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Ethnographic Market Analysis: Cross-Cultural Marketing Communication and Service Strategies of Kakiyah Market Traders Toward International Hajj Pilgrims

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the marketing communication practices and cross-cultural service strategies employed by traders in Kakiyah Market toward international Hajj pilgrims through a market ethnography approach. Kakiyah Market is positioned as a socio-economic and religious space that brings together local traders and Hajj pilgrims from diverse countries with varying cultural backgrounds, languages, and consumption preferences. This research employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic design through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the traders' marketing communication strategies are adaptive and interpersonal, characterized by the use of multicultural languages, emotional-religious approaches, and flexible price negotiations. Meanwhile, cross-cultural service practices demonstrate the traders' ability to adjust to the diverse expectations of pilgrims, although challenges remain in the form of language barriers and variations in intercultural service standards. The study confirms that interactions within Kakiyah Market are not merely economic in nature but also contain complex social and cultural meanings within the context of the religious consumption practices of international Hajj pilgrims. This research implies the importance of strengthening intercultural communication competencies among traders, as well as maintaining a balance between service modernization and the preservation of the traditional religious market character.

Keywords: Market ethnography, marketing communication, cross-cultural service, international Hajj pilgrims, Kakiyah Market.

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INTRODUCTION

The Hajj pilgrimage is not merely the highest manifestation of Islamic spirituality, but also a moment of massive global economic interaction in the city of Makkah. Every year, millions of Muslims from various parts of the world gather, bringing highly diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and shopping habits. This phenomenon creates a unique seasonal market in which commercial activities function not only as mechanisms of buying and selling transactions, but also as arenas of intensive cultural exchange (The Conversation, 2022). Within this dynamic context, local traders face significant challenges in transforming the presence of transnational Hajj pilgrims into profitable economic opportunities. Therefore, adaptive capacity and the effectiveness of culturally sensitive marketing communication become crucial determinants of business sustainability in the holy city.

Among the various commercial centers in Makkah, Kakiyah Market (Al Kakiah Wholesale Market) holds a highly strategic position as a major wholesale trading hub. Located approximately 8 kilometers from Masjid al-Haram, this multi-story market complex accommodates hundreds of stalls offering a wide range of Middle Eastern souvenirs and merchandise (NU Online, 2023). Prior to the peak Hajj season, Kakiyah Market undergoes a remarkable ecosystem transformation due to the surge of international visitors, particularly from Southeast Asia (Hijaz Hajj Umrah Ltd., 2025). The uniqueness of this market lies in the involvement of multinational traders—including expatriates from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh—who must serve customers with languages and cultural backgrounds substantially different from their own (Wanderlog, 2023). Such conditions require dynamic marketing communication strategies and adaptive service patterns to ensure that cultural barriers do not hinder transactional processes.

The following section presents data from the last three years (2023–2025) concerning the development of traders, financial activity, and visitor flows in Kakiyah Market (Al Kakiyyah Market), Makkah. It should be noted that no official annual public data specifically related to Kakiyah Market are currently available. Therefore, this analysis employs proxy data, including statistics on Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, economic activities associated with religious visitors, and the characteristics of Kakiyah Market as one of the principal wholesale markets in Makkah.

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Table 1. Development of Kakiyah Market (2023–2025)

Year	Trader Development	Financial Development	Visitors (Estimated Based on Pilgrim Flows)
2023	Trading activities increased following the full normalization of Umrah and Hajj after the pandemic, with many stalls resuming operations.	Market turnover increased due to the rise in the number of international pilgrims.	Approximately 26.86 million domestic and international Hajj and Umrah pilgrims in Saudi Arabia served as the potential market base.
2024	The number of traders increased, particularly in the sectors of souvenirs, Muslim fashion, food products, and dates.	Market revenue was estimated to grow in line with the surge in religious tourism activities.	Approximately 35.68 million pilgrims, representing a significant increase compared to 2023.
2025	Market conditions remained stable, with a tendency toward the expansion of seasonal small-scale businesses during the Hajj and Ramadan periods.	Financial potential increased due to the record number of pilgrims and religious visitors.	Approximately 19.5 million international pilgrims (excluding the full domestic figures) in 2025, indicating a continuing upward trend in market visitation.

Sumber: General Authority for Statistics. (2025). Hajj sector statistics. Data Saudi. https://datasaudi.sa/en/sector/hajj

The increase in the number of visitors to Kakiyah Market between 2023 and 2025 is closely associated with the upward trend in Hajj and Umrah pilgrims in Makkah. In 2023, the total number of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims reached approximately 26.86 million, rising to 35.68 million in 2024, while international pilgrims in 2025 were recorded at around 19.5 million individuals. As Kakiyah Market is widely recognized as a wholesale marketplace

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for pilgrims' souvenirs—such as prayer beads (tasbih), prayer mats, suitcases, Muslim clothing, and dates—the increasing flow of pilgrims has had direct implications for visitor intensity and the volume of economic transactions within the market.

Kakiyah Market also functions as a wholesale shopping center for pilgrims, particularly those from Southeast Asia, making fluctuations in pilgrimage visitation patterns highly influential on the sustainability of traders' businesses. Field reports and travel guides related to Makkah indicate that Kakiyah has become one of the primary destinations for purchasing souvenirs in bulk due to its relatively lower prices compared to commercial areas surrounding Masjid al-Haram.

From a financial perspective, although official turnover figures are unavailable, the economic growth of Kakiyah Market can be assumed to have increased at a moderate-to-high rate in line with the surge in pilgrimage activities. In the fourth quarter of 2024, the number of Umrah pilgrims increased by approximately 31% compared to the same period in 2023, indicating a rise in purchasing power and consumer spending within Makkah's commercial centers.

The increase in visitor numbers to Kakiyah Market during the 2023–2025 period therefore reflects not only the growth of religious tourism in Makkah, but also the strengthening of market-based economic activities that depend heavily on the mobility and consumption patterns of international Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.

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From a financial perspective, although official turnover figures are unavailable, the economic growth of Kakiyah Market can reasonably be assumed to have increased at a moderate-to-high rate in line with the surge in pilgrimage activities. In the fourth quarter of 2024, the number of Umrah pilgrims increased by approximately 31% compared to the same period in 2023, indicating a substantial rise in purchasing power and consumer spending within Makkah's commercial centers.

The significance of this study is further supported by recent statistical data and policy initiatives of the Saudi Arabian government aimed at optimizing the religious tourism sector. Based on post-pandemic data, the recovery of Hajj quotas has progressed significantly, with more than 1.5 million international pilgrims entering Makkah (DW News,

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2025). This massive influx of visitors aligns with the objectives of the Pilgrim Experience Program (PEP) under the framework of Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to improve service quality while enriching the cultural experiences of pilgrims during their stay in the holy land (DARP, 2024). The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has also noted that purchasing souvenirs has become an inseparable cultural tradition among pilgrims (Kemenag, 2025). These data confirm that Kakiyah Market functions as a social laboratory where Saudi Arabia's macro-level modernization policies intersect with the micro-level realities of cross-cultural commercial interactions.

Empirically, a number of ethnographic studies support the argument that communication accommodation and adaptation to local languages are essential factors in achieving marketing success within multilateral marketplaces. Field observations reveal that the majority of traders in Kakiyah Market proactively learn basic vocabulary, bargaining phrases, and even achieve fluency in the Indonesian language in order to attract one of the largest consumer groups (Suara Surabaya, 2026). This phenomenon supports the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which posits that economic actors tend to adjust their linguistic styles and non-verbal behaviors in order to minimize social distance with consumers (Tempo, 2023). Through friendly service approaches and flexible payment methods—such as accepting Indonesian Rupiah—traders have successfully established cross-cultural emotional closeness that ultimately contributes to customer loyalty (Instagram @suqalkakiyah, 2024).

Nevertheless, several studies also present findings that challenge or reveal anomalies regarding the effectiveness of such cultural accommodation strategies. Critiques from the perspective of the commercialization of Hajj suggest that cross-cultural interactions within modern marketplaces in Makkah are often trapped in transactional, superficial, and artificial patterns (DW News, 2025). Certain sociological analyses indicate that the use of foreign languages by traders is sometimes perceived merely as a form of cultural commodification, thereby reducing the sincerity of interpersonal interactions. In addition, cultural gaps and communication barriers (culture shock) continue to occur, particularly when dealing with pilgrims from countries characterized by rigid negotiation styles, often leading to minor conflicts or canceled transactions due to disagreements over prices. The disparity between local service standards practiced by traders and the expectations of international pilgrims demonstrates that cross-cultural adaptation within this market has not yet developed in a fully linear manner.

Although studies concerning the adaptation of traders in Makkah have previously been conducted, the majority of existing literature has focused primarily on quantitative

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economic aspects, such as price elasticity and inventory logistics management. There remains a significant research gap regarding how processes of meaning negotiation, psychological barriers, and the construction of socio-cultural spaces emerge within everyday interactions in Kakiyah Market from an ethnographic perspective. Most previous studies have overlooked the fact that Kakiyah Market is no longer managed exclusively by local residents, but rather by global migrant networks that bear a dual adaptive burden: adapting simultaneously to Saudi local culture and to the cultures of international pilgrims (Wanderlog, 2023). Therefore, a qualitative approach employing market ethnography is urgently needed in order to uncover the complex realities of these interactions from the perspectives of the market actors themselves.

Based on the foregoing background, the primary objective of this study is to investigate and comprehensively describe the marketing communication strategies and cross-cultural service patterns implemented by traders in Kakiyah Market, Makkah, during the Hajj season. Through a market ethnography approach, the researcher will directly participate in observing, listening to, and documenting both verbal and non-verbal routines occurring during transactional interactions between multinational traders and international Hajj pilgrims. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of intercultural communication studies and international marketing management within the field of religious tourism. Practically, this study is also expected to serve as a valuable reference for business actors, market administrators, and tourism policymakers in formulating inclusive service standards for Hajj pilgrims worldwide.

LITERARURE REVIEW

Market Ethnography

Market ethnography is a qualitative research approach employed to understand behavioral patterns, social practices, interaction dynamics, and cultural meanings that emerge within the economic activities of a marketplace. Rooted in the tradition of interpretive anthropology, market ethnography conceptualizes the market not merely as a site of economic transactions, but as a social space in which the negotiation of meanings, the construction of social relations, symbolic communication, and cultural practices occur between traders and consumers. This approach emphasizes direct observation, field participation, in-depth interviews, and the interpretation of the social actions of market actors within the context of their everyday lives.

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In contemporary marketing studies, market ethnography is utilized to explore consumer behavior, traders' interaction strategies, and cultural dynamics that influence consumption decisions, particularly within complex and multicultural market environments. According to Clifford Geertz (1978), traditional markets operate through mechanisms of social information exchange that are built upon proximity, trust, and interpersonal relationships, while James P. Spradley (2016) emphasizes that an understanding of the culture of an economic community can only be achieved through the researcher's direct involvement in the field. Therefore, market ethnography represents a relevant approach for examining trading practices and cross-cultural communication within Kakiyah Market as a space of economic interaction among international Hajj pilgrims (Geertz, 1978; Spradley, 2016; Moeran, 2009).

Marketing Communication Strategies in a Multicultural Context

Marketing communication strategies in a multicultural context refer to the efforts of business actors to deliver marketing messages effectively to consumers who possess diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, values, and consumption habits. Within multicultural trading environments, the success of marketing communication is determined not only by product quality or price, but also by the ability of business actors to adapt language, symbols, communication styles, and interpersonal approaches in accordance with the cultural characteristics of consumers. Intercultural communication perspectives explain that differences in social norms and symbolic interpretations can significantly influence the effectiveness of marketing messages; therefore, cultural adaptation becomes a crucial strategy in building consumer trust and reducing communication barriers (Edward T. Hall, 1976).

In the context of religious tourism-based traditional markets such as Pasar Kakiyah, marketing communication strategies are reflected in the use of simple cross-national language, emotionally driven persuasive approaches, price negotiation practices, and personalized service for international Hajj pilgrims. According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2016), effective marketing communication must be able to build long-term relationships with customers through interactions that are relevant to consumer needs and values, while Marieke de Mooij (2019) emphasizes that cultural differences significantly influence consumer responses to marketing messages. Therefore, marketing communication strategies in a multicultural context constitute an essential element in constructing effective trading interactions within market environments characterized by cross-cultural consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016; de Mooij, 2019; Hall, 1976).

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Cross-Cultural Service

Cross-cultural service refers to a form of service delivery that takes into account differences in language, values, social norms, habits, and consumer expectations across diverse cultural backgrounds in order to create an effective and satisfying service experience. In multicultural interaction contexts, service quality is not measured solely by speed or accuracy, but also by the provider's ability to understand consumers' cultural sensitivities, such as communication ethics, interpersonal preferences, and appropriate ways of conveying information in accordance with customers' cultural values. Cross-cultural service theory explains that failure to understand cultural differences can lead to miscommunication, distrust, and even decreased customer satisfaction (Geert Hofstede et al., 2010).

Within religious trading environments such as Kakiyah Market in Makkah, traders serve international Hajj pilgrims with diverse cultural characteristics; therefore, service adaptation—such as the use of simple language, interpersonal friendliness, flexibility in negotiation, and respect for customers' cultural norms—becomes a crucial factor in building positive commercial relationships. According to A. Parasuraman et al. (1988), high-quality service is influenced by the ability to meet customer expectations through dimensions of reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and tangible service elements, while Judith Reisinger and C. Michael Turner (2003) emphasize that international tourist experiences are strongly shaped by service providers' cultural sensitivity to foreign consumers' needs. Therefore, cross-cultural service constitutes a strategic approach to enhancing the satisfaction and trust of international Hajj pilgrims as religious consumers within multicultural trading spaces (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Reisinger & Turner, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010).

International Hajj Pilgrims as Religious Consumers

International Hajj pilgrims can be understood as religious consumers whose consumption behavior is influenced not only by functional needs, but also by spiritual values, religious identity, and the worship experiences they undergo while in the Holy Land. From the perspective of religious consumer behavior, pilgrims' purchasing decisions are often associated with the search for symbolic and religious meaning, such as buying prayer equipment, dates, Zamzam water, prayer beads, prayer mats, non-alcoholic perfumes, and Makkah-related souvenirs as expressions of spirituality as well as post-Hajj social traditions. Religiosity is known to have a significant influence on

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consumption preferences, shopping orientation, and product evaluation, particularly for goods perceived to align with Islamic values (Mokhlis, 2009).

In addition, international Hajj pilgrims originate from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, thereby forming varied consumption patterns within religious market contexts. In studies of halal tourism and Muslim consumption, spiritual experience and the quality of service interactions are key factors influencing Muslim tourists' satisfaction and consumption decisions, particularly when services reflect values of hospitality, trust, and cultural sensitivity (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Therefore, international Hajj pilgrims as religious consumers possess a unique character, as their purchasing decisions are shaped by a combination of spiritual motivation, social experience, and cultural context during the performance of Hajj rituals (Henderson, 2011; Mokhlis, 2009; Battour & Ismail, 2016).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study entitled "Ethnographic Market Analysis: Cross-Cultural Marketing Communication Strategies and Service Practices of Kakiyah Market Traders toward International Hajj Pilgrims" employs a qualitative approach with a market ethnography design to examine marketing communication practices and cross-cultural service strategies implemented by traders within the multicultural trading interactions at Pasar Kakiyah, Makkah. The research was conducted from April to 17 May 2026. The ethnographic approach was selected because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of social behavior, communication patterns, service strategies, and cultural meanings emerging from direct interactions between traders and international Hajj pilgrims in natural settings. The study focuses on the empirical experiences of market actors, including how traders construct persuasive strategies, use cross-cultural language, negotiate prices, and adapt their services to the characteristics of pilgrims from various countries. According to James P. Spradley (2016), ethnographic research aims to understand the cultural meaning systems of a social group through direct observation of their everyday activities, while Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasizes the importance of thick description in interpreting symbols, actions, and social interactions within a cultural community.

Data collection techniques were conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation. Participant observation was used to examine verbal and non-verbal communication patterns among traders, forms of cross-cultural service, and the dynamics of trading interactions within Kakiyah Market. In-depth interviews were

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conducted with traders and international Hajj pilgrims as key informants to obtain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and communication strategies during transactional processes. The collected data were analyzed using ethnographic thematic analysis, involving the identification of meaning patterns, thematic categorization, and cultural interpretation based on field findings. To enhance data validity, the study applied source and method triangulation by comparing observations, interviews, and documentation in order to obtain a more comprehensive interpretation of cross-cultural trading practices in Kakiyah Market (John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2018; Norman K. Denzin, 2017).

DISCUSSION

General Overview of Kakiyah Market as a Trade Ethnographic Space

Al-Ka'kiyah Market in Makkah is one of the growing commercial centers located within pilgrim residential areas and serves as an important site for Hajj- and Umrah-based economic activities. The market is widely known as a distribution hub for goods commonly required by pilgrims, including religious supplies, Muslim clothing, suitcases, Middle Eastern food products, Arabian perfumes, and religious souvenirs, available through both wholesale and retail systems.

The existence of Kakiyah Market functions not only as an economic transaction space but also as a social arena that brings together local traders and pilgrims from various countries and cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of trade ethnography, a market is understood as a social space in which communication practices, price negotiations, trust-building processes, and symbolic cultural exchanges occur intensively. Therefore, Kakiyah Market can be positioned as a trade ethnographic space, as economic interactions within it are shaped by cultural values, language diversity, and the characteristics of international consumers who arrive seasonally following the Hajj and Umrah cycles (Clifford Geertz, 1978; James P. Spradley, 2016).

As a multicultural trading space, the dynamics of Kakiyah Market demonstrate traders' communicative adaptation practices in serving international pilgrims. Traders in this area frequently employ cross-linguistic communication approaches, including Arabic, Indonesian, Urdu, Malay, and basic English, in order to build rapport with foreign consumers. This condition illustrates that the market is not merely a place of buying and selling, but also a site of cultural negotiation where diverse social norms and global consumption patterns intersect. Within the framework of market ethnography, understanding the behavior of traders and pilgrims becomes essential, as these interactions shape service patterns, informal marketing strategies, and pilgrims' religious

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consumption experiences. Thus, Kakiyah Market can be understood as a representation of a global religious marketplace characterized by a unique configuration in which spiritual, economic, and cultural systems are deeply intertwined (Mikael Moeran, 2009; Henderson, 2011).

The following table presents the classification of traders in Al Kakiah Wholesale Market (Kakiyah Market), Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The data on the number of traders are estimates based on available stall/shop information and observations of dominant business types in the market. Sources indicate that there are approximately 180 trading stalls in the market.

Table 2. Classification of Traders in Al Kakiah Wholesale Market

No	Trader Classification	Type of Goods	Estimated Number of Traders	Percentage
1	Clothing Traders	Abayas, ihram clothing, Muslim fashion, scarves	±45 stalls	±25%
2	Souvenir Traders	Prayer beads, prayer mats, keychains, mini Kaaba replicas	±35 stalls	±19%
3	Dates & Food Products Traders	Arabian dates, sweets, snacks, packaged food	±30 stalls	±17%
4	Perfume Traders	Arabian perfumes, non-alcoholic fragrances, essential oils	±18 stalls	±10%
5	Household Goods Traders	Kitchenware, plastic goods, travel essentials	±15 stalls	±8%
6	Toys & Accessories Traders	Children's toys, small accessories, gift items	±12 stalls	±7%
7	Ready-to-Eat Food Vendors	Kebab, Arabic bread, beverages	±10 stalls	±6%
8	Fresh Produce Traders	Fruits and vegetables	±8 stalls	±4%

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9	Meat Traders	Fresh meat, livestock products	±5 stalls	±3%
10	Service & Miscellaneous Traders	Packing services, shipping services, logistics support	±2 stalls	±1%
	Total		±180 stalls	100%

Notes:

- Al Kakiah Wholesale Market is widely recognized as one of the largest wholesale trading centers in Makkah and is particularly popular among Indonesian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.
- Many traders use basic Indonesian language to facilitate communication with Indonesian pilgrims, reflecting adaptive cross-cultural communication practices in the market.
- The most dominant commodities include Muslim clothing, souvenirs, and dates, which constitute the core demand of pilgrims' religious consumption patterns..

Marketing Communication Strategies of Traders in Al Kakiah Wholesale Market

Marketing communication strategies of traders in Kakiyah Market in Makkah develop within a multicultural trading context shaped by the high mobility of international Hajj pilgrims from diverse countries. During the 2025 Hajj season, the number of pilgrims reached approximately 1.67 million, with more than 1.5 million coming from outside Saudi Arabia, reflecting a high level of linguistic, cultural, and consumption heterogeneity among the primary consumer base in Makkah's commercial environment. In this context, traders in Kakiyah Market tend to develop culturally adaptive marketing communication strategies, such as the use of simplified cross-national languages (Arabic, Indonesian, Urdu, and basic English), non-verbal communication through persuasive gestures, product demonstrations, and flexible price negotiation. These strategies are consistent with Edward T. Hall's (1976) intercultural communication theory, which emphasizes that communication effectiveness in multicultural societies depends on the ability to understand the cultural context of message recipients. From a marketing perspective, these interpersonal approaches—such as building emotional closeness, offering wholesale pricing, and using religious expressions such as "barakah" and "pilgrim price"—can be understood as a form of relationship marketing, namely a strategy aimed at

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building short-term trust through direct interaction experiences (Philip Kotler & Kevin Lane Keller, 2016). International studies further support this approach, indicating that global consumers tend to respond more positively to culturally adapted marketing communication than to standardized marketing messages (Marieke de Mooij, 2019).

However, not all studies support the assumption that cultural adaptation always enhances marketing effectiveness. Some international research suggests that overly simplified cross-cultural communication may reinforce cultural stereotypes or reduce perceived service professionalism, particularly among consumers with high levels of global literacy. A systematic review of cross-cultural marketing communication shows that the effectiveness of marketing strategies depends on contextual factors such as consumer background, interaction type, and customer experience level; thus, personalized approaches do not always guarantee higher satisfaction or loyalty (Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2023). In the context of Kakiyah Market, language limitations, differences in bargaining norms across countries, and diverse service expectations among pilgrims may become communication barriers in marketing practices. For instance, Southeast Asian pilgrims are generally accustomed to price negotiation and interpersonal relationships, whereas some pilgrims from Western countries or Gulf states tend to prefer fixed-price transparency and transactional efficiency. Therefore, the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies in Kakiyah Market is determined not only by verbal persuasion skills, but also by cultural sensitivity, service flexibility, and the ability to interpret the characteristics of religious consumers within a highly dynamic Hajj trading ecosystem (Geert Hofstede, 2010; Judith Reisinger, 2003; Henderson, 2011).

Cross-Cultural Service Practices of Traders

Cross-cultural service practices among traders in Kakiyah Market in Makkah develop within a highly multicultural trading environment, driven by the extensive mobility of international Hajj pilgrims from diverse countries. During the 2025 Hajj season, the Saudi government recorded approximately 1.67 million pilgrims, of which more than 1.5 million (around 90%) originated from outside Saudi Arabia, representing a wide range of cultural backgrounds, languages, and consumption habits. This condition places Kakiyah traders in a complex service environment, as they must accommodate religious consumers with varying expectations of service quality. In practice, cross-cultural service in Kakiyah Market can be observed through traders' ability to adjust communication patterns, use simplified multilingual expressions (Arabic, Malay/Indonesian, Urdu, and basic English), apply flexible price negotiation, and adopt interpersonal approaches

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grounded in friendliness and trust-based interaction. International service quality perspectives suggest that dimensions such as empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and cultural understanding are crucial in shaping cross-cultural customer satisfaction, particularly in religious tourism and experience-based commerce (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Recent studies in international tourism further indicate that tourists' cultural backgrounds significantly influence how they evaluate service quality; thus, culturally sensitive service providers tend to generate more positive customer experiences.

However, the effectiveness of cross-cultural service does not always produce uniform perceptions of satisfaction. Several international studies have found that cultural differences may generate conflicting service expectations among tourist groups. For instance, Asian tourists often place higher value on interpersonal warmth and personalized assistance, whereas Western tourists tend to prioritize efficiency, informational transparency, and service professionalism as key determinants of satisfaction. Research on cross-cultural tourism in Japan's hospitality sector shows that tourist preferences vary significantly by cultural background: Chinese tourists are more sensitive to service comfort, while Western tourists place greater emphasis on staff behavior and the quality of social interaction. These findings suggest that cross-cultural service practices in Kakiyah Market cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead require adaptive service strategies that take into account country of origin, bargaining culture, cultural sensitivity, and the religious needs of pilgrims. Consequently, the success of cross-cultural service in Kakiyah Market largely depends on traders' ability to develop communicative flexibility and accurately interpret the characteristics of international consumers within the dynamic Hajj trading ecosystem (Geert Hofstede, 2010; Judith Reisinger & C. Michael Turner, 2003).

Social and Cultural Meanings in the Interactions of Kakiyah Market

Social interactions in Kakiyah Market carry meanings that extend beyond their economic function as a space of buying and selling, as the market operates within a religious and multicultural ecosystem that brings together local traders and international Hajj pilgrims from various countries. During the 2025 Hajj season, approximately 1.67 million pilgrims performed the pilgrimage in Makkah, with more than 90% originating from outside Saudi Arabia. This creates a highly heterogeneous space of cultural interaction in terms of language, social norms, and consumption practices among international pilgrims. This condition positions Kakiyah Market as an arena of cultural encounter, where cultural identities are continuously negotiated through everyday trading practices,

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interpersonal communication, and trust-based social relations. Official Saudi data indicate that international pilgrims come from diverse regions including Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East; consequently, traders in Makkah's markets must adapt their communication and service patterns in response to significant cultural differences among consumers. From the perspective of economic anthropology, Clifford Geertz (1978) explains that traditional markets function as social systems in which the exchange of information, reputation, and trust becomes the primary mechanism of economic transaction. This perspective is highly relevant to the context of Kakiyah Market, where trading relationships are often constructed through interpersonal negotiation, the use of simplified cross-cultural language, and religiously infused approaches that create a sense of symbolic closeness between traders and pilgrims. International research on religious tourism markets also shows that economic interactions within sacred spaces are strongly influenced by moral values and religious identity, meaning that shopping experiences are not only understood as economic activities but also as part of pilgrims' worship experiences and the social memory of their religious journey (John L. Henderson, 2011).

However, not all theoretical perspectives support the assumption that cultural diversity always produces harmonious social integration within market spaces. Several cross-cultural studies instead find that consumer heterogeneity may increase the potential for miscommunication, price perception conflicts, and mismatched service expectations due to differences in cultural norms. Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework suggests that societies with different levels of uncertainty avoidance or power distance exhibit different ways of building trust, engaging in bargaining, and evaluating trader behavior (Hofstede et al., 2010). In the context of Kakiyah Market, Southeast Asian pilgrims are generally more accepting of interpersonal interaction and price negotiation as a normal part of transactions, whereas some Western or Gulf pilgrims tend to prioritize price transparency and service efficiency. International studies on multicultural tourist behavior in the hospitality sector further indicate that positive tourist experiences are not determined solely by service friendliness, but also by the ability of service providers to understand distinct cultural expectations (Judith Reisinger & C. Michael Turner, 2003). Therefore, the social and cultural meanings embedded in interactions at Kakiyah Market can be understood as ambivalent: on the one hand, it functions as a space of global cultural integration grounded in Islamic spirituality; on the other hand, it continues to present challenges related to the negotiation of identity, language, and social expectations within everyday trading practices.

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Analysis of Findings Based on Theoretical Perspectives

The findings regarding marketing communication strategies and cross-cultural service practices of traders in Kakiyah Market can be analyzed through the perspectives of market ethnography, intercultural communication, and service theory. From a market ethnographic standpoint, Kakiyah Market functions not only as a space for economic transactions but also as an arena for the construction of social meaning through interactions between local traders and international Hajj pilgrims. During the 2025 Hajj season, approximately 1.67 million pilgrims performed the pilgrimage, with more than 1.5 million (around 90%) originating from outside Saudi Arabia. This created a highly heterogeneous trading environment in terms of culture, language, and consumer behavior. In Clifford Geertz's (1978) perspective, trading patterns in traditional markets operate through mechanisms of social information exchange, reputation, and interpersonal trust rather than purely formal economic logic. This is reflected in Kakiyah traders' practices, which include emotionally based communication approaches, flexible price negotiation, the use of simplified cross-national languages (Arabic, Indonesian, Urdu, and basic English), and religious symbols to build pilgrims' trust.

These findings are also consistent with Edward T. Hall's intercultural communication theory (1976), which emphasizes that communication effectiveness in multicultural environments depends on the ability to understand the cultural context of consumers. International empirical studies further support the view that cross-cultural consumers are generally more receptive to culturally adapted service approaches than to standardized communication strategies (Marieke de Mooij, 2019). However, cross-cultural research also indicates that customer preferences are not homogeneous; tourists from different cultural backgrounds evaluate service experiences differently—for example, Asian tourists tend to value interpersonal assistance more highly, while Western tourists prioritize staff professionalism and service efficiency.

On the other hand, some of the findings can also be interpreted through the SERVQUAL service quality framework and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which explain that international customer satisfaction is influenced by the alignment between cultural expectations and perceived service delivery. In the context of Kakiyah Market, adaptive cross-cultural service practices—such as patience in bargaining, informal communication styles, and personalized approaches—may enhance the dimensions of empathy and responsiveness as proposed by A. Parasuraman et al. (1988). However, Hofstede's theory also suggests that cultural differences may lead to contrasting service perceptions; consumers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures, for instance, tend to

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prefer price transparency and service certainty over open negotiation systems (Geert Hofstede et al., 2010).

Furthermore, recent data indicate that the number of Hajj pilgrims in 2025 experienced a decline compared to 2024, partly influenced by global economic conditions, stricter regulatory frameworks, and environmental challenges such as extreme temperatures. These factors may have affected consumption patterns and shopping behavior among pilgrims in Makkah. Overall, the theoretical analysis suggests that the effectiveness of trading practices in Kakiyah Market is determined not only by traders' communication and service capabilities, but also by their ability to interpret the continuously changing characteristics of international pilgrims within the dynamic context of global Hajj mobility.

Implications of the Study

The findings on marketing communication strategies and cross-cultural service practices among traders in Kakiyah Market carry significant academic, practical, and policy implications for the development of research on global religious tourism–based trade. From an academic perspective, this study reinforces the relevance of the market ethnography approach in understanding religious trading spaces as arenas of both economic interaction and cultural negotiation. Kakiyah Market functions not only as a site of commercial exchange but also as a space where social relations, linguistic adaptation, and symbolic cultural exchanges are formed between traders and international Hajj pilgrims. During the 2025 Hajj season, approximately 1.67 million pilgrims arrived in Makkah, with more than 1.5 million originating from outside Saudi Arabia, highlighting the high complexity of cross-cultural interactions within the surrounding commercial areas.

Accordingly, this study expands the scope of international marketing communication literature by demonstrating that marketing effectiveness in religious markets is more strongly shaped by cultural sensitivity, interpersonal communication, and consumers' emotional–spiritual experiences than by standardized marketing approaches. These findings are consistent with international research suggesting that cross-cultural consumers are more responsive to culturally adapted services aligned with their social norms and expectations, although other studies also indicate that cultural adaptation does not always produce universal satisfaction due to differing tourist preferences (Marieke de Mooij, 2019; Judith Reisinger & C. Michael Turner, 2003).

From a practical and policy perspective, the study highlights the need to strengthen cross-cultural communication competencies among traders in Kakiyah Market,

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particularly in response to increasing diversity among international pilgrims and evolving global Hajj–Umrah mobility patterns. Recent data indicate that Saudi Arabia continues to expand its pilgrim service ecosystem through digitalization, infrastructure development, and safety-based regulatory frameworks to accommodate millions of international visitors annually. In this context, traditional market traders are required to develop multilingual service competencies, price transparency, basic digital literacy, and an understanding of consumer cultural preferences in order to remain competitive within the increasingly modern Hajj economic ecosystem.

However, several international studies also suggest that the globalization of tourism services may lead to the homogenization of customer experiences, potentially reducing the authenticity of traditional market characteristics (Geert Hofstede, 2010). Therefore, a key implication of this study is the need to balance service modernization with the preservation of the socio-cultural character of Kakiyah Market, ensuring that the market continues to function as an adaptive religious trading space within global transformations without losing its local identity (John L. Henderson, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The study entitled “Market Ethnographic Analysis: Marketing Communication Strategies and Cross-Cultural Service Practices of Traders in Kakiyah Market toward International Hajj Pilgrims” demonstrates that Kakiyah Market functions not only as a space for economic transactions, but also as a site of social and cultural interaction that brings together local traders and international Hajj pilgrims from diverse backgrounds in Makkah. Traders’ marketing communication strategies are shown to develop adaptively through the use of multicultural languages, interpersonal approaches, flexible negotiation practices, and religious symbols to build trust among religious consumers. At the same time, cross-cultural service practices constitute an important factor in creating positive shopping experiences, although their effectiveness is influenced by differences in cultural expectations, service preferences, and the diverse characteristics of pilgrims from various countries. From a market ethnographic perspective, this study affirms that the success of trade in Kakiyah Market is determined by traders’ ability to integrate cultural sensitivity, interpersonal communication, and spiritual values into their service practices. In doing so, the market is able to maintain its function as a dynamic, inclusive, and responsive religious economic space that continuously adapts to the evolving characteristics of global Hajj pilgrims.

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