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# Creating Meaningful Urban Heritage Experiences through Experiential Marketing at Sarinah Jakarta

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**Abstract.** Revitalizing urban heritage sites depends on experiential marketing techniques that respond to changing visitor expectations and the need to preserve authenticity while retaining cultural relevance. As a nationally significant heritage property and Indonesia's first modern department store, Sarinah has evolved from a traditional retail establishment into a hybrid retail–cultural attraction that prioritizes experiential value. Within the framework of urban heritage regeneration, this study investigates how Sarinah uses experiential marketing and how tourists view, understand, and make meaning of these encounters. Direct observation and visitor questionnaires were used in a qualitative case study technique. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, which is based on Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (sense, feel, think, act, and relate), was used to examine the data. The results show that culturally expressive sensory environments, emotionally compelling stories based on national identity, opportunities for cognitive learning about Indonesian heritage, interactive activities, and social gathering places are all examples of Sarinah's experiential marketing. Positive emotional and cognitive reactions are produced by these experience elements, which promote visitor satisfaction, location attachment, and deep engagement with cultural heritage. The study emphasizes experiential marketing as a tactical tool for maintaining the significance of urban history in modern cultural tourism settings

## 1 Introduction

There is growing demand on urban heritage sites to maintain cultural authenticity while adjusting to modern tourism and consumption trends. Heritage-based commercial venues have become less relevant due to rapid urban expansion, changes in lifestyle, and the predominance of generic shopping malls (Waterton & Watson, 2014). Today's

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tourists want experiences that are emotionally compelling, significant, and representative of the local identity; they are no longer content with merely functional offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 2017).

In this setting, experiential marketing (which emphasizes lived experiences above goods or services) has evolved as a tactical method to improve visitor engagement. By influencing how travelers view and emotionally engage with locations, experiential marketing has been demonstrated in tourism and heritage studies to impact satisfaction, attachment, and intention to return (Yeh et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022).

One unique example of the application of experiential marketing in an urban heritage context is Sarinah Jakarta. Sarinah was intended to be a symbol of economic empowerment and national pride when it was founded in the early post-independence era. Sarinah has been relaunched as a cultural, creative, and lifestyle attraction that combines shopping, dining, public events, and exhibitions after a thorough restoration. Instead of serving only as a department store, Sarinah now provides a place where guests may engage with Indonesian culture through social interaction, architecture, products, and stories.

Sarinah has been relaunched as a hybrid retail-heritage attraction that combines commercial activity with cultural exhibitions, culinary heritage, artistic events, and public social spaces after a significant revitalization drive. This shift aligns with experiential marketing concepts and marks a deliberate move away from product-oriented retailing toward experience-oriented engagement. As a key element of the tourist experience, the refurbished Sarinah now places strong emphasis on ambiance, storytelling, involvement, and social contact.

Despite Sarinah's historical significance and contemporary relevance, academic studies examining its revitalization through the lens of experiential marketing remain limited. Existing research on experiential marketing in heritage tourism has predominantly employed quantitative approaches, leaving a gap in qualitative understanding of how visitors perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to experiential strategies in urban heritage settings. Addressing this gap is particularly important in emerging urban contexts such as Jakarta, where heritage preservation and commercial development must be carefully balanced.

Using a multi-stakeholder triangulation approach and combining viewpoints from tourists (n = 300 questionnaires), policymakers, tenants, and field observations, this study advances research on experiential marketing and urban heritage tourism. The study offers a comprehensive explanation of the design, perception, and operationalization of experiential marketing at Sarinah Jakarta by integrating these viewpoints into the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework.

By analyzing how Sarinah Jakarta's experiential design functions via a Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) mechanism, this study increases knowledge of experiential marketing in urban historical locations. Using triangulated qualitative data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and open-ended surveys completed by 300 visitors, the findings indicate how experiential marketing converts environmental inputs into meaningful visitor experiences and subsequent behavioral outcomes.

This study investigates how visitors perceive the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational aspects of experiential marketing at Sarinah Jakarta. This article adds to the literature on experiential marketing and urban heritage tourism by

offering in-depth insights into visitor perceptions and meanings within a revitalized heritage space, using a qualitative case study approach informed by experiential marketing theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework.

The results show that Sarinah's experiential marketing takes the form of sensory environments, opportunities for social contact, cognitive learning about Indonesian culture, emotional engagement based on national identity, and participatory activities. Overall, tourists saw Sarinah as a significant urban historical area that fosters emotional attachment, cultural appreciation, and a sense of belonging, rather than just a place to shop. Positive emotional and cognitive reactions are elicited by these experience components, which support visitor satisfaction, attachment, and meaningful engagement with heritage.

To investigate visitor experiences at Sarinah Jakarta, this study uses a qualitative interpretative methodology. To capture subjective meanings and interpretations and examine complex social events in their real-life context, a qualitative case study design is suitable (Yin, 2018).

On-site visitor surveys with open-ended questions and observational notes were used to gather data. Visitors were requested to share their thoughts, feelings, and impressions about Sarinah. This method produced rich qualitative data by enabling participants to describe their experiences in their own terms.

The qualitative data was examined using thematic analysis. The five experiential marketing dimensions: sense, feel, think, act, and relate, were used to categorize the responses. The matching of empirical results with experiential marketing theory was guaranteed by this analytical approach.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Urban Heritage Tourism and Cultural Heritage Buildings

To attract tourists and promote local identity, urban heritage tourism places strong emphasis on historical structures, cultural narratives, and collective memory in urban settings (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). Beyond their physical form, cultural heritage buildings also function as symbolic spaces where historical values and social meanings are negotiated (Waterton & Watson, 2014). Concerns over authenticity and commodification are raised by the increasing commercial and tourism adaptations of historic structures in numerous cities.

Earlier research suggests that cultural values can be conserved and transmitted through meaningful interpretation and visitor interaction in the adaptive reuse of heritage structures (Tamaratika et al., 2021). Well-managed commercialization can increase public awareness of heritage by making it relevant and accessible to modern audiences, rather than decreasing its worth.

### 1.2. Experiential Marketing Theory

Experiential marketing aims to create comprehensive experiences that appeal to consumers' senses, emotions, cognition, actions, and social relationships (Schmitt,

1999). Experiential marketing emphasizes subjective experiences and emotional value more than traditional marketing strategies, which highlight functional benefits. Schmitt (1999, 2017) defines experiential marketing through five Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs): sense, feel, think, act, and relate.

Because tourist experiences are inherently experiential and co-created by travelers and locations, these qualities are especially relevant in tourism contexts (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Experiential marketing has been shown to positively affect tourist happiness, loyalty, and destination attachment (Wu & Liang, 2009; Kim, 2018).

### 1.3. Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Framework

The way that external stimuli impact interior emotional and cognitive states and result in behavioral reactions is explained by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In tourism research, travelers' impressions and emotions are shaped by physical surroundings, cultural elements, and service interactions (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

Researchers can comprehend how experience stimuli alter visitors' internal reactions (organism), such as emotions and meanings, which in turn affect outcomes like satisfaction and attachment, by integrating experiential marketing with the S–O–R paradigm. Experience tourism and heritage studies have widely used this integrated paradigm (Jani & Han, 2015).

### 1.4. Experiential Marketing in Heritage Tourism

To improve authenticity, emotional engagement, and visitor learning, experiential marketing is crucial in historical tourism, according to recent studies (Lee et al., 2020; Song et al., 2022). In heritage contexts, where tourists seek meaningful connections with the past, experiential tactics that prioritize narrative, engagement, and cultural interaction are especially beneficial.

However, qualitative knowledge of how tourists comprehend and interpret experiential marketing in heritage destinations remains limited because much of the existing literature relies on quantitative methods. This study uses a qualitative case study methodology to close this gap.

## 3 Research Methodology

To fully understand the research problem, this study uses a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Combining these approaches enables triangulation and increases the reliability of the results. The study gathered quantitative and qualitative data within the same period, evaluated them independently, and then combined them for interpretation using a convergent mixed-method approach. This design captures both quantifiable sensory qualities and deeper contextual insights.

## 4 Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis used thematic coding of field observations, open-ended questionnaire responses (N = 300), and interview transcripts. Iterative categorization in line with the S-O-R framework and the five dimensions of experience marketing (Schmitt, 1999) was used in the coding process.

The questionnaire results provide strong support for these observations. Of the 300 respondents, 74% (n = 222) said Sarinah felt "clearly different from conventional shopping malls," and 86% (n = 258) specifically cited Sarinah's visual environment and cultural design as the most notable aspect of their visit. Interview participants also highlighted how the physical surroundings instantly conveyed Indonesian identity, showing that sensory and cultural cues are key experiential triggers.

Informational inputs also mattered alongside physical cues. Through exhibitions and educational displays, 71% of respondents (n = 213) said they learned new information about Indonesian goods, regional brands, or cultural heritage. Observations of guests reading panels and discussing the material with others further support the idea that Sarinah's setting actively promotes learning and introspection.

This research also finds that for Sense and Feel aspect, the two most prevalent experiential dimensions were sensory and emotional processing. According to questionnaire responses, 82% of visitors (n = 246) reported feeling strongly favorable emotions during their visit, such as pride, nostalgia, or emotional comfort. Interviews showed that while foreign visitors stressed cultural richness and authenticity, local visitors frequently connected Sarinah to personal memories and national identity. These emotional reactions are further supported by observational data that demonstrates tourists staying in heritage zones and acting reflectively.

There was also a significant level of cognitive engagement (Think). Sarinah inspired them to consider Indonesian culture, cultural preservation, and the importance of regional creative industries; 69% of respondents (n = 207) characterized their visit as intellectually stimulating or enlightening. By showing that cognitive reflection is an essential part of heritage-oriented experiencing environments rather than just an incidental result, this discovery expands the literature on experiential marketing.

This research translated the Act and Relate aspect into action through relational and behavioral experiences. According to the questionnaire data, 63% of respondents (n = 189) participated in exhibitions, culinary activities, or cultural events, while 77% (n = 231) actively visited various parts of Sarinah. The relational aspect was further highlighted by the fact that 70% of respondents (n = 210) stressed sharing the experience with friends or family. Observational evidence of significant visitor mobility, participation, and social interaction throughout the site supports these findings.

The results of visitors' experiential processing are reflected in the S-O-R framework's response stage. The results show that Sarinah's experiential marketing strategy generates powerful behavioral and attitudinal reactions.

With 85% of respondents (n = 255) satisfied with their visit, overall satisfaction was strong. 64% of visitors (n = 192) reported emotional attachment to Sarinah, often describing it as an important cultural space rather than a commercial arena, indicating that place attachment had a significant effect. Regarding loyalty-related responses, 80%

of respondents (n = 240) said they would recommend Sarinah to others, and 73% (n = 219) said they intended to return.

For Sensory Experience (Sense), visitors often describe Sarinah's atmosphere as visually distinctive and culturally expressive. Architectural preservation, interior design, and curated displays were sensory stimuli that immediately communicated Indonesian identity. These elements created a sense of place that differentiated Sarinah from conventional shopping malls. The Emotional Experience (Feel), the visitors of Sarinah appreciated the mall as a place that represents Indonesian heritage and creativity, and their emotional responses were strongly associated with feelings of pride, nostalgia, and comfort. These emotional experiences fostered attachment and positive affect. Regarding Cognitive Experience (Think), visitors said they gained new knowledge about Indonesian products, culture, and history.

Exhibitions and informative displays encouraged reflection and learning, prompting visitors to think critically about local identity and heritage preservation. For visitors' Behavioral Experience (Act), Marketing experiential Sarinah encouraged active participation (Relate), the visitors actively participate through events, exhibitions, and culinary exploration. Visitors became physically involved with the building, reinforcing experiential learning and fun. Sarinah's relationship experience serves as a gathering place for people from different cultures and societies. Travelers can interact with others and share cultural experiences, strengthening a sense of connection and collective identity.

**Table 1.** Thematic Findings – Stimulus (Experiential Marketing)

| Dimension | Main Themes Identified | Representative Quotes | Source Triangulation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sense | Architectural preservation, cultural aesthetics, curated displays, visual identity | "Sarinah feels different from other malls. It feels Indonesian." | Interview + Observation + Questionnaire |
| Feel | Pride, nostalgia, comfort, emotional warmth | "I feel proud bringing my foreign friends here." | Interview + Questionnaire |
| Think | Learning Indonesian history, cultural awareness, reflection | "I didn't know Sarinah had this historical background." | Interview + Exhibition observation |
| Act | Participation in events, culinary exploration, photography | "I came for the exhibition and stayed for the food." | Observation + Questionnaire |
| Relate | Social gathering, intercultural interaction, community space | "It's a place to meet people from different backgrounds." | Interview + Tenant input |

The study's conclusions have significant strategic implications for Jakartan mall operators, especially as the retail industry grows more saturated and competitive. For a long time, Jakarta's traditional malls have used anchor tenants, a wide range of products, and aggressive pricing to draw customers. But as the Sarinah story shows, experiential marketing can greatly set a retail location apart from traditional shopping malls when it is carefully combined with cultural identity and place-based significance.

The findings demonstrate that experiential marketing at Sarinah operates through integrated experiential dimensions that shape visitor perceptions and meanings. Consistent with experiential marketing theory, sensory and emotional stimuli played a central role in influencing visitor engagement (Schmitt, 2017). The S–O–R framework helps explain how these stimuli generated emotional and cognitive responses that contributed to satisfaction and attachment. Importantly, experiential marketing at Sarinah does not diminish heritage value; instead, it enhances cultural meaning through engagement and participation. This supports previous findings that experiential strategies can contribute to sustainable heritage tourism when authenticity is preserved (Lee et al., 2020; Song et al., 2022).

This study expands S-O-R theory and experiential marketing in three important ways by incorporating policy maker and tenant viewpoints. First, it shows that experiencing inputs are institutionally controlled and commercially implemented tactics in addition to environmental cues. Secondly, it presents experiential marketing not as a visitor-only occurrence but as a planned multi-actor process. Third, it offers a more contextualized understanding of experiencing tourism in heritage-based urban contexts by extending the S-O-R paradigm to incorporate sociocultural and collective responses.

## 5 Conclusion

First, malls need to shift from functional retail layouts to immersive, culturally expressive designs, as evidenced by the dominance of the Sense and Feel dimensions (86 percent of respondents said Sarinah's visual-cultural environment was its most distinctive feature, and 82 percent said they experienced strong positive emotions). Strong stimuli that elicit emotional involvement include identity-driven spatial design, carefully chosen thematic interiors, and architectural narrative. This implies that local culturally based aesthetic difference may be more viable for Jakarta malls than uniform international retail layouts.

Second, the significance of educational and narrative-based retail strategies is underscored by the high cognitive engagement (71% reporting learning experiences). To improve intellectual stimulation, Jakarta malls can incorporate exhibitions, history narrative, showcases of the creative industry, and community-driven programs. As a result, malls become hybrid commercial–cultural places, moving away from environments focused solely on consumerism.

Third, the behavioral results (80% recommendation intention and 73% revisit intention) show that experiential marketing cultivates loyalty through emotional attachment, not just transactional satisfaction. This implies that rather than focusing on temporary advertising efforts, mall managers should prioritize long-term relationship-building tactics.

Fourth, policymakers and renters' triangulated insights show that institutional coordination is necessary to provide experience value. The Sarinah model demonstrates how coherent experiential cues are produced when tenant storytelling, spatial design, and government vision are all in harmony. This suggests that, rather than being left to marketing departments alone, experience design should be intentionally integrated at the organizational level in Jakarta's mall sector.

Lastly, the S-O-R pattern in this study shows that cultural and environmental factors directly affect visitors' internal psychological states, which in turn drive their behavioral loyalty. Malls in Jakarta risk losing appeal to younger urban consumers who value authenticity and identity-based experiences if they don't design emotionally and culturally significant spaces.

Sarinah is purposefully positioned as a national cultural platform rather than a traditional retail location from the standpoint of policy makers. According to interviews with government and institutional partners, architectural preservation, curated exhibitions, and prioritizing local products are policy-driven measures that boost the creative sector and strengthen national identity. These policy goals align with environmental stimuli, such as culturally themed programming and heritage-based design features.

Tenant interviews provide further evidence that experience stimuli are deliberately incorporated into shop operations rather than occurring by accident. Tenants stressed that Sarinah's overall experience branding directs product presentation, narrative, and exhibition involvement. Several tenants described their role as "cultural storytellers" rather than just sellers, demonstrating congruence between the institutional goal and business practices.

These viewpoints align with the visitor questionnaire results, which found that 86% of participants cited Sarinah's cultural and visual surroundings as its most notable aspect. Policy, tenant, and visitor data collectively confirm that Sarinah's experiential stimuli result from well-coordinated institutional and commercial design rather than impromptu visitor interpretation.

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