



## Neuro-Marketing in Islamic Education: An Analysis of Emotional and Spiritual Influences in Parents' Decision to Choose a School

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### Abstract:

This study aims to examine the influence of emotional and spiritual factors in parents' decision to choose an Islamic school, with a focus on Madrasah. This study uses a qualitative method with an exploratory-interpretive approach, through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with parents of students and the school. The results of the study showed that parents' decisions were influenced by emotional factors, such as concerns about negative environmental influences, and spiritual factors, which included expectations for the formation of Islamic morals and the blessings of education. The two work simultaneously and complement each other, which leads to the decision to choose a school that not only provides academic education, but also prioritizes religious values. These findings also show that tahfidz Islamic boarding schools are a concrete manifestation of the integration of emotional and spiritual factors in parental decisions. This study concludes that in-depth religious education and strong character development are the main considerations for parents in choosing a school. The implication of this study is that the marketing strategy of Islamic education needs to consider the emotional and spiritual dimensions, in addition to the academic aspect, to attract parents' interest in choosing an educational institution.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of school selection in the context of Islamic education shows a striking difference between the theoretical approach of rational-based education marketing and the reality on the ground which is more influenced by emotional and spiritual factors (Srivastava & Bag, 2023; Ubago et al. 2024; Zaki, 2024). Educational marketing theory generally assumes that parents' decisions in choosing a school are based on rational considerations regarding academic quality, cost, and facilities. However, in reality, many parents give priority to factors related to religious beliefs, the moral reputation of the institution, and

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expectations for the formation of the child's character, rather than just academic indicators (Abdullah et al. 2024; Musthofa et al. 2025; Sahric et al. 2023). This gap indicates that conventional marketing theory has not been able to describe the complexity of the affective and spiritual factors that influence these decisions. Based on empirical evidence, most parents place more importance on religious and spiritual values in choosing education for their children, which points to the need for a more holistic approach to understanding consumer behavior in the Islamic education sector (Damirovich et al. 2022; Khatib et al. 2025; Soto 2024).

In Indonesia, especially in rural areas, the phenomenon seen is the tendency of parents to choose integrated or pesantren-based Islamic schools, even though the cost offered is relatively higher (Baharun et al. 2021; Noviana et al. 2022; Mundiri et al. 2022). The decision is more influenced by the need to ensure the formation of children's morals and spirituality than just academic quality (Ni'am et al. 2025). Promotions that prioritize religious image and institutional morality have proven to be more effective than approaches that only focus on academic aspects (Azizah and Mahmudin 2024; Saydulloyevich 2022; Subki et al. 2023). This shows that parents' decisions in choosing a school are not only influenced by rational considerations, but also by the emotional and spiritual dimensions that play an important role in the decision.

Previous research has examined many rational factors such as academic quality, price, and facilities in parents' decisions to choose educational institutions (Shalahuddin et al. 2025; Sukari and Kholil 2025; Yulianto 2024). Previous research has examined many rational factors such as academic quality, price, and facilities in parents' decisions to choose educational institutions (Effendi et al. 2025), and has not considered the spiritual dimension in the decision. Some studies that have begun to integrate psychological aspects have not linked them to neurological and spiritual aspects simultaneously (Haris and Manshur 2024; Hasanah et al. 2024; Solehah and Manshur 2025). In the context of Islamic education, research linking spiritual factors to cognitive mechanisms in parental decision-making is still very rare. In this regard, this study seeks to fill this gap by combining a neuro-marketing approach and an Islamic education perspective to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the behavior of parents as consumers of education.

This research makes a new contribution by combining neuro-marketing and Islamic education approaches in analyzing parents' decisions. In contrast to previous studies that focused more on psychological or religious factors separately, this study integrates the two in one more holistic framework. Using neuro-marketing theories that emphasize the role of emotions in decision-making, the study seeks to identify how spiritual factors in Islamic education can influence brain responses and parental decisions. This approach not only enriches Islamic education marketing theory, but also provides practical implications for developing marketing strategies that are more effective and in accordance with the needs of society.

This study aims to answer the main question: How do emotional and spiritual factors influence parents' decision to choose an Islamic school?. The focus of the research was to dig deeper into how the two factors interact with each other and influence parental decision-making. The research will provide new insights into understanding the dynamics of parental decision-making that are not only based

on rationality alone, but also involve more complex emotional and spiritual factors.

Parents' decision to choose an Islamic school is often influenced not only by rational considerations, but also by deep emotional and spiritual factors. This decision-making process involves a complex interaction between feelings, religious beliefs, and neurological mechanisms that play a role in processing these two factors. Emotional aspects, such as feelings of security, comfort, and closeness to religious values, as well as spiritual dimensions related to parents' expectations for a child's education, play a significant role in the decisions made. Taking this into account, understanding the emotional and spiritual dimensions is very important to formulate a marketing strategy for Islamic education that is more effective and in accordance with the needs and expectations of parents. The neuro-marketing approach is used to analyze the influence of neurological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in such decision-making.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design with an exploratory-interpretive approach to gain a deep understanding of parental decision-making patterns in choosing schools based on Islamic education through a neuro-marketing perspective. The qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomena studied are complex and contextual, and involve subjective dimensions such as emotions, perceptions, and spiritual beliefs, which cannot be quantitatively measured. The main focus of this research is on the process of interpreting parents' experiences and considerations in their decisions. Researchers play a key role in collecting, interpreting, and constructing data holistically, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the interactions between cognitive, affective, and spiritual factors underlying consumer behavior in the context of Islamic education.

The research was carried out at MTs Umar Mas'ud Sangkapura, with in-depth strategic considerations. First, this madrasah has distinctive characteristics in integrating academic education with Islamic values. Second, the location in the Sangkapura region provides a unique socio-religious background, which is very relevant for examining parents' decisions in choosing a school based on spiritual values. Third, the high public interest in this institution reflects the existence of emotional and religious factors that influence parental decisions. Therefore, MTs Umar Mas'ud Sangkapura is seen as a representative location to study this phenomenon contextually.

The sources of information in this study consist of three main categories, namely respondents, informants, and texts. The respondents of this study are parents of students who choose to send their children to MTs Umar Mas'ud Sangkapura, because they are the main actors in decision-making. The informants consist of madrasah heads, teachers, and school management who have a deep understanding of marketing strategies and institutional characteristics. In addition, several community leaders who influenced the perception of Islamic education in the environment were also used as additional informants. The sources of text in this study include official documents of madrasahs, manuscripts or books that are a reference for Islamic education values, as well as online news that discusses Islamic education trends and parents' behavior in choosing schools.

The combination of these various sources allows for triangulation of data that will increase the validity and depth of the analysis.

Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan beberapa teknik yang saling melengkapi. Data collection was carried out using several complementary techniques. First, the desk-review was conducted by examining the relevant literature on neuro-marketing, Islamic education, and consumer behavior, to build a theoretical framework. Second, direct observation is carried out in the madrasah environment to understand the social dynamics, interactions, and religious atmosphere that are attractive to parents. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines to explore parents' experiences, perceptions, and motivations in choosing schools. These interviews are also supported by an open questionnaire to enrich the qualitative data obtained. Fourth, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is carried out by involving a group of parents to gain a collective perspective and understand the dynamics of discussions related to emotional and spiritual factors in decision-making. This technique allows for richer and more interactive data exploration.

The data analysis in this study was carried out by following several systematic stages. The first stage is data condensation, which includes the selection, simplification, and focusing of raw data obtained from the field. The second stage is data reduction, where data is categorized based on themes relevant to the focus of the research, such as emotional, spiritual, and cognitive factors. The third stage is data display, where data is presented in the form of narratives, matrices, or diagrams to facilitate understanding patterns and relationships between variables. The final stage is data verification, which includes drawing conclusions supported by triangulation of sources and methods. For text and document analysis, content analysis is used, while discourse analysis is used to understand the construction of language in educational promotion. Interpretive analysis is used to interpret the meaning behind the parents' experiences and decisions. This approach ensures that the research results are in-depth, valid, and relevant to the existing context.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emotional factors are defined as a series of affective responses that arise during the decision-making process of parents in choosing an Islamic school. These factors include feelings of safety, concerns about the negative effects of the social environment, expectations for the child's future, and other subjective experiences that affect their preferences. These emotional factors not only appear as spontaneous reactions, but are also social constructs formed from the interaction between personal experiences, family values, and perceptions of external conditions. In particular, parents tend to see Islamic schools as places that are able to provide moral and spiritual protection for their children. Therefore, the decisions taken are not completely rational, but are influenced by the psychological need to feel calm and confident about the choice. In this context, emotional factors are measured through several indicators, such as parents' level of concern, trust in educational institutions, and their expectations for the formation of children's character in the future.

The results of interviews with students' parents show that emotional factors play a dominant role in their decisions. One of the students' parents

revealed "I chose this school because I felt calmer, my child was protected from bad associations." Another student's guardian stated, "The important thing is that my child has good morals, even though his academics are ordinary, it doesn't matter." From this statement, it can be seen that parents' decision to choose a school is more influenced by emotional factors such as safety and concern about environmental influences, rather than simply based on rational considerations such as academic quality. The researchers' interpretation of this data shows that emotions such as fear of the external environment and expectations for the formation of children's character are the main driving factors in decision-making. This indicates that emotional factors have a very strong influence in determining parental choices.

Based on the results of observations carried out in the madrasah environment, it was found that the religious atmosphere in the school including routine worship activities, polite interaction between teachers and students, and Islamic symbols displayed gave a very strong positive impression to parents. In addition, the interaction between the school and parents emphasizes the aspect of character development and moral values, not just academic achievement. Researchers also observed that parents who came to school looked calmer and more confident after seeing the environment firsthand. These findings show that the social and physical atmosphere in madrasahs acts as an emotional stimulus that strengthens parents' positive perceptions of the educational institution. Thus, emotional factors do not only come from within the individual, but are also influenced by direct experience of the school environment, which also shapes the final decision of parents.

Emotional factors are a key element in the parenting decision-making process. A sense of security, concern about the negative influence of the environment, and expectations for the formation of a child's character are the main aspects that influence their choices. Both the data from the interviews and the results of observations consistently show that parents place more emphasis on the aspects of moral and character protection, rather than focusing on the academic aspects of the school. This reinforces the argument that parents' decision to choose an Islamic school is heavily influenced by emotional needs related to their child's sense of security and future security.

Spiritual factors in this study are defined as a set of values, beliefs, and religious orientations that are the primary basis for parents in choosing education for their children. In the field, this spiritual factor is reflected in parents' perception of blessings (*barakah*), hopes for the formation of Islamic morals, and the belief that religion-based education will provide benefits not only in this world but also in the hereafter. This spiritual factor is not abstract, but is manifested in the real choice of educational institutions that have a strong Islamic identity. Educational institutions that are desired by parents usually implement a curriculum based on religious values, provide regular worship activities, and create an environment that supports religious practices. Therefore, in this study, spiritual factors were measured through indicators such as the level of religiosity of parents, the orientation of religious values in education, and their perception of the role of schools in shaping children's Islamic character.

The results of the interviews show that spiritual factors play a very important role in parents' decision to choose a school. One informant said, "I want

my son to go to school in a place that can bring him closer to religion, not just academically smart." Another informant stated, "What I am looking for is blessings, hopefully with school here my child will be better in his morals and life." This statement shows that parents consider not only worldly educational outcomes, but also transcendental values that are believed to have a long-term positive impact. The researcher's interpretation of this data shows that parents' decisions are strongly influenced by a strong spiritual orientation, with the expectation of blessings and moral formation being the top priority in decision-making. This confirms that spiritual factors play a role as a value framework that guides parents' decisions in choosing education for their children.

Based on the results of observations carried out in the madrasah environment, it was found that religious practices, such as congregational prayers, Qur'an reading, and other Islamic activities, became an integral part of students' daily activities. In addition, religious symbols such as Islamic clothing, the use of polite language, and interactions that reflect Islamic values also strengthen the spiritual atmosphere in schools. The researchers also observed that parents who visited the school showed a special interest in the religious activities on display, and often asked about the religious programs in the school in more detail than the academic aspects. These findings suggest that the school environment serves as a concrete representation of the spiritual values sought by parents. Thus, spiritual factors are not only internal beliefs, but are also influenced by direct experience of religious practices applied in schools, which also shape parents' decisions in choosing schools.

Spiritual factors have a very central role in parents' decision to choose an Islamic school. Values such as blessings, moral formation, and religious orientation are the main basis in determining educational choices. Both the results of interviews and observations show that parents prioritize the spiritual dimension rather than the academic aspect alone. This confirms that parents' decisions are heavily influenced by their religious beliefs, which are the main guidelines in choosing an educational environment that is in accordance with Islamic values.



Figure 1. Grave Pilgrimage Activities

The figure 1 shows that the grave pilgrimage activity carried out by MTs Umar Mas'ud students is a tangible form of integration between emotional and

spiritual factors that are the basis for parents' decisions in choosing a school. Through these activities, the institution not only transfers academic knowledge, but also provides a deep spiritual stimulus by teaching respect for ancestors and awareness of life after death. For parents, this kind of direct religious practice provides a sense of emotional calm because their children are equipped with strong character and depth of faith, thus emphasizing the position of MTs Umar Mas'ud as an educational institution that is able to balance intellectual intelligence with ukhrawi values in the Islamic educational tradition.

The integration of emotional and spiritual factors in this study is defined as the process of combining affective (emotional) responses and religious (spiritual) values that simultaneously influence parental decision-making in choosing an Islamic school. In practice, these factors do not operate in isolation, but rather interact with each other and form a complex set of considerations. Emotions such as a sense of security, concern for the social environment, and hope for the future of children are combined with religious beliefs such as the search for blessings and the formation of Islamic morals. This process results in a holistic decision, where emotional and spiritual considerations cannot be separated, but instead complement each other in shaping parents' choice of Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, parents' decision to choose an Islamic school is not only based on rational or emotional considerations, but is the result of the integration of these two factors working together.

The results of the interviews showed that there was an integration between emotional and spiritual factors in the decision-making process of parents. One of the informants stated, "I feel at peace because my son is not only socially guarded, but also religiously guided." Another informant said, "What makes me sure is that this school is not only good in its environment, but also strong in its religious education." These statements show that parents do not separate the two factors, but rather consider them as a mutually reinforcing unit in decision-making. The sense of security that arises from moral protection and expectations for the formation of Islamic children's character is the main basis for their decisions. This suggests that parental decisions are more holistic, where emotional and spiritual factors complement each other, creating stronger and more stable decisions.

The results of observations conducted in the madrasah environment also show that a conducive religious atmosphere creates an experience that combines emotional and spiritual aspects. Worship activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an readings, and polite interactions between teachers and students create a sense of comfort and strengthen religious values. Researchers observed that parents showed a positive response when they saw a combination of discipline and religious practice in school. This emphasizes that these two factors—emotional and spiritual—are closely intertwined in creating a positive perception of school. Thus, the school environment serves as a medium of integration between feelings (emotions) and beliefs (spiritual), where both are present together and influence parental decisions.

Parents' decision to choose an Islamic school is not only based on a single factor, but is the result of integration between emotional and spiritual aspects. These two factors appear simultaneously and reinforce each other in shaping the final decision of parents. The sense of security associated with moral protection and religious beliefs that focus on the formation of Islamic morals work together

to reinforce parents' preferences for schools. This data pattern confirms that the integration of the two factors forms a more holistic, stable, and consistent decision.

Parents' decisions in choosing educational institutions are often influenced by the existence of facilities that can support children's educational needs, both in terms of academics and character development. In this case, MTs schools affiliated with tahfidz Islamic boarding schools, although the two are physically separate, but are in the same foundation, give parents the opportunity to choose between schools with a dormitory system or no dormitory. This choice illustrates that parents have flexibility in deciding whether their child will live in a boarding school or only attend formal education at the school. This decision is influenced not only by academic factors, but also by emotional and spiritual considerations, which are related to a sense of security and hope for the formation of a child's Islamic morals. Thus, the choice of schools that offer the option of tahfidz Islamic boarding schools is a tangible manifestation of the decision of parents who consider both academic education factors and religious values that they want to teach their children.

The results of interviews with parents showed that the decision to choose an MTs school with a tahfidz Islamic boarding school was greatly influenced by both emotional and spiritual factors. One of the informants said, "I feel calmer when my son is in school, because he can get a more in-depth religious education, but if not, I can still feel comfortable with education in this school." Another informant stated, "I chose this school because there is a tahfidz program, the important thing is that my child can learn the Qur'an, whether he is a monk or not." From this statement, it can be seen that parents view Islamic boarding schools as a means of moral development and strengthening religious education, but they also consider the comfort and needs of children in choosing whether they want to go to school or not. Emotional factors, such as a sense of security under closer scrutiny and expectations of the formation of an Islamic character, are very strong in determining their decisions. On the other hand, spiritual factors related to expectations for religious teaching and tahfidz are also very dominant in this decision.

Based on the observations made, it was found that the existence of tahfidz Islamic boarding schools, even though they are separate from MTs schools, has a significant influence on parents' decisions. Parents who choose not to go on a date still show interest in the tahfidz program at MTs schools. They hope that their children can learn the Qur'an well, even if they choose not to live in the dormitory. On the other hand, parents who choose to have their children go to tahfidz Islamic boarding schools emphasize the importance of character development and strengthening religious values which they consider more effective when done in a structured environment. These findings show that although Islamic boarding schools and schools are physically separate, they have complementary roles in meeting the needs of academic education and the formation of Islamic character. This pattern indicates that parents prefer schools that not only focus on academic aspects, but can also provide guarantees for in-depth religious education, both through the mondok system and through formal education at school.

Parents who choose MTs schools with tahfidz Islamic boarding schools—especially those with or without the option of a mondok or not—consider both

emotional and spiritual factors in their decisions. Parents who choose to go to school tend to prioritize moral development and deeper religious teaching, while parents who choose not to go to school still want a strong religious education through the tahfidz program at school. This data pattern shows that parents' choices are strongly influenced by the need for emotional protection and spiritual strengthening of children, both in the context of religious education in Islamic boarding schools and in formal schools. This decision reflects a more flexible but still religiously oriented option that matches parents' expectations for their child's future.

The findings of this study show that emotional factors have a dominant role in parents' decisions in choosing Islamic schools. This is in line with the consumer behavior literature which states that consumer decisions are not always based on rational considerations, but are often influenced by emotional factors (Berutu et al. 2025). Daniel Kahneman's dual-system thinking perspective also explains that the fast-thinking system (System 1), which is intuitive and emotional, is often more dominant than the more rational slow-thinking system (System 2). These findings reflect that a child's sense of security, moral concern, and hope for the future are key determinants in parental decisions. The implication of these findings is that the marketing strategy of Islamic education cannot rely solely on rational information such as facilities and curriculum, but must be able to touch on the emotional dimension that can strengthen the appeal of the school. Functionally, this increases the effectiveness of marketing communications; However, dysfunctionally, it has the potential to ignore the objective aspect if emotions are too dominant in decision-making.

Furthermore, spiritual factors have proven to be the main cornerstone in shaping parental preferences. These findings are consistent with research in Islamic education that emphasizes the importance of religious values in parental decision-making (Aprianto et al. 2025). This study expands the perspective by showing that spirituality in the context of Islamic education is not only normative, but also operational in real behavior. The concept of blessing (*barakah*) and the orientation of the hereafter are key variables that influence parents' decision to choose a school, which is not widely discussed in the conventional marketing literature. The Theory of Religious Values by Rokeach which explains that religious values are central in a person's life, explains that educational decisions cannot be separated from this transcendental dimension. The implication of these findings is that Islamic educational institutions need to articulate spiritual values authentically in their practice and communication. This is in line with the belief of the Muslim community that religion is the center of their lives.

The integration of emotional and spiritual factors in parents' decision-making suggests that their decisions are holistic and non-linear. These findings are in line with a neuro-marketing approach that states that emotions and values work simultaneously in influencing consumer decisions (Khalif et al. 2025). This study found that in the context of Islamic education, the integration between emotions and faith has unique characteristics. The Psycho-Spiritual Theory put forward by Paloutzian and Park states that spiritual and emotional experiences are intertwined and shape one's perception of more profound choices. The implication of these findings is that consumer decision-making models need to be reconstructed by including the religious dimension as a primary variable, rather

than just a complement. This integration occurs because social and religious experiences shape cognitive schemes that influence the way individuals interpret and evaluate their educational choices.

Findings related to parents' choice of Islamic boarding school-based institutions show a concrete manifestation of the integration between emotional and spiritual in decision-making. The importance of authority figures and social systems in shaping individual decisions. Islamic boarding schools are perceived as institutions that are able to provide moral security, intensive supervision, and moral development, which are the dominant factors for parents who choose this school (Kholilurrohman, Biroli, and Dzulkarnain 2025). The implication of these findings is that the boarding school system has significant added value in the context of Islamic education marketing, as it provides stronger social control over children's development. This is due to parents' concern for the external environment and the need for a strict supervision system to ensure the formation of character in accordance with religious values.

The neuro-marketing approach shows that parents' decisions in choosing educational institutions are more influenced by subconscious processes than rational considerations alone, where responses to symbols, narratives, and experiences that have emotional and religious significance are the main factors. These findings reinforce the view that consumer behavior is implicit and intuitive, while presenting a new contribution by linking neurological mechanisms with the spiritual dimension in Islamic education. The implication is that Islamic education marketing strategies need to be designed in a more in-depth way through the creation of emotional and symbolic stimuli that are able to build inner attachment, so that neuro-marketing approaches that are integrated with spiritual values become more relevant in understanding and influencing consumer decisions.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that emotional and spiritual factors play a dominant role in parents' decision to choose an Islamic school, especially MTs Umar Mas'ud. Emerging emotional factors, such as concern over the negative influence of the social environment and expectations for the formation of a child's character, prove to be the main drivers in decision-making. On the other hand, spiritual factors, which include expectations for the blessings of education and the formation of Islamic morals, are also very important considerations for parents. These findings suggest that parents' decisions in choosing a school are not only driven by academic factors, but also by more complex emotional and spiritual considerations.

Scientifically, the research makes an important contribution by introducing the emotional and spiritual dimension in the context of Islamic education marketing. These findings add a new perspective by emphasizing that parental decisions are not only based on rational considerations, but also involve deep psychological and religious aspects. The use of neuro-marketing approaches in this study also provides deeper insights into how emotions and religious values influence consumer decisions in the context of education. In addition, this study enriches the methodology in education marketing studies by using a qualitative approach, which allows for more in-depth information on parental motivation and decisions.

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