

DESIGNING A HUMAN-TO-HUMAN MARKETING MODEL IN THE IRAQI HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study aims to design a Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing model tailored to the religious hospitality industry in Iraq. Recognizing the limitations of traditional marketing frameworks such as B2C and B2B in capturing the emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of guest experiences, the study employs a qualitative research design based on Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory methodology.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 hotel professionals in major religious destinations. The coding process (open, axial, and selective) revealed H2H marketing as the central phenomenon, characterized by human relationship building, humanize customer service, personalized experience building, and respect to cultural-religious contexts.

The study identified key causal conditions, including the changing expectations of Gen Z travelers, Society emphasis on human relation and respect, Impact of cultural and religious values on customer behaviors, emergence of need to experience building in religious journeys, Weakness of machine marketing in real loyalty building, and Media impact on mental image. Contextual and intervening conditions—such as organizational culture, ethical commitment, infrastructure, legal environment, and media influence—were found to either enable or restrict the implementation of H2H strategies.

Emergent strategies include service humanization, employee training on ethics and empathy, trust-building efforts, material-spiritual integration, and culturally aligned marketing approaches. These strategies lead to a range of outcomes such as increased customer loyalty and satisfaction, enhanced revenue, stronger brand identity, social credibility, and the growth of pilgrimage tourism.

This research contributes a culturally grounded and operationally actionable H2H framework for religious hospitality services, offering practical insights for hotel managers, policymakers, and tourism planners in Iraq and similar socio-religious contexts.

Keywords: Human-to-Human Marketing, Grounded Theory, Hotel Industry, Religious Tourism, Customer Experience, Iraq

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Introduction

In today's service-driven economy, customer experience has become a central pillar of competitive advantage (Kandampully et al., 2018). In service-based industries such as hospitality, customer experience is fundamentally shaped by the quality of human interaction (Solnet et al., 2019). Traditional marketing frameworks such as Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) often fall short in capturing the emotional, relational, and cultural complexities of real-world customer relationships. In response, Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing has emerged as a people-centered paradigm that emphasizes empathy, authenticity, and emotional engagement in marketing interactions (Pfoertsch, 2024; Babay, 2025). In fact, in the contemporary service economy, the shift toward personalized, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded marketing has led to the growing prominence of the Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing paradigm (Roshid et al., 2025).

While recent marketing trends have prioritized automation, data-driven personalization, and digital engagement, these approaches—though valuable—often fail to address the emotional and cultural subtleties essential in face-to-face service contexts. A growing body of literature therefore advocates for a Human-to-Human marketing perspective, which recognizes that every marketing exchange ultimately occurs between people (Kotler et al., 2024). In this view, technology and data should enable—not replace—genuine human connection, particularly in industries built on trust and emotional resonance (Chen et al., 2025).

In the hospitality industry, where the core offering is not a product but an experience, the quality of human interaction significantly impacts customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth (Gołab-Andrzejak & Gebarowski, 2018). This is particularly true in religious and culturally nuanced destinations such as Iraq, where hospitality is not only a commercial activity but also a deeply symbolic and spiritual act. Each year, millions of domestic and international pilgrims travel to sacred cities like Karbala, Najaf, and Samarra, seeking not just accommodation but emotional comfort, cultural respect, and spiritual fulfillment (Al-Suraifi, & Swadi, 2022). However, many hospitality providers in Iraq continue to rely on product-centric or mechanized marketing strategies that fail to align with guests' deeper expectations (Al-Suraifi & Swadi, 2022).

The core issue lies in the lack of a culturally embedded, human-centric marketing framework that considers the values, emotions, and lived experiences of hotel guests. While global marketing models tend to emphasize functionality and

efficiency, they overlook the emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of service interactions, which are crucial in religious hospitality settings (Sharma, 2024). In this context, there is a growing need for an H2H marketing model that can guide hotel managers to build meaningful, culturally respectful, and long-lasting relationships with their customers (Kotler et al., 2020).

Moreover, no existing model has been localized or validated for the Iraqi hospitality industry, which operates in a unique socio-religious and economic environment. This theoretical and practical gap calls for a deep, qualitative exploration into the dynamics of human interaction in religious hospitality and the development of an indigenous H2H marketing framework. So, this study is necessary from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, extending this approach to the hospitality industry—especially within religious tourism—offers an opportunity to expand and contextualize H2H theory in meaningful ways. Practically, with the growth of religious tourism in Iraq, there is an urgent need for hospitality models that integrate spiritual sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal ethics. Such models can help hotels differentiate themselves, increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, enhance social reputation, and improve word-of-mouth marketing—all of which are vital for sustainable success in this competitive market. By addressing this gap, the current research aims to design a grounded and contextually relevant H2H marketing model for the Iraqi hotel industry, providing both theoretical insight and actionable strategies for hospitality managers.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past two decades, marketing theory has undergone a paradigmatic shift from transactional, product-oriented models toward frameworks rooted in emotional resonance, co-creation, and experiential value. This evolution reflects a broader rethinking of marketing not as an institutional exchange, but as a relational process between people—a principle that lies at the heart of the Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing framework (Pfoertsch, 2024).

The H2H model emphasizes the humanization of business relationships, advocating for trust-based, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded interactions (Almeida, 2020). Unlike B2B or B2C paradigms, H2H views the customer as a full person—socially, emotionally, and culturally embedded—requiring marketers to align their messaging, conduct, and values accordingly (Kotler et al., 2024).

Todorova and Ruskova (2024) describe this shift as a movement from

experiential to “empathic marketing”, where consumers no longer seek personalization alone, but emotional authenticity and moral alignment. This perspective is particularly relevant in high-touch service industries like hospitality, where the human presence is often more impactful than technological efficiency.

Liu and Hung (2021) add that digital systems and human service should be complementary rather than substitutive. While self-service tools enhance operational flow, empathy, compassion, and interpersonal warmth—hallmarks of competitive differentiation in hospitality—can only be delivered by humans. This affirms the core of H2H marketing, particularly in religious tourism, where hospitality is both a spiritual offering and a moral responsibility.

As Jafari & Scott (2014) and Timothy & Olsen (2006) argue, pilgrims evaluate service experiences not only through comfort and cleanliness, but through lenses of ethical conduct, respect for religious customs, and spiritual care. In such contexts, H2H marketing provides a culturally coherent and emotionally attuned framework, positioning service providers not merely as vendors, but as moral hosts and cultural facilitators.

The theoretical underpinnings of H2H marketing can be further enriched by Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), as proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004). SDL shifts the focus of value creation from firms to collaborative processes between service providers and customers. It emphasizes that value is not embedded in products or delivered unilaterally, but rather co-created through interaction, dialogue, and shared meaning. In religious hospitality, this implies that the value of a hotel stay emerges not from physical amenities alone, but from shared emotional experiences, spiritual support, and culturally respectful service encounters. SDL thus offers a robust philosophical foundation for H2H marketing by framing service as a mutually constitutive relationship, not a one-way transaction.

Closely related to this is the concept of the Experience Economy, articulated by Pine and Gilmore (1998), which argues that modern consumers seek not just goods or services, but memorable, immersive, and emotionally resonant experiences. In the context of pilgrimage tourism, experiences are even more layered—they carry spiritual significance, cultural symbolism, and moral judgment. As such, hotels are not merely providing lodging; they are staging sacred space and moral interaction, making every service touch point an opportunity for meaning-making. The H2H model aligns seamlessly with this experiential turn, enabling service providers to move beyond functional service delivery and enter the realm of transformative hospitality.

In sum, the reviewed literature suggests that H2H marketing—when supported by SDL, experience economy principles, and cultural ethics—offers a powerful framework for transforming service delivery in religious hospitality. However,

its practical application must be contextualized, particularly in countries like Iraq, where service encounters are inseparable from religious identity, social reputation, and moral obligation.

Research methodology

This present study is of an applied nature, conducted within the interpretive paradigm, and adopts a qualitative approach. Participants included active managers in the political sector and experts in social media. The sample was selected through theoretical saturation, resulting in a total of 25 individuals. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection. Table 2 illustrates the characteristics of the participants in the research. The data collection instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews, with the interview protocol developed based on a review of existing literature and consultations with experts.

In this study, the researchers gathered, examined, and analyzed the data to formulate research questions, subsequently presenting the findings in tabular form based on principles of coding. The credibility of the research was ensured through the following methods:

Member Checking: A portion of the findings was shared with the study participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. Participants assessed whether the researchers had correctly understood their statements and whether the analysis appeared logical and reasonable from their perspective.

Peer Review: Texts from three interviews were independently coded by a fellow researcher familiar with the subject matter. The process aimed to establish agreement on the main and subcategories derived from the coding.

External Auditor Review: Feedback from the primary supervisor was utilized as external validation to refine and modify the analysis, ensuring robustness and credibility of the findings (Table 1).

The analysis of texts and interviews was carried out using grounded theory methodology in conjunction with Thematic Analysis (TA). In the grounded theory approach, patterns and models are generated directly from systematically collected and analyzed data throughout the research process. It is essential to note that the interview analysis adhered to the procedures established by Strauss and Corbin.

During the phases of open, axial, and selective coding, the data were broken down and conceptualized. Open coding, the initial stage of interview analysis, involves identifying concepts, uncovering their properties, and examining their dimensions within the data. In this phase, the data are segmented into discrete parts, thoroughly examined, and compared for similarities and differences.

Table 1. Characteristics of experts participating in the research.

Row	Gender	Age	Education	Position	Tenure
1	Male	63 y	Bachelor's degree in Accounting	Managing Director	35y
2	Male	41 y	Diploma of Management	Managing Director	16 y
3	Male	45 y	Hotel Diploma	Financial and Administrative Manager	16 y
4	Female	33 y	Diploma of Management	Shareholders Department Manager	16 y
5	Male	33 y	International Institute of Hotel and Tourism in Vienna	Public Relations Manager	8 y
6	Female	36 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Public Relations Officer	8 y
7	Female	31 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Director of the Chairman's Office	8 y
8	Female	33 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Secretary Hotel name: Baghdad International.	8 y
9	Female	32 y	Bachelor's degree in English language	Customer Reception	7 y
10	Male	54 y	Bachelor's degree in Accounting	Director of Internal Control Department	24 y
11	Male	37 y	Bachelor's degree in Accounting	Director of Internal Control Department	15 y
12	Male	44 y	Diploma in Tourism and Hotels	Food Department Manager	26 y
13	Male	37 y	Bachelor of Tourism	Managing Director	10 y
14	Male	39 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Deputy Managing Director	12 y
15	Male	47 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Managing Director	15 y
16	Male	42 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Director of Internal Control Department	9 y
17	Male	51 y	Bachelor's degree in Accounting	Finance Department Manager	20 y
18	Male	14 y	Bachelor of Law	Managing Director	9 y
19	Male	52 y	Bachelor's degree in Accounting	Human Resources Manager	11 y
20	Male	48 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Reservations Department Manager	8 y
21	Male	59 y	Bachelor of Law	Managing Director	9 y
22	Male	34 y	Bachelor of Law	Security Manager	12 y
23	Male	40 y	Bachelor of Business Administration	Restaurant Department Manager	5 y
24	Male	62 y	Bachelor of Business Sciences	Managing Director	11 y
25	Male	48 y	Diploma in Tourism	Human Resources Manager	8 y

Events, incidents, objects, and actions that are conceptually or semantically related are grouped under broader abstract concepts known as categories.

Following this, the researcher conducted axial coding using the data from the open coding phase. In this stage, the codes identified earlier were reviewed and compared, then organized into broader categories based on their similarities and differences. Finally, selective coding was performed, which occurs after completing both open and axial coding, and after defining the paradigmatic models.

Findings

The findings are presented in three sections: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding

Open coding is an analytical process through which codes, concepts, and categories are identified, along with their features, dimensions, and relationships within the data. This process involves three main steps. First, initial codes are identified to facilitate an in-depth review of the sources and information related to the research. These codes are then organized into concepts, which are subsequently classified into broader categories. Table 3 illustrates an example of open coding conducted in this study (Table 2).

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the second level of coding. In contrast to open coding, which focuses on identifying emergent themes, axial coding further refines, aligns, and categorizes the themes. With the completion of open coding and transition to axial coding, collected data can be sifted, refined, and categorized with the goal of creating distinct thematic categories in preparation for selective coding. Axial coding identifies relationships between open codes, for the purpose of developing core codes (Williams, & Moser, 2019). After the open coding stages and the identification of sub-categories, the categories are organized within the axial coding framework. Axial coding examines the relationships among the concepts and categories established during the open coding process. Following the disaggregation of data through open coding, axial coding reassembles these elements by establishing connections between a category and its subcategories. The primary focus of axial coding is on a specific category (the phenomenon) concerning the following aspects (Vollstedt, & Rezat, 2019). In this stage, the derived categories, presented as the central phenomenon,

were systematically interconnected through a paradigmatic model. Specifically, they were linked by identifying causal conditions (the underlying causes of the main phenomenon), strategies (the responses implemented in reaction to the main phenomenon), contextual features (specific enabling conditions that influence the strategies), intervening conditions (general conditions affecting the strategies), and outcomes (the results of applying the strategies) in a theoretical manner.

Central Phenomenon

An event or occurrence is something that triggers a series of actions or interactions aimed at controlling or managing it. The central phenomenon refers to the core event around which the process revolves. In this study, the central phenomenon is the use of political social media marketing. The categories related to this central phenomenon are presented in (Table 3).

Causal condition

Causal conditions refer to the circumstances and events that lead to the emergence and development of the phenomenon. These conditions are the primary factors responsible for the occurrence of the studied phenomenon. The categories related to causal conditions are presented in (Table 4).

Contextual condition

Contextual conditions encompass the general enabling factors that influence the formation of the studied phenomenon. The categories related to these contextual conditions are presented in (Table 5).

Intervening Condition

Intervening conditions consist of a set of circumstances that, by influencing strategies (actions) and the main core phenomenon, either facilitate or restrict the intervention of other factors. The categories related to intervening conditions are presented in (Table 6).

Strategies

Actions or interactions that are taken to control, manage, deal with, and respond to the main category. Strategies represent purposeful behaviours, activities, and interactions that are adopted in response to the main focal category and under the influence of causal conditions. The categories related to strategies are shown in (Table 7).

Table 2. An example of open coding conducted in the research.

Open code	Sentences	Participants
Population Changes e.g. z generation expectations	We've noticed a clear shift in expectations, especially among younger guests from the new generation. They are more tech-savvy and expect fast, seamless service, but at the same time, they value real, human interaction. Unlike older customers, they want to feel emotionally connected to the service-not just receive it.	P1, P 9, p11, P13,P15
Service Quality/World-class luxury services expectations	Guests today are comparing us to international standards. They expect the same level of service they receive in Dubai, Istanbul, or even Europe. From the cleanliness of the room to the professionalism of the staff, they demand excellence-and anything less is seen as failure.	P11, P 13, P19
Quick response to customers	Nowadays, if you don't respond to a guest's request within minutes, they start to feel ignored. Whether it's a room service call or a message on social media, fast response has become a basic expectation-not a luxury anymore.	P1, P 9
Balance between profitability and social responsibility	Polarizing content and aggressive attacks on opponents may alienate voters. Excessive use of sponsored content can give campaigns an insincere impression. Failure to address accusations or scandals on social media can rapidly lead to public distrust.	P1, P2
Cultural and linguistic understanding and communication	Of course, we are running a business and need to make profits, but at the same time, we can't ignore our role in the community. In a place like Karbala, guests expect us to reflect social and religious values-not just offer beds and meals. So we try to find a balance between financial performance and our moral responsibilities.	P12, P22, P18
A dining experience tailored to different cultures	We receive guests from many countries and religious backgrounds, and food is one of the first things they notice. That's why we try to offer options that respect different cultures-halal meals, vegetarian dishes, and even traditional Iraqi items that make them feel at home.	P18, P12, P22, P24
Building cultural bridges and effective communication	Our guests come from different countries—some speak Arabic, others Persian, Urdu, or even English. We always tell our team: hospitality is not just about speaking the same language; it's about understanding the guest's mindset and values. That's how we build cultural bridges and make them feel welcome.	P22,P12,P18
Paying attention to the religious needs of guests	Understanding and respecting guests' religious practices is essential for creating a personalized and meaningful hospitality experience.	P23,P20

Table 3. Components related to the central phenomenon.

Experts' number	Open coding	Axial Coding
3,2,1,6,9,11,13,14,16,20,22,25	human Relationship Building Humanize customer service Personalized experience building Respect to cultural-religious contexts	H2H marketing in hospitality religious industry:

Table 4. Components related to causal conditions.

Experts' number	Open coding	Axial Coding
1,9,11,13,15	Population Changes e.g. z generation expectations	Expectations Change of customers towards human interactions
11,13,19	Service Quality/World-class luxury services expectations	
1,9	Providing fast and efficient services	
1,9	Quick response to customers	
9	Demand for quality public services	
11	Providing professional and fast reception services.	Society emphasis on human relation and respect
13	Social Responsibility	
1	Increasing social media-based engagement	
1,2	Balance between profitability and social responsibility	
2	Strong social relationships for word-of-mouth marketing	
2	Using social networks	
20	Demonstrate commitment to social and ethical responsibility in hotel work	
17	Social and ethical responsibility in hotel work	
8	Community participation	
16	Balance between profitability and social responsibility towards the local community and visitors.	
24	Balance between profitability and social responsibility.	
5	Environmental responsibility: Commitment to sustainable practices.	Impact of cultural and religious values in customers behaviors
23	Visitor comfort through clean and quiet facilities.	
12,22,18	Cultural and linguistic understanding and communication	
18,12,22,24	A dining experience tailored to different cultures.	
22,12,18	Building cultural bridges and effective communication	
12,22,18	Understanding and appreciating the cultural and religious backgrounds of visitors	
21	Respect for different cultures	
23,20	Paying attention to the religious needs of guests.	
20,23	Providing halal food according to Islamic law.	
20	Iraqi culture of hospitality and focus on social relationships	
1	Cultural expectations of Iraqi residents	
2	Hospitality culture	
14	Cultural and historical aspects of Baghdad	
3,6	Cultural diversity/ Taking into account the diversity of customer cultures and beliefs.	
23	Designating places for prayer and worship inside the hotel.	
14,20	Enhancing the spiritual sense of the place with special decorations and services in accordance with religious rituals	
6,25	Holding religious ceremonies inside the hotel.	
20	Providing religious counseling in addition to hotel services.	
25	Providing guidance services with religious accommodations.	Emergence of need to experience building in religious journeys
22,12,18,10	Providing services that are tailored to local culture and needs	
23	Designating places for prayer and worship inside the hotel.	
14,20	Enhancing the spiritual sense of the place with special decorations and services in accordance with religious rituals	
6,25	Holding religious ceremonies inside the hotel.	
20	Providing religious counseling in addition to hotel services.	Weakness of machine marketing in real loyalty building
25	Weakness of machine marketing in real loyalty building	
1,16	Media impact on mental image	Media impact on mental image
1	Social media-based interaction	
7	Designing an Effective Website	
7	Social Media Marketing	
7	Email Marketing	
7	Internet Advertising Network Marketing	
7	Honesty and Transparency in Dealing with Guests	
7	Partnering with Influencers/Internet and Social Media Engagement	
22	Conveying the visitor experience through social media	
12	Trending towards social media technology	
14	The impact of online assessments and social media.	
19	Maintain contact with previous visitors through social media and offer special offers for return visits.	
21	Interaction through social media and quick response and effective communication with customers.	

Table 5. Categories related to Contextual Conditions.

Experts' number	Open coding	Axial Coding
14	The existence of an organizational culture based on excellent service	Organizational Culture Factor
1	Hotel culture and appreciation for personal relationships with guests	
2	Hotel hospitality culture	
5	Hospitality and tourism culture of hotel staff	
21	Organizational culture in the hotel	
18	Creating a culture of continuous improvement.	
20	Creating a hospitality culture centered on uniqueness, distinction, and spirituality	
12,20	Mutual respect,	Ethical commitment level
24	Treating visitors with kindness and respect.	
14	Honesty and transparency in dealing with guests.	
15	Ensuring customer privacy and maintaining complete confidentiality.	
16	Professionalism, competence and respect for official protocols and privacy.	
18	Appreciation and welcome	
13	Providing values, humanity through service and generosity, protection and care.	
25	Welcoming with a smiling face.	
12	Serving the guest like a pilgrim in the house of God with humility and respect.	
13	Honest, value-based communication	
19	Preserving authenticity and spirituality	
18	Spiritual and ethical dimension	
13	Honesty and truthfulness in dealings	
24	Lack of hotel management skills.	
25	Continuous training of staff on how to deal with pilgrims	
18	Training employees on ethics and behavior	
18	Training employees on ethics and behavior	
19	Training employees on efficiency, friendliness, and cooperation	HRM Systems(Training employees on ethical issues)
20	Quality of training and effective communication between employees	
21	Comprehensive employee training in service skills, communication, and cultural and religious awareness.	
22	Training hotel staff on how to treat visitors with a high level of humanity.	
22	Invest in training staff on how to build strong relationships with visitors.	
23	Train staff to communicate effectively with visitors.	
1	Human resources efficiency and competence	
5	Flexible and collaborative personality of hotel staff	
12,16	Lack of human resources/ Shortage of qualified workers	
11	Assigning employees to provide personal service to important people	
15,14	Need a specialized team to organize events.	
16	The inhumane qualifications of a coach	
21	Staff training level	
11,14,15	Lack of professional training for workers.	
17,8	Training and developing hotel staff in verbal kindness, positive body language, and active listening skills.	
16,20	Employee development and training	
3	Involving hotel and tourism sector employees in intensive courses	
13	Providing staff who speak different languages.	
14	Train customer service staff to use positive language when dealing with customers and avoid negative terminology.	
15,16	Training employees to have friendly and cooperative behavior.	
16	Variety in hotel classification and low quality in some of them	Workplace diversity
25,6,12	Cultural diversity	
1	A diverse and inclusive work environment for everyone	
4	Taking into account religious diversity.	
25	Taking into account religious diversity.	

23	Visitor comfort through clean and quiet facilities.	Religiousness of the Iraqi cultural environment
12,22,18	Cultural and linguistic understanding and communication	
18,12,22,24	A dining experience tailored to different cultures.	
22,12,18	Building cultural bridges and effective communication	
12,22,18	Understanding and appreciating the cultural and religious backgrounds of visitors	
21	Respect for different cultures	
23,20	Paying attention to the religious needs of guests.	
20,23	Providing halal food according to Islamic law.	
20	Iraqi culture of hospitality and focus on social relationships	
1	Cultural expectations of Iraqi residents	
2	Hospitality culture	
14	Cultural and historical aspects of Baghdad	
3,6	Cultural diversity/ Taking into account the diversity of customer cultures and beliefs.	
23	Designating places for prayer and worship inside the hotel.	
14,20	Enhancing the spiritual sense of the place with special decorations and services in accordance with religious rituals	
6,25	Holding religious ceremonies inside the hotel.	
20	Providing religious counseling in addition to hotel services.	
25	Providing guidance services with religious accommodations.	
5	Commitment to health and safety standards	Adherence to health standards,

Table 6. Components related to intervening conditions.

Experts' number	Open coding	Axial Coding
10,17,2	Economic developments	Economic factors (budget, price, low ROI, cost reduction)
2,4,5,7,10	Economic conditions affect people's ability to travel and stay in hotels.	
16,17	Unstable electricity and high operating costs	
16,17	Lack of funding and modern equipment	
19,23	Pressure to reduce costs while maintaining good service levels	
21	Exaggeration in prices	
19	Positive contribution to the local economy.	
21	Helping to develop and support the national economy.	
9	Financial transparency: Transparent financial transactions with customers.	
7,9,17	The impact of legal factors	Legal/Government factors (government support, local and international regulations)
8,9,17	Legal/Legal/Government Factors	
8,9,17	Lifting government restrictions.	
16	Compliance with the law and protection of customer data.	
7	Compliance with legal and professional standards	
	demographic changes	Social and demographic factors
	tourism trends	
1	Domestic and foreign tourism volume	
1	Iraq's demographic changes	
3,8	Demographic factors include age, gender, and sect.	
22	Number of visitors	
10,21	Tourism trends	
16,24	Growth of religious tourism	
2,15	physical infrastructure	Technical and infrastructure factors
15	Religious place infrastructure	
15,5	digital marketing	
2,15	Updating technological infrastructure	
16,21	Development of physical /religious infrastructure	
15	Focus on existing and essential infrastructure	
16	Poor infrastructure	
9	Advanced infrastructure and technology to support large conferences and events	
18	Infrastructure supporting luxury tourism	
21	Infrastructure and comfort services	
22,6	Infrastructure and comfort services	

12,22,18	need for halal services	Cultural-religious factors
21	language	
23,20	worship	
20,23	Halal food	
7	Partnering with Influencers/Internet and Social Media Engagement	Media influence and customer mindset
22	Conveying the visitor experience through social media	
12	Trending towards social media technology	
14	The impact of online assessments and social media.	
19	Maintain contact with previous visitors through social media and offer special offers for return visits.	
21	Interaction through social media and quick response and effective communication with customers.	

Table 7. Categories related to strategies.

Experts' no.	Open coding	Axial Coding
11,17	Humanize Customer Service Relationship Building	Service humanization strategies(Action/Interaction Strategies)
1,7,10	Empathy and Understanding	
13,14	Effective Communication Strategies	
8,23	Blend Personalization and Automation	
1	Human-to-human marketing strategy	
2,5,6,11,17	HRM strategies (Employee training based on ethics and human interaction)	Organizational and Human Resources Strategies:
7,10,14,15	Professionalism Human Resource Strategies	
2,5,6,19,20	Problem-solving strategies	Marketing and Advertising Strategies
1,12	Marketing and Advertising Strategies:	
1,9	Targeted Marketing Customer Engagement Strategies	
9	Data-Driven Marketing Amplification Strategies (Word of Mouth, Media)	
7	Advertising and promotion strategy	
10	Social and political dimensions in developing marketing strategies	
11	7P's human strategy in marketing	
13	Level of advertising and promotion.	
13	Location or location	
13	Reasonable price	
1,5,6,10	Trust Building and Reliability	Trust Building and Long-Term Engagement Strategies:
13,14	Customer Service Categorization	
16,17	Loyalty Programs	Combined strategies (material + spiritual):
13,14	Combination of spiritual and material aspects	
8,23	Social Responsibility and Environmental Protection	
2,5,6,11,17, 1,12	Problem Solving Strategies	

Consequences

Outcomes refer to the results and consequences of implementing strategies. Some categories represent the effects that arise from applying these strategies and are influenced by the main core phenomenon, causal conditions, and intervening conditions. These associated categories are presented in (Table 8).

Selective coding

Selective coding is the systematic process of identifying the core category and relating it to other categories, thereby validating relationships and filling gaps with categories that require further refinement and elaboration. In other words, selective coding involves the integration and refinement of categories to develop a coherent theory. During this stage, the researcher, while focusing on the processes embedded within the data, emphasizes which category is most frequently repeated and capable of linking other categories. At this point, the "core category" is identified, and other categories are systematically connected to it. Based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) model, the components of the final research model, as determined through selective coding, are as follows (Figure 1).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing model tailored to the religious hospitality sector in Iraq, utilizing Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory methodology. Through qualitative analysis of insights from 25 hotel professionals.

The central phenomenon emerging from this study is Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing in the religious hospitality sector, characterized by four

foundational pillars: human relationship building, humanized customer service, personalized experience design, and respect for cultural-religious contexts. This paradigm underscores the idea that hospitality marketing, particularly in religious contexts like Iraq, must move beyond transactional and technical interactions toward emotionally meaningful, ethically grounded, and culturally sensitive engagements.

In religious hospitality, the relationship between the service provider and guest transcends commercial logic. It is built on mutual respect, emotional connection, and often spiritual empathy. This aligns with Solnet et al. (2019), who assert that in high-touch service industries, human relationships significantly influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. In religious tourism settings—such as in Karbala or Najaf—hospitality is perceived not only as a service but also as a moral responsibility, requiring authentic emotional engagement (Mahmudhassan, 2024).

Humanizing service involves treating each guest as a unique individual with emotional, spiritual, and social needs—not merely as a consumer. Pfoertsch (2024) emphasizes that H2H marketing demands authenticity, empathy, and active listening. In the Iraqi context, this means shifting away from cold, scripted hospitality and embracing personalized gestures—such as offering symbolic gifts or spiritual guidance—rooted in Islamic values of generosity and respect.

Personalization in religious hospitality is not limited to tailored amenities or room services; it extends to spiritual practices, dietary preferences, and cultural rituals. As noted by Jafari & Scott (2014), religious travellers seek emotionally safe and spiritually fulfilling experiences. Providing spaces for worship, culturally appropriate food, and religious counselling allows guests to

Table 8. Categories related to consequences.

Experts' number	Open coding	Axial Coding
21	Offering symbolic gifts such as rosaries and religious books as part of the stay experience.	Increase customer loyalty and satisfaction
6,1,14,15	Increase revenue	Increase revenue and return on investment
3	Achieving profitability to maintain and develop the hotel business.	
5,14,15	Revenue generation for the hotel and return on investment	
5,11,12	Increasing financial returns	
9,11,12	Achieving high revenue and excellent profit margins	
21	Public income level and level of domestic and foreign tourism	
2,6	Low cost	Reduce machine marketing costs
19,23	Reducing costs while maintaining a good level of service	
11	Transferring a suitable image from the hotel	Strengthen the hotel brand
25	Improving Iraq's image as a safe and distinctive tourist destination.	
16	The impact of human-to-human marketing on the mental image of Iraq	
2,9,13	The hotel's good reputation	
9	Helping to increase the hotel's positive image among customers, especially foreigners.	Create a human competitive advantage
1	Competitive advantage in human-to-human marketing	
8,12	Competition in the market	
17,6,8,9,10	Competition between hotels	
13,14	Fierce competition between luxury hotels in Baghdad	
25	Competition for excellence and uniqueness.	
8	Provide strong competitive offers.	Increase social credibility and reputation
11	Transferring a suitable image from the hotel	
2,5	Improving Iraq's image as a safe and distinctive tourist destination.	
16	The impact of human-to-human marketing on the mental image of Iraq	
2,9,13	The hotel's good reputation	
9	Helping to increase the hotel's positive image among customers, especially foreigners.	
9	Transparency and credibility.	Grow pilgrimage tourism
21,11,2	Direct interaction to increase credibility	
16,24	Grow pilgrimage tourism	Increase safety and health standards
9	Ensuring the highest standards of security and privacy	
11,13	Providing a safe and comfortable environment for guests	
16,24,21	Ensuring security and solving security challenges	
9,13,15,16	Security and privacy	Strengthen word-of-mouth marketing (WOM)
17	Build a reputation based on genuine recommendations and reviews.	
19,12	Build a good reputation through positive reviews and word of mouth recommendations.	
9,11	Convert customers into hotel advocates through their positive experiences and trusted testimonials.	
25,1	Turning satisfied visitors into one of the hotel's advertising tools.	
15,19,23	The impact of word-of-mouth recommendations and hotel reputation on organizing events and conferences.	

feel emotionally and spiritually at home. This type of experiential customization deepens the emotional bond between guest and host, reinforcing loyalty.

Respecting the cultural and religious identities of guests is not optional—it is essential. Kotler et al. (2024) point out that successful service marketing must be context-sensitive, especially in culturally diverse and spiritually significant settings. The hospitality culture in Iraq demands that hotel staff be trained in intercultural competence, ethical hospitality, and awareness of religious customs-elements that are foundational to the H2H approach.

The emergence of Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing in the religious hospitality sector of Iraq is driven by a complex set of causal conditions, that act as antecedents to the shift from transactional to relationship-centered marketing. Changing Customer Expectations: One of the most significant causal factors is the evolution of customer expectations, particularly among younger generations such as Gen Z. These customers are digitally fluent yet crave authentic, emotionally rich interactions. While they value speed and efficiency, they are increasingly drawn to brands that demonstrate empathy and personal relevance (Remade, & Kumar, 2021). In the hospitality context, this translates into expecting not just comfort or convenience, but a deep sense of being understood and valued. Moreover, Research by Kandampully et al. (2018) confirms that modern customers-especially those engaging in tourism-demand high-quality, personalized, and emotionally fulfilling service encounters. This shift renders standardized or impersonal service offerings obsolete.

The second causal factor is the societal emphasis on human relationships,

ethics, and social responsibility, particularly in religious and collectivist cultures like Iraq. The hospitality sector is not isolated from its social environment; rather, it is deeply embedded in a moral economy where values such as generosity, respect, and sincerity are expected from service providers (Al-Suraihi & Swadi, 2022). Guests do not merely evaluate the hotel's physical offerings, but also the ethical conduct, interpersonal warmth, and sincerity of its staff. In such a setting, the balance between profitability and social responsibility becomes a key strategic concern. As noted by Kotler et al. (2024), modern marketing must integrate not only functional and emotional value but also spiritual and ethical value—a triad particularly relevant in religious destinations.

The cultural and religious values of guests profoundly shape their perceptions, expectations, and responses to hospitality services. Pilgrims visiting sacred cities like Karbala or Najaf often bring with them expectations rooted in Islamic hospitality norms—which prioritize respect, humility, and moral integrity. As Jafari and Scott (2014) note, religious tourists are not just seeking rest or entertainment; they seek spiritual nourishment and cultural alignment. Therefore, H2H marketing in this context must reflect deep cultural literacy and intercultural competence, including sensitivity to language, food, rituals, gender norms, and spiritual needs. These values do not operate in the background; they are active forces shaping the desired structure of the service encounter.

Religious tourism is undergoing a transformation—from obligation-based pilgrimage to experience-based spiritual travel. Pilgrims now seek immersive, meaningful experiences that combine the sacred and the social (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). This transformation creates demand for hospitality services

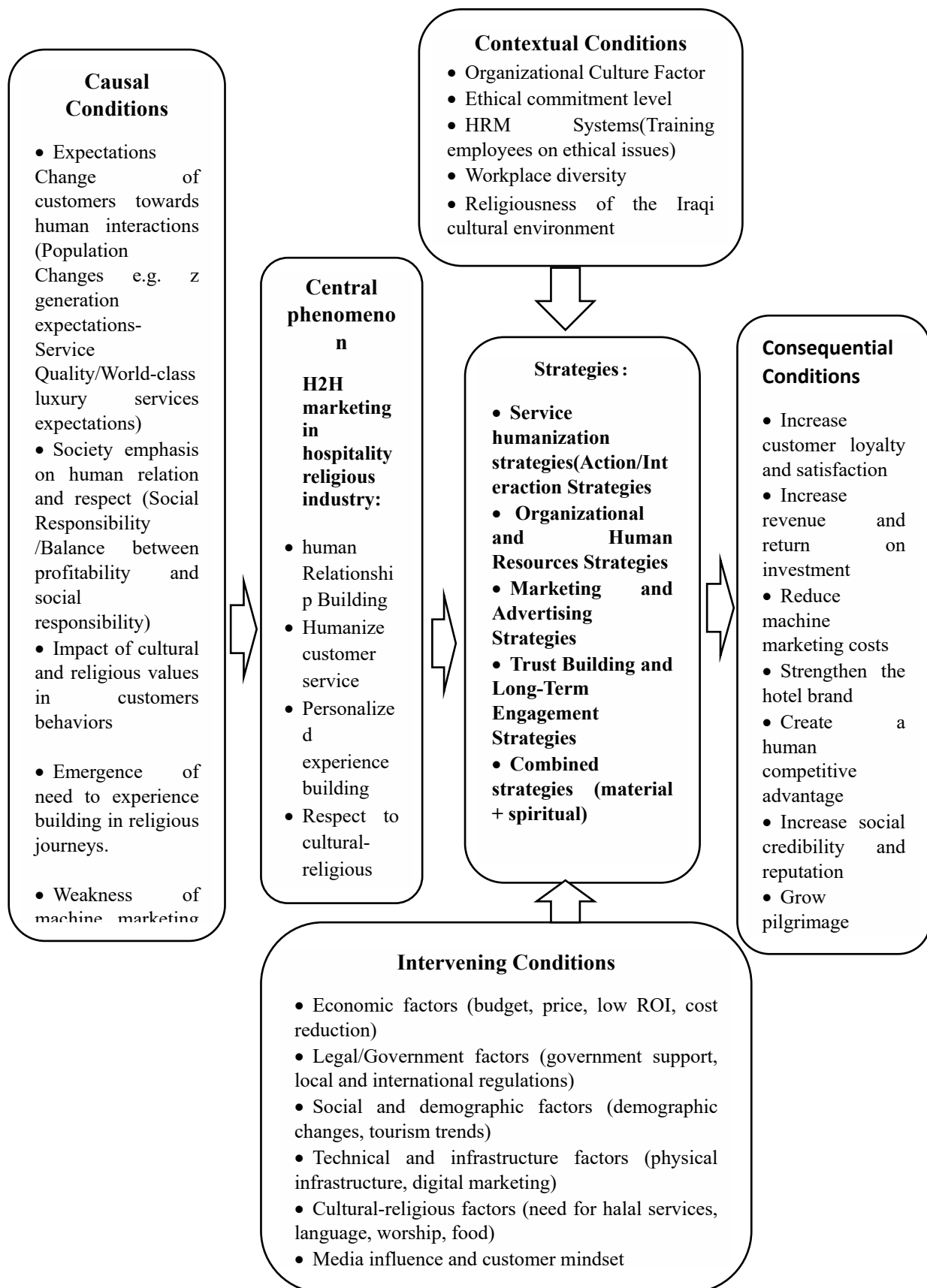


Figure 1. Research paradigm model.

that can deliver symbolic meaning, emotional fulfillment, and spiritual care, far beyond the functional aspects of lodging or food. Thus, the need for “experience building” is not only a market trend but also a cultural evolution, compelling hotels to adopt H2H strategies that respond to the narrative, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of travel.

Despite the advances in AI, automation, and digital marketing, machine-based approaches often fail to cultivate genuine customer loyalty. As Pfoertsch (2024) argues, technological systems may optimize transactions but rarely foster trust, empathy, or emotional memory—elements central to long-term customer engagement. In religious hospitality, where guests evaluate their experience through ethical and spiritual lenses, robotic or scripted service interactions can even be counterproductive. True loyalty emerges not from convenience alone, but from being seen, heard, and respected as a human being.

Finally, the influence of media and online platforms has become a decisive causal factor in how guests form mental images of hotels. Platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and social media channels are shaping perceptions before the actual visit. According to Buhalis & Law (2008), digital media serve as experience proxies, meaning that future guests interpret reviews and online presence as previews of relational quality. In Iraq's post-conflict image-building process, media engagement plays a crucial role not only in brand differentiation but also in rebuilding trust in safety, service quality, and spiritual integrity. Therefore, H2H strategies must extend into digital interactions as well, emphasizing honesty, transparency, and emotional resonance even in online content.

To operationalize Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing in the religious hospitality sector, the study identified a set of interlinked strategies that respond to the central phenomenon and its causal conditions. These strategies span interpersonal service behaviours, internal organizational systems, communication models, and socio-cultural engagement approaches. Grounded in the lived experiences of Iraqi hotel professionals, the strategies provide a pragmatic yet value-driven roadmap for culturally sensitive service delivery. Humanizing customer service lies at the heart of the H2H marketing approach. This involves replacing impersonal interactions with empathetic, emotionally intelligent, and personalized engagement. Research by Berry et al. (2006) underscores the importance of emotional connection in service environments, particularly in high-contact sectors like hospitality.

Empathy and Understanding are foundational to guest relationships in religious settings. As Bahadur et al. (2020) argue, empathy in service personnel significantly influences customer trust and satisfaction. In contexts like Karbala and Najaf, this includes awareness of guests' religious states, emotional needs during pilgrimage, and moments of spiritual vulnerability. Effective Communication Strategies, including verbal warmth, active listening, and nonverbal respect (e.g., body language, gestures of welcome), play a critical role. According to Qasem, & Alhakimi, W. (2019), frontline communication quality is a predictor of both satisfaction and loyalty.

Implementing H2H marketing demands systemic support through HR policies, recruitment, and training. Hotels must institutionalize human-centered values through their workforce. HRM Strategies Based on Ethics and Human Interaction include training staff in moral hospitality, interfaith sensitivity, emotional labour, and non-discriminatory practices. According to Baum (2007), human resource development in hospitality must emphasize interpersonal competence as much as technical skills. Professionalism in HR Practices ensures that humanized service does not devolve into unstructured or inconsistent behaviour. Nitonde, & Nandapurkar, (2014) notes that standardizing soft skills—such as kindness, calmness, and humility—can coexist with professional excellence through effective service scripts and training protocols. In H2H marketing, external communication must align with internal values. Marketing efforts should reflect sincerity, cultural respect, and emotional storytelling, rather than manipulative or generic promotion.

Targeted Customer Engagement involves crafting marketing messages that resonate with pilgrims' emotional, cultural, and spiritual expectations. Rigby, & Lee, (2024) emphasize that emotional resonance in advertising enhances consumer connection, particularly in symbolic service industries. Data-Driven Amplification Strategies, especially those leveraging word-of-mouth (WOM) and social media, are critical. According to Litvin et al. (2008), electronic WOM (eWOM) in the hospitality industry significantly shapes guest decisions, making it essential to manage real experiences that generate genuine online advocacy.

Building trust is not merely a by-product but a core objective of H2H marketing. In religious tourism, where emotional and moral expectations are high, trust serves as the gateway to loyalty. Trust and Reliability are cultivated through consistency, transparency, and ethical conduct. As Morgan and Hunt (1994) highlight, trust in service settings is developed through shared values and benevolence—not just performance. In the religious hospitality domain, service must address both material needs and spiritual aspirations. This integrative view aligns with the broader Islamic concept of *ikram al-daif* (honouring the guest) as a moral and spiritual act. Spiritual-Material Integration includes

offering Qur'ans, prayer spaces, or religious ceremonies alongside clean accommodations and quality meals. Timothy and Olsen (2006) confirm that such combined experiences contribute to the sacred authenticity of the trip.

Social Responsibility and Environmental Protection initiatives—such as sustainable operations, community engagement, and supporting local causes—signal moral alignment with the values of guests, who increasingly expect service providers to reflect shared ethical commitments (Khatter, 2025). Also, problem-Solving Strategies, such as conflict mediation, cultural translation, or addressing guest discomfort with humility, reinforce the emotional safety of the environment (Hamid, 2024).

The success of H2H marketing in religious hospitality is not only a function of frontline strategies or external market dynamics—it also depends heavily on the contextual infrastructure within which service delivery occurs. These contextual conditions shape how service values are interpreted, operationalized, and sustained within organizations. In the case of the Iraqi hotel industry, several enabling conditions—including cultural, ethical, organizational, and environmental factors—were identified as central to the institutionalization of H2H practices.

Organizational culture serves as the ideological backbone of service behaviour. A culture that emphasizes respect, empathy, and guest-centered values acts as fertile ground for H2H marketing. Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as the set of shared assumptions that guide behaviour in organizations. In religious hospitality, this includes rituals of welcoming, respectful greetings, and prioritizing moral integrity over efficiency. Hotels with a culture of personalized care and spiritual hospitality are more likely to institutionalize authentic H2H practices (Dawson et al., 2011).

Also, ethical commitment—both personal and institutional—is a foundational contextual condition. As Crane and Matten (2016) explain, business ethics in hospitality extend beyond compliance to include moral sensitivity, cultural respect, and fairness in service treatment (Huimin, & Ryan, 2011). In religious settings, this also involves gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and sincerity in religious observance. Guests interpret ethical conduct not just as professionalism, but as a form of moral legitimacy—which is vital for trust in faith-based tourism (Singgalen, 2024). Furthermore, human-to-human service delivery requires a workforce that is not only trained in technical tasks, but also in emotional labor, cultural communication, and ethical reasoning (Sumaneeva et al., 2018).

Workplace diversity, particularly in terms of religion, language, and nationality, introduces both complexity and opportunity in H2H marketing. A diverse workforce—if effectively managed—enables the organization to connect with a broader spectrum of guests, reflect inclusive values, and respond to multi-faith needs. Cox and Blake (1991) argue that cultural diversity, when strategically integrated, leads to better problem solving and guest satisfaction. In the Iraqi religious tourism sector, where guests come from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and beyond, linguistic and cultural alignment through staff representation can greatly enhance perceived authenticity and trust.

In a post-pandemic and health-conscious era, adherence to health standards is no longer just a legal obligation but a symbol of ethical commitment and guest care. WHO (2021) guidelines highlight that religious gatherings—such as pilgrimages—require heightened standards of hygiene and crowd management. Hotels that demonstrate diligence in health, cleanliness, and safety are more likely to earn the trust of emotionally and spiritually vulnerable guests, especially pilgrims traveling in large groups or with elderly family members.

While causal and contextual factors explain why H2H marketing has emerged and how it aligns with internal service values, intervening conditions determine the extent to which these strategies can be implemented effectively. These conditions either facilitate or hinder the relationship between core strategies and their desired outcomes. In the Iraqi religious hospitality context, six main intervening categories were identified: economic, legal, social, infrastructural, cultural-religious, and media-related.

Economic realities such as limited budgets, high operational costs, and low return on investment (ROI) pose serious constraints on service innovation in Iraqi hotels. As noted by Clarke (2013), constrained cash flow in religious tourism destinations often leads to underinvestment in service personalization, staff development, and facility upgrades. This is particularly problematic for H2H marketing, which requires investment in human resources, ethical training, and cultural adaptation. Hotels aiming to implement personalized services may face cost-cutting pressures that push them back toward automated or standardized solutions. Moreover, economic instability—exacerbated by political volatility and inconsistent tourism flows—creates an atmosphere of risk aversion, limiting strategic experimentation.

The success of H2H models is also mediated by legal clarity and governmental support. In Iraq, the hospitality sector often operates in a regulatory vacuum,

with limited enforcement of service quality standards or ethical codes. According to Ayorekire et al., (2020), weak governance and poor policy integration between tourism and religious institutions can hinder efforts to professionalize the sector. In contrast, supportive government interventions—such as subsidies, training programs, or halal certification systems—can create a more enabling environment for culturally responsive service.

Also, a lack of modern infrastructure—from outdated facilities to unreliable energy and internet—remains a critical obstacle to delivering high-quality H2H service. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), poor physical infrastructure undermines customer satisfaction, especially in high-contact service sectors where comfort, hygiene, and ambiance are central to emotional engagement. Similarly, digital infrastructure is vital for pre- and post-stay engagement through websites, mobile apps, and social media. Hotels without digital capabilities cannot deliver blended H2H experiences, where technology enhances—not replaces—human contact (Liu & Hung, 2021).

H2H marketing in Iraq must account for a host of religious-cultural expectations, including halal food, gender-sensitive spaces, multilingual staff, prayer accommodations, and religious counseling. Failure to meet these needs may not only create dissatisfaction but also lead to moral disengagement by the guest. As Timothy and Olsen (2006) observe, religious tourists tend to evaluate hospitality experiences through spiritual and ethical frames, not just functional ones. Thus, the lack of institutional frameworks for certifying, monitoring, or guiding religious service compatibility becomes a major limiting factor in achieving authentic H2H interactions.

In the digital age, online reviews, social media narratives, and influencer endorsements shape guests' mental image of a hotel before their arrival. This phenomenon is especially influential in destinations with a contested or fragile international reputation like Iraq. According to Litvin et al. (2008), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can have more impact on trust and travel decisions than traditional advertising. This dynamic presents a double-edged sword: hotels that successfully deliver humanized, culturally respectful service can build strong online advocacy, while those that fall short risk rapid reputational damage. As such, managing the customer mindset in real time—through honest, responsive, and transparent digital communication—is crucial for H2H marketing effectiveness.

The implementation of a Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing model in the religious hospitality industry of Iraq has the potential to produce transformative outcomes—extending far beyond financial gains to encompass reputational capital, emotional connection, and social legitimacy. Based on grounded data from the field, the following consequences have been identified as major outcomes of H2H strategies.

One of the most immediate and significant impacts of H2H marketing is the deepening of emotional loyalty. By recognizing guests as whole individuals with emotional, cultural, and spiritual needs, H2H interactions foster a level of satisfaction that goes beyond transactional contentment. According to Wong (2004), emotional satisfaction is a stronger predictor of long-term loyalty than functional satisfaction. Furthermore, in religious tourism—where moral integrity and spiritual empathy matter greatly—loyalty is not just behavioral but also value-driven. Satisfied guests often return not merely for comfort, but to re-experience an environment that affirms their identity and beliefs.

Contrary to the belief that humanized services increase operational costs, research shows that emotionally engaged customers are more profitable. In the context of religious hospitality, personalized services (e.g., prayer spaces, symbolic gifts, spiritual guidance) can justify premium pricing and encourage longer stays and repeat visits, contributing to stronger ROI and revenue growth.

As trust and loyalty increase through humanized relationships, the need for aggressive advertising or algorithmic persuasion diminishes. According to Kumar & Reinartz (2016), the cost of acquiring new customers through digital channels is significantly higher than retaining loyal ones through relational service strategies. With H2H, word-of-mouth and repeat patronage serve as organic marketing tools, helping hotels to lower dependency on expensive, impersonal machine-based campaigns.

Traditional competitive advantages—such as location or price—are often replicable. But emotional and ethical differentiation through H2H marketing is far more defensible and sustainable. Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduce the concept of the "experience economy," where value lies in memorable human interaction, not just functional service.

Hotels that consistently deliver respectful, spiritually attuned, and emotionally resonant experiences position themselves as irreplaceable in the eyes of guests, especially those engaged in meaningful religious journeys.

Finally, perhaps the most powerful outcome of H2H is its capacity to transform satisfied customers into brand advocates. According to Chen et al. (2021), personal recommendations in hospitality—especially from trusted social or

religious networks—are more persuasive than paid media. In religious tourism, where group travel is common, WOM often plays a decisive role in shaping travel decisions. Satisfied pilgrims often share their positive experiences not only with friends and family but also via social media, religious forums, and community gatherings, fueling sustained demand.

Practical Implications and Future Research Directions

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer a contextualized framework for implementing Human-to-Human (H2H) marketing in Iraq's religious hospitality sector, with a strong emphasis on cultural, emotional, and ethical dimensions of service. Several key implications arise for hospitality managers, policy-makers, and training institutions:

1. **Human-Centered Service Design:** Hotels must prioritize human relationship-building, empathy, and personalized experience design—especially in religious contexts where spiritual care and emotional sensitivity are central. Service protocols should be restructured around human touch points rather than mechanized procedures.

2. **Staff Training in Ethical and Spiritual Hospitality:** Human resource development programs should go beyond technical competencies and emphasize emotional intelligence, religious literacy, cultural sensitivity, and value-based communication. Partnerships with local religious scholars or cultural experts could enhance training relevance.

3. **Strategic Integration of H2H Principles:** Hotel leadership must embed H2H values into organizational strategy, including mission statements, performance metrics, recruitment criteria, and marketing messages. Without strategic alignment, human-centric efforts may remain isolated or unsustainable.

4. **Digital-Human Synergy:** While automation is essential for scalability, it should not displace genuine human interaction. Instead, technology should be leveraged to support human connection—for instance, using AI to customize experiences but relying on trained staff for emotionally charged service encounters.

5. **Policy and Infrastructure Support:** Governmental and tourism bodies should provide regulatory, financial, and infrastructural support for faith-based hospitality, including halal certification, religious accommodation standards, and tax incentives for ethical training. A national framework for "spiritual hospitality" could standardize and elevate service quality.

6. **Branding Based on Moral Value and Cultural Respect:** Marketing campaigns should avoid generic appeals and instead highlight the hotel's commitment to respect, inclusion, and spiritual understanding. This creates differentiation in a competitive market and fosters trust, especially among international religious travellers.

Future Research Directions

This research opens up multiple avenues for further inquiry, particularly in regions where faith, culture, and tourism intersect. Suggested areas for future exploration include:

1. **Quantitative Validation of the H2H Model:** While this study was qualitative in nature, future research could apply structural equation modeling (SEM) or other statistical methods to validate the relationships between causal conditions, strategies, and outcomes identified in the model.

2. **Comparative Studies Across Religious Contexts:** It would be valuable to compare H2H service models across different pilgrimage destinations (e.g., Mecca, Qom, Lourdes, Varanasi) to understand how religious frameworks shape guest expectations and service norms.

3. **Customer Perspectives on H2H Experiences:** This study focused on hotel professionals; future research should explore the pilgrims' or guests' lived experiences, using in-depth interviews or ethnography, to assess how they interpret, value, and respond to humanized service.

4. **Impact of H2H Marketing on Long-Term Brand Loyalty:** Longitudinal studies could examine how sustained implementation of H2H strategies influences customer retention, spiritual satisfaction, and brand advocacy over time.

By addressing these areas, future research can deepen both the academic understanding and practical relevance of H2H marketing, ensuring that religious hospitality evolves not only in efficiency but also in dignity, compassion, and cultural integrity.

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