motivation to study, and future career prospects (Mishra and Gupta, 2021).

### Hypothesis Development

#### The Effect of Experiential Marketing on College Decision

Experiential marketing has proven to be effective in influencing brand perception and purchasing decisions. By providing an immersive product experience, experiential marketing can be an important source of information for consumers in making purchasing decisions. Universities need to continue to improve the quality of education and their competitiveness in

the market in order to attract prospective students and expand their market reach globally. Through experiential marketing, universities can build a strong brand image and be known as an excellent institution, providing added value to society (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024).

Experiential marketing includes sales strategies that provide unique, good, and memorable emotional understanding to customers. Furthermore, experiential marketing forms emotional benefits provided by producers according to customer needs (Nurchayati, Riyadi and Sartini, 2022). In practice, just like how social media marketing leverages popular platforms like instagram and others, experiential marketing can also leverage these platforms for execution. Experiential marketing generates positive experiences for consumers through interactions on social media. These positive encounters foster a favorable brand attitude among consumers, which in turn influences their purchasing decisions (Suardana *et al.*, 2024).

***H<sub>1</sub>: Experiential Marketing Has a Positive Effect on College Decision***

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on Experiential Marketing**

College services are characterized by high experiential quality, which implies that they are difficult to evaluate before consumption. This adds to the perceived risk and makes branding important as a source of assurance for students about the quality of what they will receive (Mourad and El Karanshaw, 2013). When the level of Islamic marketing is developed, customer satisfaction will also increase. Islamic marketing promotes the use of islamic values. This is in line with the spiritual marketing process. The spiritual marketing process describes how spiritual marketing can provide customer satisfaction and loyalty (Qurrata *et al.*, 2021). Student satisfaction plays a key role in linking an institution's reputation to student loyalty. This confirms that student satisfaction should be a primary concern in efforts to increase their loyalty. To build student loyalty, it is essential to continuously work on maintaining, protecting, and enhancing the institution's reputation, while also improving service quality to offer students a more satisfying experience.

***H<sub>2</sub>: Islamic Branding Has a Positive effect on Experiential Marketing***

### **The Effect of Experiential Marketing on Word of Mouth**

The sustainability and survival of higher education institutions are greatly influenced by the quality of service in education. Given that higher education institutions operate in the service sector, maintaining and providing certain quality service standards is a challenge. The quality of educational services perceived by students has a direct impact on their level of satisfaction. Satisfied students will not only choose the same university in the future, but also tend to spread positive word of mouth and recommend the institution to others (Rasheed and Rashid, 2024). A number of studies show that they find service quality to be an important factor in generating good behavioral intentions through customer satisfaction (Khoo, 2022). Emotional experiences can encourage consumers to continue using a product because of feelings that foster trust and create a bond between the consumer and the product, which ultimately forms a commitment (Wijaya and Yulita, 2020).

***H<sub>3</sub>: Experiential Marketing Has a Positive Effect on Word of Mouth***

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on Word of Mouth**

The implementation of a marketing strategy that combines islamic marketing and experiential marketing has various positive impacts, especially in creating a word of mouth effect that is beneficial for consumers. When customers like what they learn about a product through

positive word of mouth communication, they will be more loyal to the product's brand (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). The Experiential religiosity factor relates to religious experiences, feelings, perceptions, and sensations experienced by a person. religion plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. Religiosity reflects how deeply a person believes in their religion, along with their understanding of it, this is shown through the experience of religious values, which involves sincerely following the rules and fulfilling religious duties in daily life (Septiani *et al.*, 2023). Religion shapes their beliefs in terms of what products and which ones to choose and which products to buy. When a customer has been involved with a product or service, he or she will recommend it to others because customer engagement is related to religiosity and word of mouth (Abror *et al.*, 2021).

***H<sub>4</sub>: Islamic Branding Has a Positive Effect on Word of Mouth***

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on College Decision**

Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion. Islam has now become very significant, not only in the market, but also in global media and politics. The success of implementing an islamic branding strategy depends on the psychological and emotional connection between muslim consumers and the brand. The formation of an islamic brand can also fulfill the need for self-consistency, which is a motive for self-congruence, encouraging consumers to demonstrate purchasing behavior that is in line with their self-image (Bukhari and Isa, 2020). A person's religious beliefs influence every moment of their life, including their purchasing behavior. Consumer purchasing behavior is concerned with how an individual, group, or organization selects, purchases, and uses products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy consumer demand (Temizkan, 2022). Islamic branding is defined as the use of islamic values and principles to promote products and services. Islamic branding is based on islamic beliefs and is designed to create a sense of spiritual connection between customers and the brand. The existence of islamic marketing can increase consumer trust in the company. By being honest and transparent, Islamic values help build consumer trust and make the business appear credible (Ferdy and Fikri, 2024).

***H<sub>5</sub>: Islamic Branding Has a Positive Effect on College Decision***

### **The Effect of Word of Mouth on College Decision**

Word of mouth is a powerful tool for promoting a company's products and services, as well as fostering customer loyalty. Positive WOM recommendations help eliminate doubts, generate excitement, and may even create a barrier that prevents customers from leaving. It enhances customer confidence in the company and its offerings, making them feel they made the right decision (Ngoma and Ntale, 2019). Customers who are hesitant about a purchase make optimization choices while facing high levels of uncertainty and that evaluations written by other consumers can play a role in reducing some of that anxiety. Word of mouth build customer trust, which ultimately encourages them to accept the information and, as a result, buy products and services (Khan, Anwar and Qabool, 2023). Students consider opinions expressed through word of mouth when making their university choices. It can also have an impact on the university brand. Word of mouth is the most important factor. Followed by peer influence and university reputation. University rankings, which are highly correlated with university reputation, they most often look for information related to course content and university reputation and their level of interest.

***H<sub>6</sub>: Word of Mouth Has a Positive Effect on College Decision***

### **The Effect of Experiential Marketing on College Decisions is Mediated by Word of Mouth**

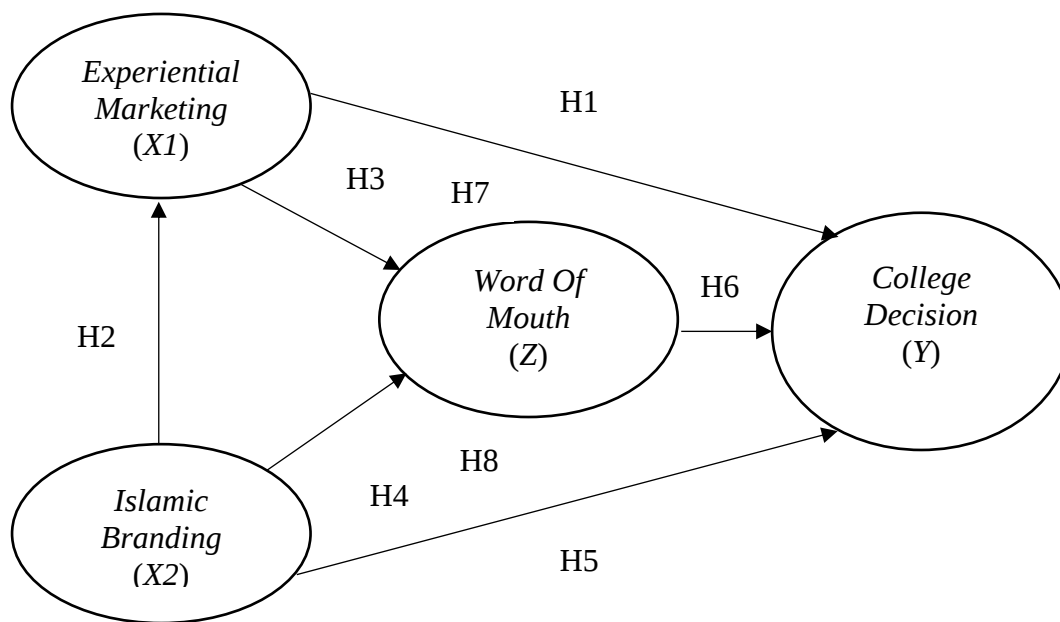
Experiential marketing involves two main dimensions that provide the greatest contribution, namely sense and relate. In the world of higher education, word of mouth (WoM) is considered as one of the effective sources of information in the decision-making process of prospective students. Consumer satisfaction with a brand among the available choices can influence their purchasing decisions, including in the higher education sector. The purchasing decision-making process involves integrates knowledge to assess and compare multiple options before selecting one (Iskamto, 2021). Word of mouth messages are delivered when individuals share their feelings and experiences about the products and services concerned with their friends and family. Positive perceptions of service efficiency affect student satisfaction, therefore, with the help of word of mouth communication, satisfied students will attract other students as well (Rasheed and Rashid, 2024).

***H<sub>7</sub>: Experiential Marketing Has a Positive Effect on College Decision through the Word of Mouth Mediation Variable***

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on College Decision is Mediated by Word of Mouth**

Islamic marketing is often defined as a marketing approach that focuses on God-consciousness with the aim of creating a balance between material and spiritual needs in various aspects of human life (Floren, Rasul and Gani, 2020). Before purchasing a product or service, consumers do not have direct experience of the product or service. However, word of mouth regarding quality, performance, and service can shape perceptions that influence other elements such as brand image and consumer purchase intentions (Nuseir, 2019). An organization found the presence of religion as a strong driver behind consumer purchasing decisions. People generally buy based on quality or other factors, but for muslim consumers, their decisions are also influenced by Islamic teachings, which cover all aspects of life in detail, making the connection even stronger.

***H<sub>8</sub>: Islamic Branding Has a Positive Effect on College Decision through Word of Mouth Mediation Variable***



**Figure 1.** Research Framework

Source: Ambarwati and Sari (2024)

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a causal relationship study approach to analyze the causal relationship between relevant variables through hypothesis testing. The data used are primary data, obtained directly from respondents in this study. Data collection was carried out through a quantitative approach by distributing questionnaires online using google form. The convenience sampling method is a sampling technique based on convenience or coincidence. Someone is taken as a sample accidentally or anyone who is considered to match the characteristics of the specified sample will be used as a sample (Sugiyono, 2013). This study was conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, with the research subjects being students of the 2023 class of the Islamic University of Indonesia.

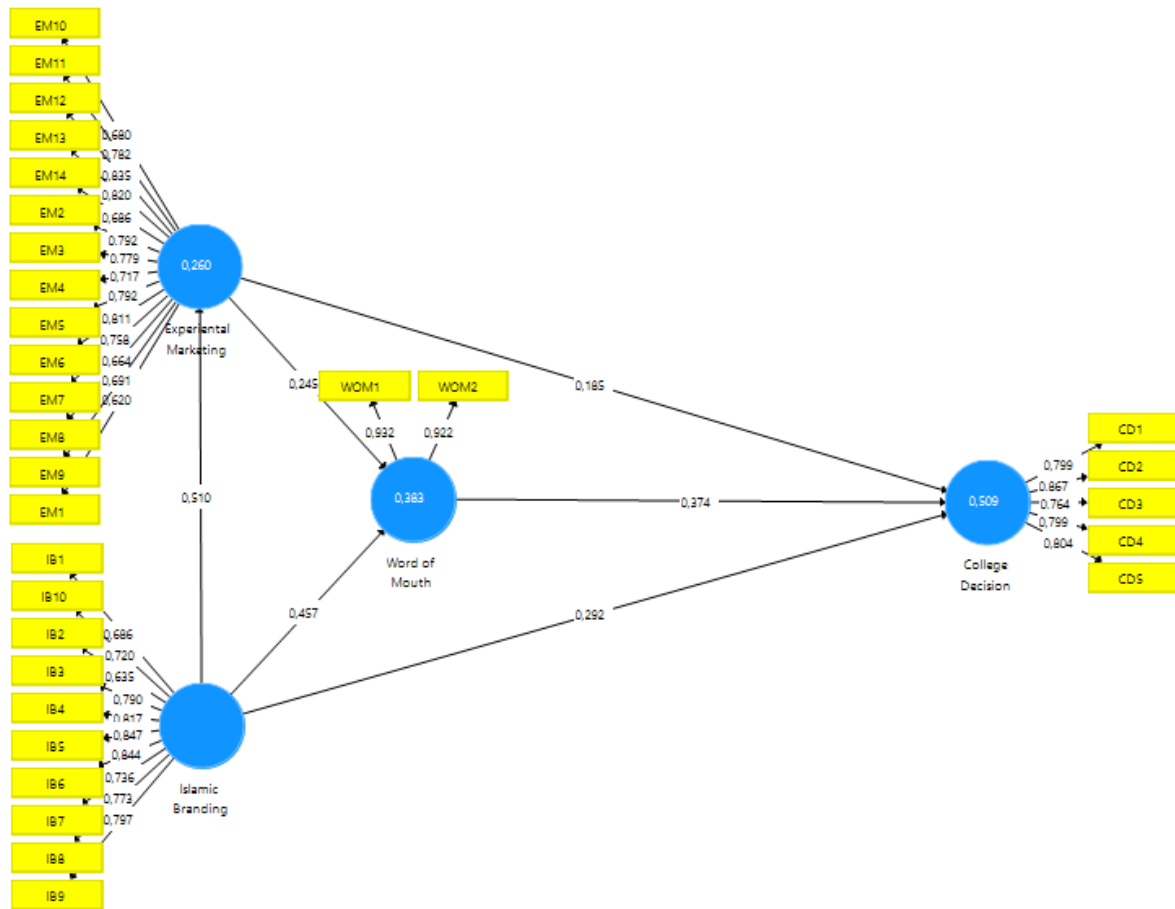
The variables to be studied in this study consist of four variables, namely experience marketing and islamic marketing as independent variables, word of mouth as a mediating variable and college decision as a dependent variable. The measurement of variables in this study was carried out using a likert scale, which is designed to assess variables or constructs based on the subject's response to their level of agreement regarding psychological concepts, such as individual or group behavior and views regarding the existence of social phenomena (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). This study will later be analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). To achieve this target, the minimum sample is calculated from the number of indicator questions asked plus the latent variables and then multiplied by five. Meanwhile, to achieve this target, the maximum sample is calculated from the number of indicator questions asked plus the number of variables and then multiplied by ten (Hair *et al.*, 2021). This study uses 31 question indicators and 4 latent variables. The number of respondents obtained ranges from  $5a \leq x \leq 10a$  where  $a$  is the sum of the proposed indicators and the number of latent variables and  $x$  is the number of respondents. Based on the calculation results, this study must have a minimum target of 175 respondents and a maximum target of 350 respondents or new students of the 2023 intake of the Islamic University of Indonesia.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Variables

| Demographic Variables                              | N   | %     |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| <i>Gender</i>                                      |     |       |
| Male                                               | 86  | 43    |
| Female                                             | 114 | 57    |
| <i>Umur</i>                                        |     |       |
| 15-20 Age                                          | 188 | 94    |
| 21-25 Age                                          | 12  | 6     |
| More 25 Tahun                                      | 0   | 0     |
| <i>School</i>                                      |     |       |
| Private                                            | 103 | 51,5% |
| Country                                            | 97  | 48,5% |
| <i>Pocket Money Month</i>                          |     |       |
| Rp500,000-<Rp1,000,000                             | 21  | 10,5  |
| Rp1,000,000-<Rp2,000,000                           | 54  | 27    |
| Rp2,000,000-<Rp3,000,000                           | 89  | 44,5  |
| Rp3,000,000-<Rp4,000,000                           | 34  | 17    |
| Rp4,000,000-<Rp5,000,000                           | 2   | 1     |
| More than Rp5,000,000                              | 0   | 0     |
| <i>Faculty</i>                                     |     |       |
| Faculty of Business and Economic                   | 49  | 24,5  |
| Faculty of Law                                     | 21  | 10,5  |
| Faculty of Islamic Religious Sciences              | 3   | 1,5   |
| Faculty of Medical                                 | 6   | 3     |
| Faculty Mathematics and Natural Sciene             | 19  | 9,5   |
| Faculty of Psychology and Cultural Sciences        | 54  | 27    |
| Faculty of Civil Engineering and Planning          | 26  | 13    |
| Faculty of Technology and Industry                 | 22  | 11    |
| <i>The Person Who Most Influences The Decision</i> |     |       |
| Self                                               | 138 | 69    |
| Parents                                            | 48  | 24    |
| Siblings                                           | 11  | 5,5   |
| Relation                                           | 3   | 1,5   |
| <i>Entrance Options</i>                            |     |       |
| First Choice                                       | 48  | 24    |
| Second Choice After Failing to Enter PTN           | 152 | 76    |
| <i>Registration Scheme</i>                         |     |       |
| CBT (Computer-Based Test)                          | 37  | 18,5  |
| PBT (Paper-Based Test)                             | 9   | 4,5   |
| PSB (Achievement Student Search)                   | 31  | 15,5  |
| SIBER (Report-Based Selection)                     | 123 | 61,5  |

Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

## DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS & DISCUSSION



**Figure 2.** Path Analysis Test Result

Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

### Coefficient of Determination Test

The college decision is explained by its antecedent variables by 50,1%. This indicates that there is still an influence of 49,9% from other variables outside the college decision variable. Furthermore, experiential marketing is explained by its antecedent variables by 25,6%, which indicates that there is still an influence of 74,4% from other variables outside the experiential marketing variable. Meanwhile, word of mouth is explained by its antecedent variables by 37,7%, which means that there is still an influence of 62,7% from other variables outside the performance expectancy variable.

**Table 2.** Results of The Determination Coefficient Test (R-Square)

| Variable               | R-Square | R-Square Adjusted |
|------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| College Decision       | 0,509    | 0,501             |
| Experiential Marketing | 0,260    | 0,256             |
| Word of Mouth          | 0,383    | 0,377             |

Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

### Q-Square Test Results

The college decision variable has a q-square value of 0,317, experiential marketing has a q-square value of 0,137, and word of mouth has a q-square value of 0,317. Meanwhile, the islamic marketing variable has a q-square value of 0. However, a value of 0 in islamic marketing is reasonable because this variable is an independent variable.

**Table 3.** Q-Square Test Results

|     | SSO      | SSE      | Q <sup>2</sup> (=1-SSE/SSO) |
|-----|----------|----------|-----------------------------|
| CD  | 1000,000 | 682,923  | 0,317                       |
| EM  | 2800,000 | 2417,025 | 0,137                       |
| IB  | 2000,000 | 2000,000 |                             |
| WOM | 400,000  | 273,150  | 0,317                       |

Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

### Hypothesis Test Results

Based on the hypothesis table, it shows that H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>6</sub>, H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>8</sub> are supported. This is because it is in line with the principles of Hair *et al.* (2016), which states that the t-statistic value must be more than 1,96 and the p-value must be less than 0,05. Thus, H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>6</sub>, H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>8</sub> are supported.

**Table 4.** Hypothesis Test Results

|            |      |     | Sample Mean | STDEV | T     | P     | Label    |
|------------|------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| EM         | <--- | CD  | 0,192       | 0,071 | 2,607 | 0,009 | Accepted |
| IB         | <--- | EM  | 0,525       | 0,067 | 7,557 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| EM         | <--- | WOM | 0,254       | 0,072 | 3,401 | 0,001 | Accepted |
| IB         | <--- | WOM | 0,452       | 0,071 | 6,447 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| IB         | <--- | CD  | 0,289       | 0,079 | 3,684 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| WOM        | <--- | CD  | 0,374       | 0,087 | 4,326 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| EM←- WOM←- |      | CD  | 0,094       | 0,032 | 2,886 | 0,004 | Accepted |
| IB←- WOM←- |      | CD  | 0,171       | 0,052 | 3,277 | 0,001 | Accepted |

Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

### Discussion

#### The Effect of Experiential Marketing on College Decision

The research conducted results of testing hypothesis one or H<sub>1</sub> show that experience marketing has a positive and significant influence on higher education decisions. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,185 with a t-statistic test of 2,607 > 1,96 and a significant value displayed by p-values of 0,009 < 0,05. Experiential marketing plays a role in college decisions. The results of this study are supported by Haryanti *et al.* (2022), which states that experiential marketing has a positive influence on college decisions. The results of previous studies also have a positive influence between the experiential marketing variable on college decisions (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). Based on the results of the analysis, this happens because the good services and facilities felt by students make students impressed during the lecture process and can be a source of information and references for other students

or other prospective students so that this will help in creating a satisfying experience that can create positive word of mouth and college decision intentions in students.

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on Experiential Marketing**

This research shows that the results of the second hypothesis test ( $H_2$ ) indicate that islamic marketing has a positive and significant influence on experience marketing. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,510, a t-statistic of 7,557 which is greater than 1,96, and a significant p-value of 0,000, which is less than 0,05. Islamic marketing plays a role in influencing experiential marketing. This finding is in line with research conducted by Nuryakin, Md Saad and Maulani (2024), which states that islamic marketing has a positive impact on experiential marketing. Previous research also revealed a positive influence between the variables of islamic marketing and experiential marketing (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). Based on the analysis, this happens because the values of islamic principles applied at universities influence students' emotions and feelings through the experiences they gain during their studies.

### **The Effect of Experiential Marketing on Word of Mouth**

The research conducted shows that the results of the three hypothesis tests ( $H_3$ ) prove that experiential marketing has a positive and significant influence on word of mouth. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,245 with a t-statistic value of 3,401 > 1,96 and p-value of 0,001 < 0,05. Experiential marketing plays a role in word of mouth. This finding is supported by research Sutriani, Muslim and Ramli (2024), which revealed that experiential marketing has a positive influence on word of mouth. Previous research also found a positive influence between the variables of experiential marketing and word of mouth (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). Based on the results of the analysis, this is due to the positive learning experience, services, and facilities felt by students during the learning process, which then results in positive word of mouth.

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on Word of Mouth**

The research conducted shows that the results of the four hypothesis tests ( $H_4$ ) show that islamic marketing has a positive and significant influence on word of mouth. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,457, a t-statistic test of 6,447 which is greater than 1,96, and p-value of 0,000 which is less than 0,05. Islamic marketing plays an important role in word of mouth. This finding is in line with research conducted by Ambarwati and Sari (2024), that shows a positive influence between islamic marketing and word of mouth. Based on the analysis, this happens because islamic marketing has attracted significant attention among academics and practitioners. Marketing strategies that adopt islamic marketing principles have a positive impact, especially in creating a good word of mouth effect among students. students who experience experiences based on islamic values applied by the Islamic University of Indonesia tend to produce positive word of mouth.

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on College Decision**

The research conducted shows that the results of the five hypothesis tests ( $H_5$ ) indicate that islamic marketing has a positive and significant influence on higher education decisions. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,292 with a t-statistic test of 3,684 > 1,96 and a significant p-value of 0,000 < 0,05. Islamic marketing plays a role in influencing word of mouth in higher education decisions. This finding is supported by

Ambarwati and Sari (2024), that showed a positive influence between the variables of islamic marketing and higher education decisions. Based on the analysis conducted, this is due to the experience of students who feel the implementation of islamic values at the Islamic University of Indonesia, which then produces positive word of mouth and becomes an important factor in determining higher education decisions.

### **The Effect of Word of Mouth on College Decision**

The research conducted shows that the results of the six hypothesis tests ( $H_6$ ) indicate that word of mouth has a positive and significant influence on higher education decisions. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,374, with a t-statistic test of  $4,326 > 1,96$  and p-value of  $0,000 < 0,05$ . Word of mouth plays a role in college decisions, this finding is in line with research by Harahap et al. (2017), which states that students considering the word of mouth to choose a college. Previous research also showed a positive influence between the word of mouth variable and the college decision variable (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). Based on the results of the analysis, this happens because students' positive learning experiences during the learning process produce good word of mouth, which then helps prospective students in making profitable academic decisions. This happens because the university can meet the needs of students, build trust, and provide the services needed, thereby increasing the attractiveness and ability of the Islamic University of Indonesia to attract and retain its students.

### **The Effect of Experiential Marketing on College Decisions is Mediated by Word of Mouth**

The research conducted shows the results of the seven hypothesis tests or  $H_7$ , which indicates that the role of word of mouth can mediate the relationship between experience marketing and college decisions. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,092, with a t-statistic test of  $2,886 > 1,96$  and p-values of  $0,004 < 0,05$ . The role of word of mouth can mediate the relationship between experiential marketing and college decisions. This finding is supported by Ambarwati and Sari (2024), which shows a positive influence between experiential marketing variables on college decisions through the mediating role of word of mouth. Based on the analysis, this happens because students feel a positive experience during the learning process as well as the facilities and services provided, which then encourages students to attract more prospective students to the university through positive word of mouth.

### **The Effect of Islamic Branding on College Decisions is Mediated by Word of Mouth**

The research conducted shows that the results of the eight hypothesis test or  $H_8$ , indicate that word of mouth can mediate the relationship between islamic marketing and college decisions. This can be seen from the results of the original sample which shows a value of 0,171, with a t-statistic test of  $3,277 > 1,96$  and a significant p-value of  $0,001 < 0,05$ . The role of word of mouth can mediate the relationship between islamic marketing and college decisions. this finding is supported by research Nurhayati and Hendar (2020)w, hich states that word of mouth has the ability to mediate the relationship between islamic marketing and college decisions. Previous research also shows a positive influence between islamic marketing and college decisions mediated by word of mouth (Ambarwati and Sari, 2024). Based on the results of the analysis, this happens because students feel the principles of islamic values applied at the university, which then influences the choice of college decisions through positive word of mouth.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that in this study there are eight accepted hypotheses. The results of this study provide managerial implications for private university managers. The academic community needs to improve the service of facilities and infrastructure to improve the marketing of Islamic experiences and marketing felt by students. With the existence of good learning experiences and principles of Islamic values, it will produce positive word of mouth which can have a good reputational impact on universities in accepting new students. It is important for university managers to pay attention to the experience, services and facilities provided to students which will have an impact on word of mouth and become a factor in choosing a university.

The author realizes that the results of this study have limitations. The limitations in this study lie in the object of research. The object of this study only comes from one private university, namely students of the Islamic University of Indonesia class of 2023. So the object of this study is only limited to students of the Islamic University of Indonesia class of 2023. Due to the limitations of the research that have been discussed previously, the author has suggestions for improvements that can be made for further research. The author suggests involving many respondents from other private universities.

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