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Immersive, Spiritual, and Differentiation Marketing Strategies on Perceived Value and Their Implications for Student Trust

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the influence of immersive marketing, spiritual marketing, and differentiation strategies on student perceived value and its implications for student trust at Vocational High Schools designated as Centers of Excellence (SMKS PK) in the East Priangan region. A descriptive-verificative method with a quantitative approach was used. The population consisted of students at SMKS PK in East Priangan, with a sample of 210 respondents selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected via questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with LISREL 8.80. The results show that immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing strategies, student value, and student trust fall into the fairly good to good category. Simultaneously, the three strategies positively and significantly affect student value, with a coefficient of determination of 82%. Partially, immersive marketing contributes 20.11%, spiritual marketing 21.09%, and differentiation strategy 24.07% to student value, with differentiation strategy providing the largest contribution. Student value, in turn, positively and significantly affects student trust, contributing 91%. The study concludes with an integrated vocational-education marketing model in which student perceived value mediates the effect of marketing strategy on student trust

INTRODUCTION

Vocational secondary education in Indonesia is increasingly positioned as a strategic instrument for producing a work-ready labor force, and the government's Center of Excellence (Pusat Keunggulan/PK) program has intensified competition among private vocational schools (SMKS) to attract and retain students. In this competitive landscape, schools can no longer rely solely on academic reputation; they must design marketing strategies that create memorable learning experiences, resonate with students' values, and clearly differentiate the institution from its rivals.

Three strategic approaches are particularly relevant to this context. Immersive marketing strategy uses interactive technology and experiential learning activities so that students directly engage with, rather than merely observe, the educational offering (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2024; Pine & Gilmore, 2020). Spiritual marketing strategy embeds character values, integrity, and social responsibility into the institution's identity and interactions with students (Zohar & Marshall, 2020; Fry, 2020). Differentiation strategy builds distinctiveness through unique skill programs, facilities, service quality, and institutional image (Kotler & Fox, 2021). Each of these approaches is theorized to shape how students perceive the value of their education, which in turn is expected to determine their trust in the institution.

Despite the theoretical appeal of these three strategies, prior studies have tended to examine them in isolation and largely within commercial service settings rather than vocational education, leaving a theoretical gap regarding an integrative model that combines immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing as joint antecedents of student value. Empirically, findings on the relationship between perceived value and trust remain inconsistent across contexts (Croitoru, Capatina, Florea, Codignola, & Sokoloic, 2024; Suhartanto, Dean, & Syarifuddin, 2022), while contextually, research on strategic marketing within SMK Pusat Keunggulan institutions is still limited. This study therefore investigates the simultaneous and partial effects of immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing strategies on student perceived value, and the subsequent effect of student perceived value on student trust, among students of private SMK Pusat Keunggulan in the East Priangan region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immersive Marketing Strategy

Immersive marketing strategy refers to the use of interactive technologies and experiential learning designs that actively engage students in the educational process rather than positioning them as passive recipients of information (Kotler et al., 2024). Drawing on Schmitt's (2020) experiential marketing framework and Pine and Gilmore's (2020) experience economy, immersive strategies are theorized to operate through dimensions such as immersive technology, interactivity, personalization, and emotional engagement, which together create a distinctive and memorable learning experience.

Spiritual Marketing Strategy

Spiritual marketing strategy concerns the internalization of character, integrity, and social-responsibility values within an institution's culture and its communication with stakeholders (Zohar & Marshall, 2020; Fry, 2020; Hamdan, Azzulala, Nafisah, & Kamiluddin, 2021). In education, this strategy is expressed through emotional connection, human-centric treatment of students, and social responsibility initiatives that build a values-based relationship between the school and its students.

Differentiation Strategy

Differentiation strategy is the process by which an institution builds a distinctive competitive position through its programs, facilities, services, channels, and image (Kotler & Fox, 2021). For vocational schools, differentiation is commonly manifested in specialized skill programs, industry-standard practical facilities, service quality, and access to information that set the institution apart from competitors.

Student Perceived Value

Student perceived value reflects students' overall assessment of the benefits received relative to the costs incurred in pursuing their education, encompassing the dimensions of benefit versus cost, expectation alignment, and satisfaction (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2020; Croitoru et al., 2024). Perceived value theory posits that this evaluation functions as a central mechanism translating service and marketing efforts into favorable relational outcomes.

Student Trust

Student trust denotes students' confidence in the reliability, integrity, and benevolence of the educational institution (Amin, Isa, & Fontaine, 2022; Betts, Robinson, & Blake, 2022). Trust theory suggests that perceived value is among the strongest antecedents of trust, because value realized through consistent, beneficial experience builds the relational confidence that underlies trust.

Hypothesis Development and Conceptual Framework

Immersive experiences that are well designed and delivered consistently are expected to raise students' perceived benefits relative to the cost of their education (Alyoussef, 2023; Chamorro-Atalaya, Calderón, & Luján, 2023). Likewise, the internalization of spiritual and character values strengthens students' emotional and ethical evaluation of the institution (Betts et al., 2022; Amin et al., 2022), while clear differentiation increases students' confidence that the institution offers benefits unavailable elsewhere (Kotler & Fox, 2021; Al-Hawari, Al-Azza, & Melhem, 2024). Perceived value, in turn, is theorized to be a proximal determinant of trust (Suhartanto et al., 2022; Croitoru et al., 2024). Based on this reasoning and the conceptual framework in Figure 1, five hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Immersive marketing, spiritual marketing, and differentiation strategy simultaneously and significantly affect student perceived value.
H2: Student perceived value significantly affects student trust.
H3: Immersive marketing strategy significantly affects student perceived value.
H4: Spiritual marketing strategy significantly affects student perceived value.
H5: Differentiation strategy significantly affects student perceived value.

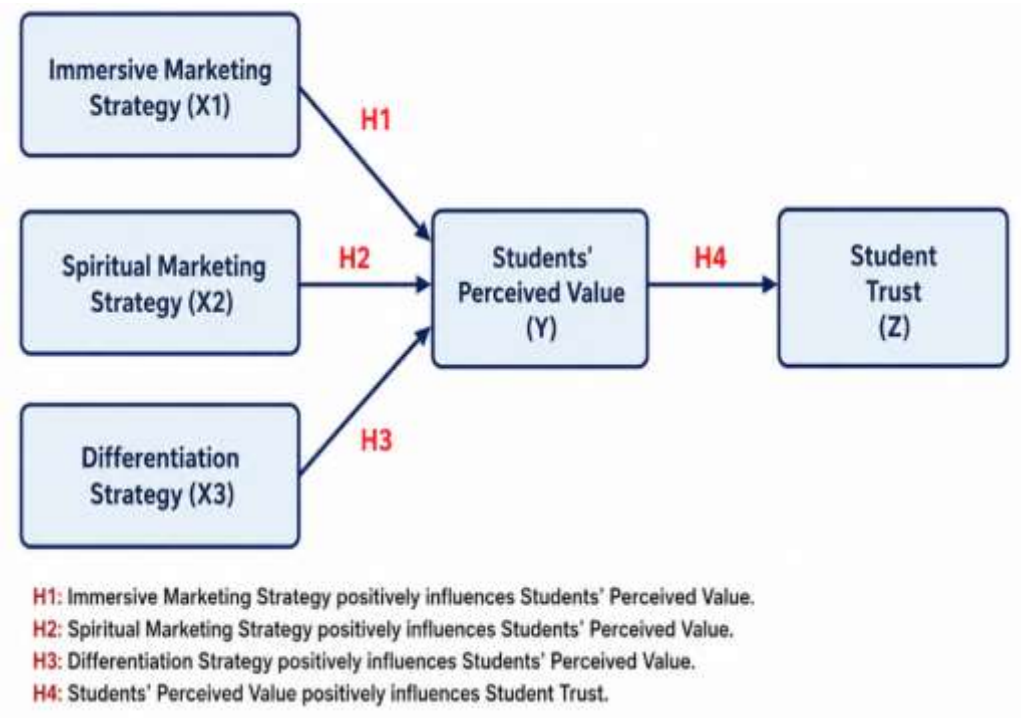

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative, explanatory approach combining descriptive and verificative methods, with cross-sectional data collection. The descriptive method describes the empirical condition of each research variable, while the verificative method tests the hypothesized causal relationships derived from the conceptual framework.

The population comprises 4,027 students from five private SMK Pusat Keunggulan schools in the East Priangan region (Kabupaten Tasikmalaya, Kota Tasikmalaya, Kabupaten Ciamis, Kabupaten Garut, and Kota Banjar). Following Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt's (2021) guideline of 5-10 observations per indicator for SEM (21 indicators), a sample of 210 respondents was determined and drawn using cluster proportional random sampling, with the number of respondents per school allocated proportionally to school population size.

Data were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire covering five constructs: immersive marketing strategy (X1, 11 items), spiritual marketing strategy (X2, 10 items), differentiation strategy (X3, 9 items), student perceived value (Y, 6 items), and student trust (Z, 7 items). Instrument validity was confirmed by item-total correlations exceeding the r-table value of 0.312, and reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.70 for all

constructs (0.919-0.932), indicating very high internal consistency. Ordinal responses were transformed to interval data prior to analysis, and normality was verified using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Data were analyzed using covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with LISREL 8.80, which allows simultaneous estimation of the measurement and structural models and evaluation of model fit through indices such as Chi-Square, RMSEA, CFI, GFI, and AGFI. Hypotheses were tested by comparing the t-value of each path coefficient against the critical t-value of 1.96 at a 5% significance level.

RESULT

Respondent Profile

Of the 210 respondents, the largest proportion came from SMKS PK Plus YSB Suryalaya (31.4%) and SMKS PK Qurota A'yun (31.0%), followed by SMKS PK Muhammadiyah (22.9%), SMKS PK Al Ikhlas Susuru (8.6%), and SMKS PK Al Azhar (6.1%), reflecting the proportional allocation of the sample across the five schools.

Instrument Testing

Table 1. Reliability Test Results

No	Variable	Code	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Criterion
1	Immersive Marketing Strategy	X1	11	0.919	Very High
2	Spiritual Marketing Strategy	X2	10	0.932	Very High
3	Differentiation Strategy	X3	9	0.919	Very High
4	Student Perceived Value	Y	6	0.925	Very High
5	Student Trust	Z	7	0.927	Very High

Source: SPSS 27 processed data (2026)

Descriptive Results

All five research variables fall into the fairly good to good category. Immersive marketing strategy obtained an average score of 3.384, with the immersive-technology dimension scoring highest and the emotional dimension lowest. Spiritual marketing strategy scored 3.392, led by the emotional-connection and social-responsibility dimensions, with the human-centric dimension lowest. Differentiation strategy scored 3.371, with channel differentiation strongest and service differentiation weakest. Student perceived value scored 3.375, driven mainly by the satisfaction dimension, while the benefit-versus-cost dimension was comparatively lower. Student trust scored 3.372, led by the integrity dimension, with the benevolence dimension lowest.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The first structural equation, linking immersive (X1), spiritual (X2), and differentiation (X3) marketing strategies to student perceived value (Y), is estimated as follows:

$$Y = 0.29X1 + 0.32X2 + 0.34X3, \text{ Error variance} = 0.18, R^2 = 0.82$$

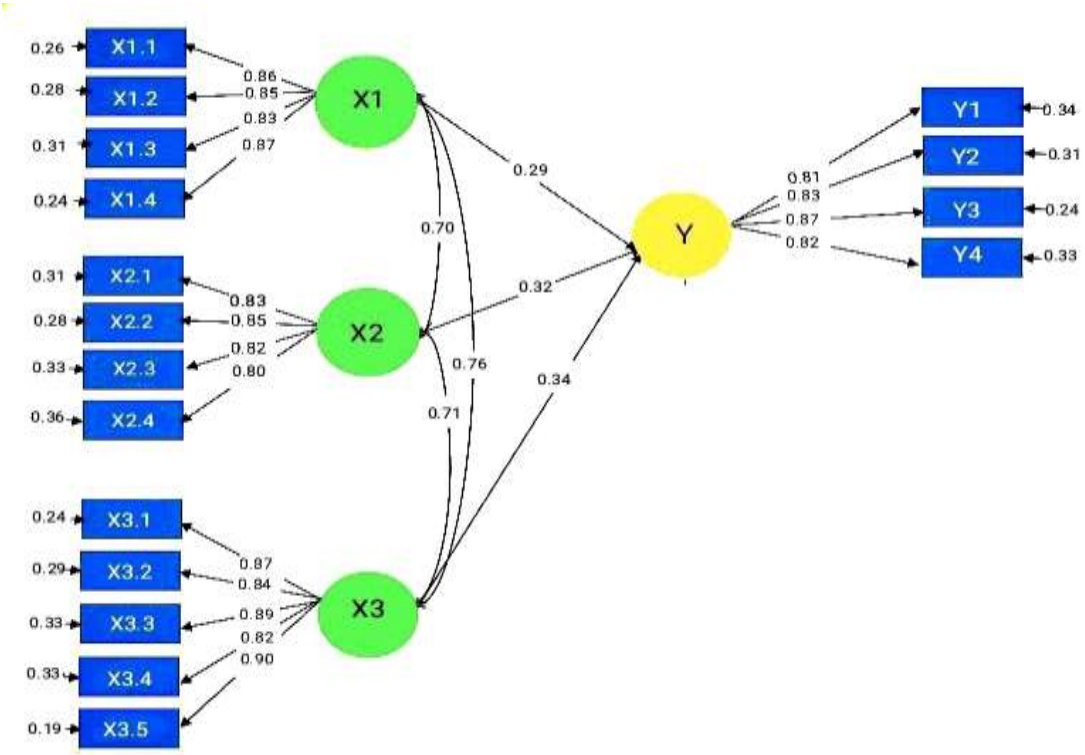

Figure 2. Path Coefficients: Immersive, Spiritual, and Differentiation Marketing Strategy on Student Perceived Value
Source: LISREL 8.80 output (2026)

With t-values of 2.77, 3.52, and 4.52 for X1, X2, and X3 respectively (all exceeding the critical value of 1.96), all three strategies significantly and positively affect student perceived value, both simultaneously (R^2 = 0.82, supporting H1) and partially (supporting H3, H4, and H5). The decomposition of direct and indirect effects is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Direct and Indirect Effects on Student Perceived Value

Variable	Path Coef.	Direct Effect	Total Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Immersive Marketing (X1)	0.29	8.41%	11.70%	20.11%
Spiritual Marketing (X2)	0.32	10.24%	10.85%	21.09%
Differentiation Strategy (X3)	0.34	11.56%	12.51%	24.07%

Variable	Path Coef.	Direct Effect	Total Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Total	-	30.21%	35.06%	65.27%

Source: LISREL 8.80 processed data (2026)

Differentiation strategy provides the largest total contribution to student perceived value (24.07%), followed by spiritual marketing (21.09%) and immersive marketing (20.11%), indicating that distinctive programs and facilities are the strongest lever for building perceived value in this context, although all three strategies interact with and reinforce one another.

The second structural equation, linking student perceived value (Y) to student trust (Z), is estimated as:

$$Z = 0.96Y, \text{ Error variance} = 0.089, \ R^2 = 0.91$$

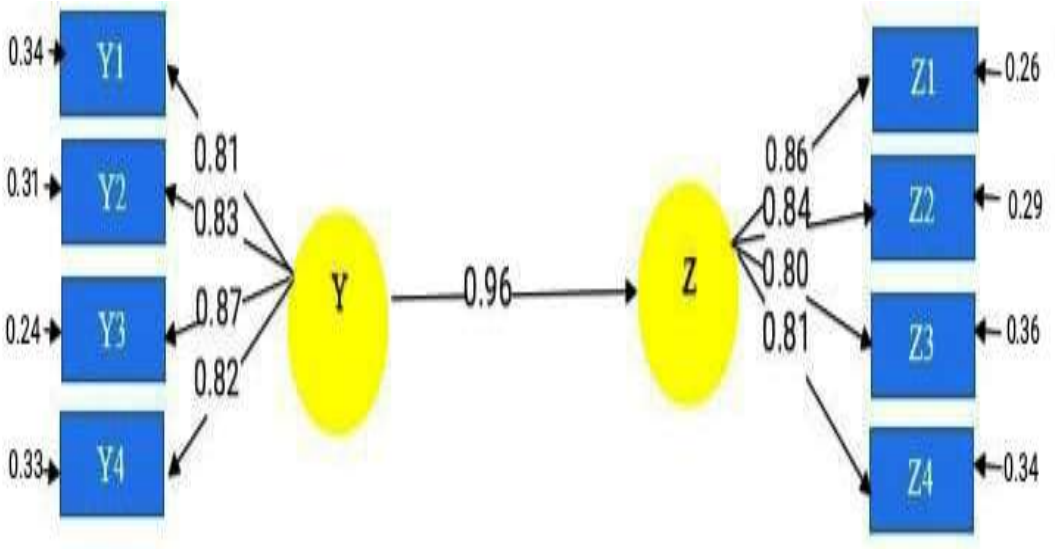

Figure 3. Path Coefficient: Student Perceived Value on Student Trust
Source: LISREL 8.80 output (2026)

With a t-value of 9.16 (> 1.96), student perceived value has a strong, positive, and significant effect on student trust, explaining 91% of its variance and supporting H2. Overall, the goodness-of-fit evaluation (theoretical plausibility, parameter accuracy, explanatory ability, and forecasting ability) indicates that the structural model is well supported by the data, with all hypothesized paths confirmed at the 5% significance level.

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coef.	t-value	Conclusion
H1	X1, X2, X3 → Y (simultaneous)	$R^2 = 0.82$	-	Supported
H2	Y → Z	0.96	9.16	Supported

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coef.	t-value	Conclusion
H3	X1 → Y	0.29	2.77	Supported
H4	X2 → Y	0.32	3.52	Supported
H5	X3 → Y	0.34	4.52	Supported

Source: LISREL 8.80 Processed Data (2026)

DISCUSSION

The finding that immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing strategies jointly explain 82% of the variance in student perceived value confirms that, within vocational education, value is not created by a single strategic lever but by the interaction of experiential, values-based, and competitive-positioning approaches. This is consistent with the experiential marketing perspective of Schmitt (2020) and Pine and Gilmore (2020), which argues that memorable, participatory experiences are central to how service users construct value judgments, and it extends that perspective from commercial services into the vocational-education context.

Differentiation strategy emerged as the strongest partial contributor to student perceived value (24.07%), which aligns with Kotler and Fox's (2021) argument that clear institutional distinctiveness - through specialized programs, industry-standard facilities, and service quality - is a primary lever schools can use to stand out in a crowded market. The comparatively strong contribution of spiritual marketing (21.09%) also supports the view that character formation, integrity, and social responsibility function as genuine value drivers in education, not merely as a peripheral institutional attribute (Zohar & Marshall, 2020; Fry, 2020). The slightly lower, though still significant, contribution of immersive marketing (20.11%) suggests that while technology-enabled, interactive learning is valued by students, its emotional-engagement dimension - the lowest-scoring dimension in the descriptive results - still has room to mature before it can rival differentiation as the dominant driver of value.

The very strong effect of student perceived value on student trust ($\beta = 0.96$, $R^2 = 0.91$) reinforces value-based trust theory (Suhartanto et al., 2022; Croitoru et al., 2024) and indicates that, in this setting, trust is overwhelmingly a downstream consequence of the value students experience rather than an independent outcome of isolated service encounters. Practically, this implies that any school-level intervention aimed at strengthening trust is best pursued indirectly, by improving the antecedents of perceived value, rather than through generic trust-building communication alone.

Taken together, these results support an integrated vocational-education marketing model - referred to in the underlying dissertation as the Integrated Vocational Education Marketing Model (IVEMM) - in which immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing strategies function as joint antecedents of student perceived value, and student perceived value functions as the principal mechanism through which marketing strategy translates into student trust.

Proposed Model: The Lsd (Lati Sari Dewi) Model

Building on the pattern of partial and simultaneous contributions identified in the structural model, this study proposes an integrated model designated as the LSD (Lati Sari Dewi) Model: Image Differentiation, Emotional Connection, and Immersive Marketing Strategies for Enhancing Student Value and Competence. Rather than introducing new constructs, the LSD Model relabels the three antecedents tested in this study according to the specific dimension that empirically proved dominant within each construct, so that the model communicates more precisely which mechanism drives student value in the vocational-education context.

The first component, Image Differentiation, is grounded in the finding that differentiation strategy produced the largest total effect on student perceived value (24.07%), driven primarily by channel differentiation and institutional image among its dimensions. This indicates that, for prospective and current students, the school's distinctive image - built through specialized programs, industry-standard facilities, and a recognizable identity - is the single most powerful lever for shaping perceived value, consistent with Kotler and Fox's (2021) argument on institutional positioning.

The second component, Emotional Connection, replaces the broader label of spiritual marketing strategy (total effect 21.09%) because the descriptive results show that, within this construct, the emotional-connection dimension scored highest, alongside social responsibility, while the human-centric dimension scored lowest. This suggests that spiritual values are operationalized less through generic character-building programs and more through the emotional bond students feel with the institution, reframing this pathway as an emotional-connection mechanism rather than a purely values-based one.

The third component, Immersive Marketing Strategy, is retained under its original name because, although it produced the smallest - yet still significant - contribution to student value (20.11%), it remains a distinct and necessary lever: it operates through interactive technology and experiential learning that the other two constructs do not capture. Its emotional-engagement dimension was the lowest-scoring dimension across all five research variables, indicating that this pathway still has considerable room to develop before it can rival image differentiation as a driver of value.

The extension from student value to student competence follows from two observations in the results. First, student perceived value exerted a very strong effect on student trust ($\beta = 0.96$, $R^2 = 0.91$), showing that value is not an isolated outcome but a mechanism that propagates into other student outcomes. Second, because vocational education (SMK) is intrinsically oriented toward producing work-ready competence rather than value alone, the skill-based programs underlying image differentiation, the character formation underlying emotional connection, and the hands-on simulation underlying immersive marketing strategy are theorized to jointly shape not only how students perceive value but also the competencies they develop. On this basis, the LSD Model is formulated as: Student Value and Competence = f (Image Differentiation, Emotional Connection, Immersive Marketing Strategy), with student perceived value continuing to

function as the central mediating mechanism, as established in the structural results of this study ($R^2 = 0.82$ and $R^2 = 0.91$).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Immersive, spiritual, and differentiation marketing strategies, student perceived value, and student trust at private SMK Pusat Keunggulan in East Priangan all fall into the fairly good to good category. The three marketing strategies simultaneously and significantly affect student perceived value ($R^2 = 0.82$), with differentiation strategy contributing the most (24.07%), followed by spiritual marketing (21.09%) and immersive marketing (20.11%). Student perceived value, in turn, significantly and strongly affects student trust ($R^2 = 0.91$). All five hypotheses (H1-H5) are supported.

Schools are recommended to strengthen differentiation by developing industry-aligned skill programs, upgrading practical facilities, and improving service quality; to deepen spiritual marketing through character-building, mentoring, and counseling programs; and to enhance immersive marketing by expanding technology-based and simulation-based learning, with particular attention to strengthening students' emotional engagement, which remains the weakest dimension. Because student perceived value is the principal driver of trust, schools should prioritize investments that visibly raise the benefits students perceive relative to cost, rather than pursuing trust-building activities in isolation.

SUGGESTION

This study is limited to private SMK Pusat Keunggulan in the East Priangan region and relies on cross-sectional survey data, which restricts causal and temporal generalization. Future research could extend the model to public vocational schools, senior high schools, or higher-education institutions; incorporate additional variables such as service quality, satisfaction, institutional image, or engagement; test mediating or moderating variables such as relationship quality; and adopt a longitudinal design to observe how student value and trust evolve over time.

Building on the LSD (Lati Sari Dewi) Model proposed in this study, future research is recommended to empirically test and validate the model among a wider population of SMK across the Priangan Timur (East Priangan) region, encompassing both private and public vocational schools that have not yet attained Pusat Keunggulan status, so that the generalizability of Image Differentiation, Emotional Connection, and Immersive Marketing Strategy as antecedents of student value can be examined beyond the current sample. Future studies are also encouraged to develop and incorporate a dedicated student-competence measurement instrument, so that the extension of the model from student perceived value to student competence can be verified empirically rather than theoretically.

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