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PILGRIM EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT IN DIGITAL UMRAH SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Purpose: *Digital transformation has extended the management of Umrah services well beyond promotion to communication, registration, payment, religious guidance, accompaniment and post-return contact, yet digitalisation, service quality, trust and satisfaction are still studied largely as separate topics. This study analyses how pilgrim experience is managed across the service journey of digitally transforming Umrah travel agencies and how digital technology and human interaction are integrated.* ***Design/methodology/approach****: A qualitative library research design was used. Journal articles, academic books and official reports on digital transformation, Umrah services, customer experience and customer journey were identified, screened, coded and synthesised through thematic analysis.* ***Findings:*** *Digital service transformation is a managerial change in how agencies design and coordinate pilgrim experience across touchpoints. Technology strengthens accessibility, communication speed, administrative convenience, transparency and responsiveness, whereas human interaction remains indispensable for consultation, ritual guidance, accompaniment and problem resolution. Five experience dimensions (accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, assurance and personalisation) were identified and organised into the Digital–Human Pilgrim Experience Management (DH-PEM) framework, which links digital service transformation, customer journey, pilgrim experience management, trust and satisfaction.* ***Research limitations/implications:*** *The framework is derived from literature synthesis and has not been tested statistically; field-based qualitative and quantitative validation is needed.* ***Practical implications:*** *Agencies should map the pilgrim journey and allocate technological and human roles touchpoint by touchpoint.* ***Originality/value:*** *The study positions pilgrim experience, rather than technology adoption, as the central object of Umrah service management and extends da'wah management scholarship with a service-journey perspective.*
Keywords: *digital transformation, Umrah services, pilgrim experience, customer journey, service management*

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Umrah travel agencies are digitalising rapidly, but digital tools do not automatically produce a good pilgrim experience. This study synthesises research on digital transformation, customer experience and religious travel to explain how agencies can manage the whole pilgrim journey, from first enquiry to post-return contact. It shows where technology should lead (information, administration, payment) and where people must remain central (ritual guidance, accompaniment, problem solving). The resulting framework helps scholars of da'wah management, agency managers and policymakers design services that are efficient, trustworthy and spiritually meaningful for pilgrims.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have moved from the periphery to the core of how service organisations design, deliver and evaluate their offerings. Research on digital customer experience shows that technology now shapes the utilitarian, social, informational and affective sides of the service encounter (Chiang, 2023), while work on digital service innovation describes how digitised resources redistribute governance and value creation across service ecosystems (Vargo et al., 2024). These shifts are especially visible in religious travel. The Pilgrim Experience Program, launched within Saudi Vision 2030, makes the quality of the pilgrim's journey an explicit policy objective, and the programme reported more than 19.5 million international pilgrims and Umrah performers in 2025 (Pilgrim Experience Program, 2026). Official reporting also points to high satisfaction levels and to the wider use of digital platforms in service delivery (Saudi Press Agency, 2026), and scholarship on Hajj management documents how artificial intelligence is being used to manage crowds and sustain the pilgrimage (Abalkhail & Al Amri, 2022). Indonesian Umrah travel agencies sit between pilgrims and this evolving ecosystem. For them, digitalisation now reaches information search, registration, administration, payment, ritual guidance, accompaniment and post-return communication, producing hybrid service patterns that combine digital channels with face-to-face interaction (Faiza & Sholehah, 2025; Rossitika & Mudjahidin, 2024).

A growing body of work examines what makes Umrah and wider religious tourism services succeed. Studies of Umrah travel show that trust significantly predicts pilgrim satisfaction at PT Adhiya Tour & Travel Bandung and that service quality and trust jointly shape satisfaction (Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025), while a more recent study finds trust to be the only direct path to satisfaction that held in its model (Yanti et al., 2025). Service quality and brand trust are related to loyalty among Maktour Travel pilgrims, with satisfaction acting as a mediator (Ardhani et al., 2025), and the operation of Umrah services is linked to customer value, trust and commitment (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Research on the pilgrimage to Makkah reports that satisfaction with medical services and religious guidance predicted spiritual satisfaction, whereas food, transport and accommodation did not (Hassan et al., 2022a), and that pilgrims fall into motivational segments with different satisfaction and loyalty profiles (Hassan et al., 2022b). Reviews of halal tourism describe satisfaction research as still at an early stage (Ekka & Bhardwaj, 2024); evidence from Muslim travellers suggests that halal-friendly attributes operate through perceived value and destination trust rather than directly (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022), and a study of Indonesian halal tourism links religiosity, digital halal literacy and destination attributes to satisfaction, trust and revisit intention (Abror et al., 2025). Studies of religious sites in other traditions likewise show that emotional experience and place attachment feed satisfaction and loyalty (Obradović, 2024). On the digital side, research on transformation in Hajj and Umrah travel companies connects technology with leadership and consumer preferences (Rossitika & Mudjahidin, 2024), digitalisation of Hajj and Umrah management is associated with efficiency and wider reach (Faiza & Sholehah, 2025), and recent work on Umrah agencies documents platform-based registration, payment and marketing (Pembayun & Lina, 2026). Related studies examine the digital-era backpacker Umrah phenomenon and its implications for pilgrims' spirituality (Kahfi et al., 2025), service management strategies and service quality as drivers of pilgrim satisfaction (Ridho et al., 2025), and the role of the muthawif in agency management (Fallah & Muhajarah, 2024). At the system level, evidence from Hajj health services shows how fragmented electronic systems hamper coordination and why integrated platforms are proposed (Aljohani et al., 2022).

Despite this progress, the literature remains fragmented. Digital transformation is mostly examined through technology adoption, efficiency, marketing or business sustainability, whereas service quality studies assess service dimensions and their effects on satisfaction or loyalty. The quantitative designs that dominate Umrah research measure relationships among

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variables but say little about how trust and satisfaction are produced through everyday service processes (Ardhani et al., 2025; Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025). Outside religious services, customer experience scholarship has moved from satisfaction towards journeys: journey quality, understood as seamlessness, personalisation and coherence, explains customer loyalty beyond conventional service quality (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021); effective journeys drive brand loyalty (Reitsamer et al., 2024); engagement journeys extend beyond purchase-related touchpoints (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024); and complex digital services require deliberate coordination of touchpoints across journey phases (Kandil et al., 2024; Terpoorten et al., 2024). In the literature reviewed here, this journey logic has not been systematically applied to Umrah travel management, and the integration of digital technology with human interaction in a service that is simultaneously logistical, religious and emotional remains under-theorised. Research on human–technology collaboration indicates that customers evaluate robots, chatbots and employees differently across the journey (Leiño Calleja et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023), but these insights have rarely been brought to bear on pilgrimage services.

This gap matters because digitalisation does not automatically yield a good service experience. Digital systems can accelerate registration, payment and information delivery, yet pilgrims continue to need accompaniment, clear information, reliable service and ritual guidance, and these needs are felt most strongly when something goes wrong. The managerial challenge is therefore not only how agencies use technology but how technology is integrated with work processes and human interaction to produce a consistent experience. Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives, framed as research questions: (RQ1) How does digital service transformation reconfigure the service journey of Umrah travel agencies? (RQ2) How is pilgrim experience formed and managed across the touchpoints of this journey? (RQ3) How are digital technology and human interaction integrated to meet pilgrims' needs, and how is this integration related to trust and satisfaction?

The study offers four contributions. Theoretically, it combines customer experience management, service-dominant logic and customer journey research to explain pilgrim experience as a managed, cumulative process and not as a single satisfaction score. Conceptually, it proposes the Digital–Human Pilgrim Experience Management (DH-PEM) framework and six research propositions that can guide later empirical work. Methodologically, it demonstrates a transparent thematic library research procedure for building a service framework in a field where empirical evidence is dispersed. Practically, it gives Umrah agencies a basis for mapping the pilgrim journey and allocating digital and human roles. For da'wah management, it extends the discipline's concern with the management of religious services by treating pilgrim experience as a managerial object in its own right.

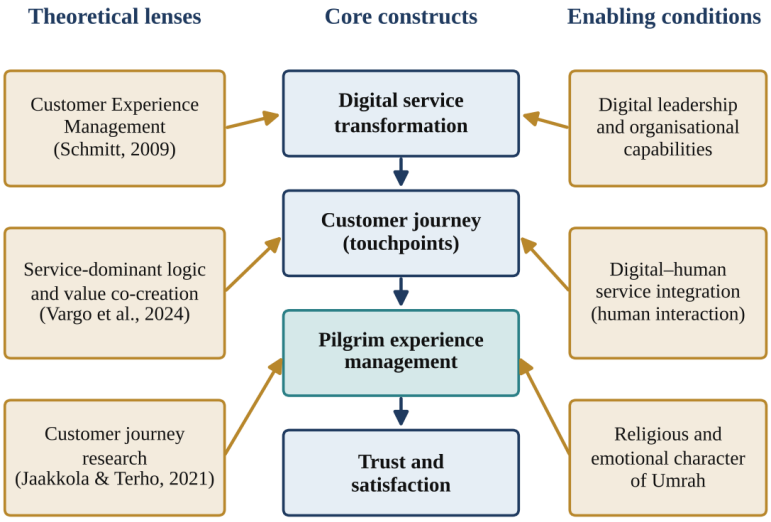
LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical discussion rests on three complementary lenses (Figure 1). The first is customer experience management, which treats every interaction as part of the experience a customer forms and directs management towards consistency across the entire journey rather than towards the end result alone (Schmitt, 2009). Work on user and brand experience in digital products and services reinforces the point that experience is a psychological outcome shaped across touchpoints (Van De Sand et al., 2020), and analysis of 2,178 service journal articles identifies four types of digital experience, namely utility, sociability, informativeness and arousal (Chiang, 2023). Recent scholarship also stresses that customer experience cannot be separated from employee experience and from human experience more broadly, each with a distinct managerial focus (Gustafsson et al., 2024). This last point is important for Umrah services, where frontline guides and officers are part of the product pilgrims consume.

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Figure 1
Theoretical framework of the study



Source: Authors' conceptualisation based on Schmitt (2009), Jaakkola & Terho (2021) and Vargo et al. (2024).

The second lens is service-dominant logic, which locates value in co-creation among actors and resources. Digital service innovation is understood as using digital technology to create services and to configure ecosystems in which stakeholders co-create value (Rabetino et al., 2024), and the distinctive feature of digital contexts is that resources become more fluid, making distributed governance and novel outcomes more visible (Vargo et al., 2024). Humans and artificial intelligence can be conceptualised as entangled resources in value co-creation (Kaartemo & Helkkula, 2025), and value co-creation with smart technologies emerges from the interplay of online and offline agency with physical–digital materiality (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2025). The third lens is customer journey research. Journey quality has three dimensions, seamlessness, personalisation and coherence (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021); engagement journeys capture non-purchase investments of resources across touchpoints (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024); and phygital journeys are composed of hybrid artefacts, blended contexts, circular actions and intertwined emotions (Mele et al., 2024; Gueznai & Elboussadi, 2024). Phygital experiences can be designed with extended reality technologies that enrich their cognitive, social, sensory and contextual dimensions (Batat & Hammedi, 2023; Dastane et al., 2025), and in-store technologies serve utilitarian, hedonic, social and playful needs (Bonfanti et al., 2023). Customer experience types in phygital settings differ in the intensity of customers' reactions to firm stimuli (Pusceddu et al., 2023), and phygital research increasingly asks for multi-actor perspectives that include employees and recognise both value creation and value destruction (Mulcahy et al., 2026).

Four constructs are defined from these lenses. Digital service transformation is the change in how an agency designs, manages and delivers services through the integration of digital technology with organisational processes and human interaction, understood as an organisational change that affects service structure, interaction and value creation (Deiters & Meister, 2025). Its success depends on organisational capabilities: digital leaders build digital sensing, seizing and transforming capabilities (Albannai et al., 2025), leadership steers business model innovation and organisational change (Malik et al., 2025), digital leadership capability strengthens the performance consequences of dynamic capabilities (Chatterjee et al., 2023), digital leadership is linked to sustainable performance (Khaw et al., 2022), and digital capabilities raise organisational agility in public-sector settings (Atobishi et al., 2024). The

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customer journey is the sequence of touchpoints through which a pilgrim encounters the agency from information search to post-return contact (Kandil et al., 2024; Terpoorten et al., 2024). Pilgrim experience management is the coordinated management of these touchpoints so that the pilgrim's cumulative experience is consistent and meaningful. Trust and satisfaction are the relational outcomes that service marketing theory treats as central to long-term customer relationships (Zeithaml et al., 2022); in digital settings both are shaped by e-service quality and user experience (Mamakou et al., 2024; Venkatakrishnan et al., 2023), by consistent and fluent interaction across channels (Lin et al., 2023), and by how personalisation is balanced against privacy (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2024; Vu et al., 2026). Customer experience management and service-dominant logic jointly serve as the grand theoretical foundation, because together they explain why the experience is produced across the journey and by whom.

Research Proposition Development

Because the study is qualitative and conceptual, it formulates research propositions rather than hypotheses. The first concerns the relationship between transformation and the journey. Digitalisation of Hajj and Umrah management reaches information, administration and payment (Faiza & Sholehah, 2025; Pembayun & Lina, 2026) and, as customer journey research shows, multiplies and connects touchpoints (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024; Kandil et al., 2024). We therefore propose: P1: Digital service transformation reshapes the pilgrim customer journey by multiplying and connecting touchpoints before, during and after Umrah. Journey quality in turn explains outcomes beyond service quality (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021; Reitsamer et al., 2024), which suggests that experience arises from how journeys are managed: P2: The pilgrim customer journey shapes pilgrim experience through management of touchpoints, not through the availability of technology alone.

Technology alone does not secure this result. Leadership and organisational capabilities are consistently found to determine whether digital transformation succeeds (Albannai et al., 2025; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2025), which gives P3: Organisational capabilities (digital leadership, readiness and staff competence) condition the extent to which digital service transformation reshapes the journey into a coherent experience. Evidence from service encounters further shows that customers rate employees as more customer-oriented than robots and that switching from an employee to a robot during a journey weakens the robot's evaluation (Leiño Calleja et al., 2023), that chatbot recovery after service failure yields lower satisfaction and revisit intention than human recovery (Zhu et al., 2023), that chatbots can both improve and harm customer experience (Ranieri et al., 2024), and that willing, high-quality employees can compensate for weaker robot performance (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2022). Combined with the religious and emotional character of Umrah, where ritual guidance and medical support shape spiritual satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2022a), this yields P4: The allocation of digital and human roles by touchpoint conditions pilgrim experience, with technology leading informational and transactional touchpoints and human interaction leading consultative, ritual and problem-resolution touchpoints.

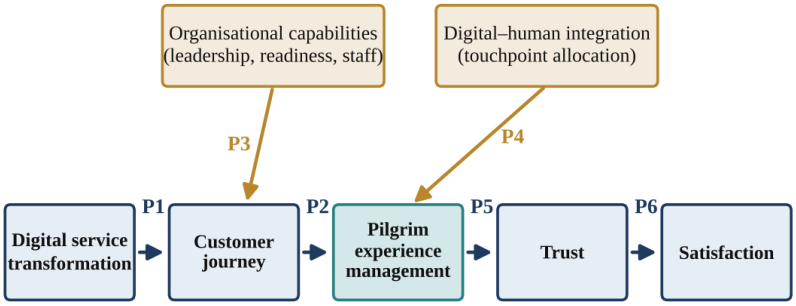
Finally, the relational outcomes follow from experience. Trust has been shown to be a significant determinant of Umrah pilgrim satisfaction (Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025; Yanti et al., 2025), quality of operation relates to trust and commitment (Rahmawati et al., 2023), and satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality, brand trust and loyalty (Ardhani et al., 2025). We therefore propose P5: Pilgrim experience management strengthens pilgrims' trust in the agency, and P6: Trust is the main route through which pilgrim experience translates into satisfaction and a continued relationship with the agency. The propositions are interpretive and are intended to be tested in later field studies.

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Research Model

The research model (Figure 2) turns this reasoning into an analytical structure. Digital service transformation leads to a reconfigured customer journey (P1), which is converted into pilgrim experience through touchpoint management (P2); organisational capabilities (P3) and digital–human integration (P4) condition these transitions; and pilgrim experience management generates trust (P5) and, through trust, satisfaction (P6). The model aligns the research questions, theoretical lenses and propositions: RQ1 corresponds to P1 and P3, RQ2 to P2 and P4, and RQ3 to P4 to P6. It also frames the thematic analysis reported in the Method and Result sections. Because it is derived from literature, it is not a causal model tested statistically; it is a structured proposal for a service that has so far been studied mostly through separate variables.

Figure 2
Research model and propositions (P1–P6)



Solid arrows: sequential relationships proposed from the synthesis; gold arrows: conditioning factors.

Source: Authors' conceptualisation from the literature synthesis.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design. The design was chosen because the objective is to examine and synthesise scholarship on digital service transformation, Umrah service management, pilgrim experience and technology-enabled services, and to build a conceptual framework from it, rather than to measure variables in the field. Library research is suited to an area where relevant evidence is dispersed across service marketing, religious tourism, information systems and da'wah management, and where a transparent synthesis can reveal patterns that single studies cannot. The design aligns with the theoretical lenses and the research questions set out above, and the resulting framework is expressly conceptual and not a causal test.

The research setting is the scholarly literature on digital transformation of Umrah and Hajj services and on customer experience and journey management. The analytical corpus comprises journal articles, academic books and chapters, and official institutional reports. Because the study is not a survey or an interview study, there is no population of respondents or informants; sampling was purposive and criterion-based. Sources were included when they (a) addressed digitalisation or service transformation, Umrah or Hajj services, religious tourism, customer experience, customer journey, trust, satisfaction or human–technology interaction; (b) were published in credible scholarly outlets or by official institutions; and (c) contributed to constructing the conceptual framework. Recent publications were prioritised, and a majority of

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the sources cited were published within the last five years. Studies without a direct link to the research focus were excluded.

Data were collected through systematic searching of academic databases, publisher platforms and official sources using combinations of keywords such as “digital transformation”, “Umrah services”, “Hajj and Umrah digitalisation”, “pilgrim experience”, “customer experience”, “customer journey”, “phygital”, “digital service innovation”, “service quality and trust” and “human–AI service encounters”. Records were screened by title and abstract and then by full text where available, and bibliographic details of the retained sources, including authors, year, outlet and DOI, were verified against the publisher or repository record. Searching and screening were iterative: reading of earlier sources suggested new terms, and sources that lacked a clear connection to the research problem were removed. The study draws on published literature only, so no interview guide, observation protocol or questionnaire was used.

Because the study is not a measurement study, there are no scale items or reflective or formative indicators. Instead, the key constructs were operationalised conceptually from the literature and used as coding categories: digital service transformation, customer journey stage, experience dimension (accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, assurance and personalisation), digital–human role allocation, trust and satisfaction. Definitions were adapted from established studies in service marketing and customer experience research (for example, Jaakkola & Terho, 2021; Schmitt, 2009; Zeithaml et al., 2022) to ensure conceptual alignment with the wider international literature.

Data were analysed with reflexive thematic analysis carried out manually, following six steps: (1) familiarisation through full reading of each source; (2) initial coding of relevant findings and arguments; (3) grouping codes into candidate themes; (4) comparing sources to identify convergence, divergence and gaps; (5) interpreting themes descriptively and analytically against the research questions; and (6) synthesising themes into a conceptual framework and research propositions. Table 1 summarises the coding scheme. Trustworthiness was supported by selecting credible sources, triangulating each theme across several independent sources, keeping the link between codes and sources traceable, and presenting the final framework explicitly as a synthesis and not as a tested relationship.

Table 1
Coding Scheme Used in the Thematic Analysis

No.	Theme	Illustrative codes	Representative sources	Analytical role
1.	Digital service transformation	Information, communication, registration, payment, monitoring; leadership and readiness	Rossitika & Mudjahidin (2024); Faiza & Sholehah (2025); Malik et al. (2025)	Defines the change driver (RQ1)
2.	Reconfigured customer journey	Pre-, during- and post-Umrah touchpoints; hybrid journeys	Jaakkola & Terho (2021); Kandil et al. (2024); Mele et al. (2024)	Structures the analysis (RQ1, RQ2)
3.	Pilgrim experience dimensions	Accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, assurance, personalisation	Fadilah & Solahudin (2025); Hassan et al. (2022a); Chiang (2023)	Specifies experience content (RQ2)
4.	Digital–human integration	Role allocation; robot, chatbot and employee evaluation; guide competence	Leiño Calleja et al. (2023); Zhu et al. (2023); Fallah & Muhajarah (2024)	Explains integration (RQ3)
5.	Relational outcomes	Trust, satisfaction, loyalty, commitment	Ardhani et al. (2025); Yanti et al. (2025); Rahmawati et al. (2023)	Links experience to outcomes (RQ3)

Source: Authors' analysis based on the literature synthesis.

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RESULT

The results are organised around the three research questions. The thematic synthesis produced five interrelated themes: digital transformation in Umrah service management, the reconfiguration of the pilgrim service journey, the dimensions of pilgrim experience management, the integration of digital technology with human interaction, and an integrative management model.

Digital Transformation in Umrah Service Management

The synthesis shows that digital transformation in Umrah services has moved from the use of technology as a communication and promotion medium towards the integration of technology across service processes. Digitalisation now covers information provision, communication with pilgrims, registration, administrative management, payment, departure information, and monitoring and service after Umrah. Technology is therefore no longer an add-on but is becoming part of the service management system (Faiza & Sholehah, 2025; Rossitika & Mudjahidin, 2024; Pembayun & Lina, 2026). This is consistent with the wider conceptualisation of digital service innovation as the configuration of services and ecosystems through digital technology (Rabetino et al., 2024).

The literature also indicates that transformation gives agencies opportunities to improve efficiency and accessibility. Information can be delivered faster, administrative steps become more practical, and communication no longer depends entirely on face-to-face meetings. At the same time, transformation changes expectations: pilgrims increasingly need information that is fast, clear, accessible and consistent at every stage. Evidence from Hajj health services shows how the absence of integrated systems fragments service delivery (Aljohani et al., 2022), and evidence from Hajj management shows how advanced technologies are used to manage large-scale operations (Abalkhail & Al Amri, 2022). The success of transformation is not determined by technology alone. Leadership, organisational readiness, human resource competence and the ability to adapt technology to pilgrims' needs are decisive (Albannai et al., 2025; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2025). Digital transformation in Umrah services can therefore be understood as a change in the service system that connects technology, organisational processes and pilgrims' needs.

Reconfiguration of the Pilgrim Service Journey

Digitalisation changes the pilgrim's journey from the stage before purchase to the stage after worship. At the outset, pilgrims obtain information on packages, facilities, schedules, costs, guides and services through multiple digital channels. Registration and administration are increasingly carried out through digital systems, which produces a more connected journey and reduces dependence on face-to-face interaction for certain processes. The resulting pattern is hybrid: technology provides speed and ease of access, whereas human interaction is still needed where explanation, accompaniment, decision-making and problem solving are required. Studies on Umrah service management and on digital-era Umrah consistently identify communication, professionalism, responsiveness and accompaniment as important to pilgrim experience (Kahfi et al., 2025; Ridho et al., 2025).

The journey cannot be understood through digital touchpoints alone. Every interaction between pilgrim and agency forms a chain of linked experiences: information provided at the outset, ease of administration, clarity of communication, quality of accompaniment and responses to needs all shape perceptions of the whole service, which is why journey quality predicts loyalty beyond conventional service quality (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021; Reitsamer et al., 2024). Table 2 and Figure 3 summarise how digital and human roles are distributed across five journey stages derived from the synthesis. Digital roles are strongest in the information and

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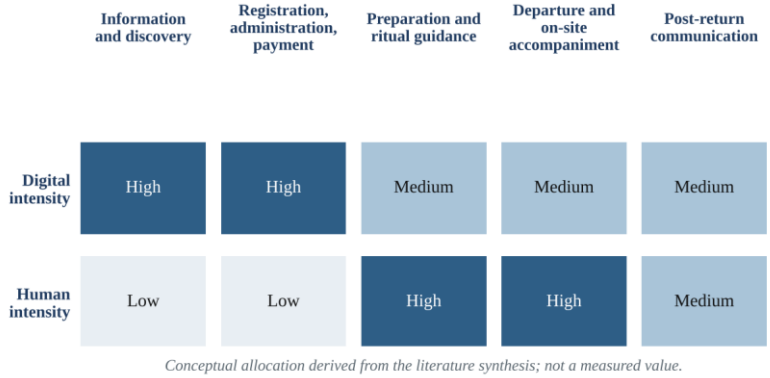
administration stages, while human roles are strongest in ritual preparation and on-site accompaniment; the post-return stage is mixed.

Table 2
Digital and Human Roles Across the Pilgrim Journey

Journey stage	Typical digital role	Typical human role	Experience dimensions most at stake	Illustrative evidence
Information and discovery	Websites, social media and messaging for packages, costs, schedules and guide information	Consultation for undecided prospects	Accessibility; transparency	Rossitika & Mudjahidin (2024); Chiang (2023)
Registration, administration and payment	Digital forms, electronic payment and status tracking	Handling of exceptions and document problems	Responsiveness; transparency; assurance	Pembayun & Lina (2026); Faiza & Sholehah (2025)
Preparation and ritual guidance	Digital schedules, notifications and learning materials	Briefings and question-and-answer sessions by guides	Assurance; personalisation	Fallah & Muhajarah (2024); Hassan et al. (2022a)
Departure and on-site accompaniment	Alerts, live information and helpdesk channels	Guides and field officers; emergency support	Responsiveness; assurance; personalisation	Aljohani et al. (2022); Leiño Calleja et al. (2023)
Post-return communication	Feedback channels and follow-up messaging	Personal follow-up and complaint resolution	Personalisation; trust	Kahfi et al. (2025); Reitsamer et al. (2024)

Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed literature. The allocation is conceptual.

Figure 3
Conceptual Intensity of Digital and Human Roles Across the Pilgrim Journey



Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed literature.

Pilgrim Experience Management in Digital Umrah Services

The analysis shows that pilgrim experience forms from a combination of service quality, ease of use of technology, communication, information certainty and human interaction. Research on Umrah services shows that trust significantly affects pilgrim satisfaction, whereas service quality was not significant partially but became significant together with trust (Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025). This suggests that pilgrim experience is related not only to the final service outcome but also to the interaction processes pilgrims go through. In Makkah-bound pilgrimage, satisfaction with medical services and religious guidance, rather than with food, transport or accommodation, predicted spiritual satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2022a), which

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underlines that the experiences that matter most are those closest to the religious purpose of the journey.

Five dimensions of pilgrim experience were identified in the digital context (Table 3): accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, assurance and personalisation. These dimensions are consistent with digital experience typologies (Chiang, 2023) and with evidence that e-service quality and user experience raise satisfaction (Mamakou et al., 2024) and that consistent, fluent interaction across channels builds trust and commitment (Lin et al., 2023). They also show that positive experience is not formed by automation alone. Personalisation raises the question of balance: personalisation benefits and privacy concerns have to be weighed, as work on smart devices and AI-driven commerce demonstrates (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2024; Vu et al., 2026). Digital transformation should consequently aim at improving the quality of experience, not only the efficiency of administrative processes.

Table 3
Dimensions of Pilgrim Experience in Digital Umrah Services

Dimension	Meaning in the Umrah context	Digital enablers	Human enablers	Supporting literature
Accessibility	Ease of obtaining information and using services	Mobile-friendly channels; clear interfaces	Staff available when digital access fails	Mamakou et al. (2024); Chiang (2023)
Responsiveness	Speed and accuracy of the agency's replies	Messaging, ticketing and notifications	Escalation to a responsible officer	Ranieri et al. (2024); Zhu et al. (2023)
Transparency	Clarity on packages, costs, schedules, procedures and terms	Online itinerary and payment records	Explanations by consultants and guides	Rossitika & Mudjahidin (2024); Fadilah & Solahudin (2025)
Assurance	Certainty and a sense of safety for the pilgrim	Reliable systems and data handling	Competent guides; reassurance in difficulty	Fallah & Muhajarah (2024); Hassan et al. (2022a)
Personalisation	Attention to individual pilgrim needs within digital systems	Segmented information; preference records	Personal follow-up and care for special needs	Jaakkola & Terho (2021); Chan-Olmsted et al. (2024)

Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed literature.

Integration of Digital Technology and Human Interaction

An important finding is the need to integrate digital technology with human interaction. Digitalisation accelerates information delivery, data management, communication and the simplification of service processes. However, Umrah has religious and emotional dimensions, so pilgrims' needs cannot be fully met through digital systems. Ritual guidance, explanation of travel procedures, response to the condition of pilgrims, handling of complaints and the provision of a sense of safety require human involvement. The management of Umrah travel agencies shows the importance of guide competence and the quality of interaction in service delivery (Fallah & Muhajarah, 2024).

Evidence from service research clarifies how the integration might work. Employee–robot collaboration can be framed in terms of shared goals, workflow and decision authority (Le et al., 2023); customers perceive employees as more customer-oriented than robots, and a handover from employee to robot during a journey lowers the robot's evaluation (Leiño Calleja et al., 2023); a robot's usefulness drives repatronage, with high-quality employees compensating for weaker robot performance (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2022); chatbots can improve or damage customer experience on relational, cognitive, affective and behavioural

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dimensions (Ranieri et al., 2024); AI chatbot service quality can build loyalty through value, trust and satisfaction (Chen et al., 2023); and AI concierges can add value across the whole customer journey while raising questions about emotional authenticity, privacy and ethics (Liu et al., 2024). The tone of an AI agent matters in sensitive situations, since verbal anthropomorphism helps well-being only when combined with low visual anthropomorphism when bad news is delivered (Mulcahy et al., 2024). These findings suggest a digital–human service pattern in which technology plays a larger role at the information and administration stages and human interaction becomes more important at the consultation, guidance, accompaniment, problem-resolution and special-needs stages.

A Pilgrim Experience Management Model

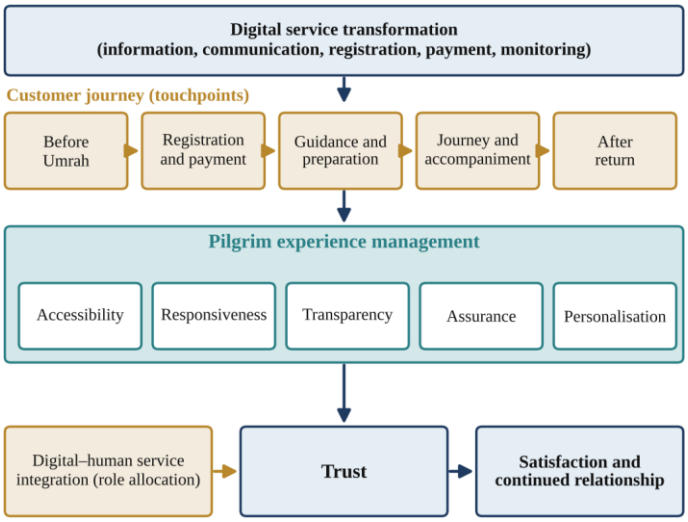
Drawing on the synthesis, the study produces the Digital–Human Pilgrim Experience Management (DH-PEM) framework (Figure 4). It places digital service transformation as the initial process because technological change prompts a change in how organisations design and deliver services. This change unfolds across the stages of the pilgrim's journey, from information search, registration, administration and payment to departure preparation, accompaniment during the trip and post-return communication. Each touchpoint becomes an opportunity for the organisation to manage pilgrim experience.

Pilgrim experience management is central because it integrates these touchpoints through the five dimensions of accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, assurance and personalisation. Experience management in turn produces trust, and trust is the principal route to satisfaction and to a continued relationship between agency and pilgrim, consistent with evidence from Umrah research on trust and satisfaction (Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025; Yanti et al., 2025), on commitment (Rahmawati et al., 2023) and on loyalty (Ardhani et al., 2025). In the Indonesian halal tourism context, satisfaction and trust likewise drive revisit intention and citizenship behaviour (Abror et al., 2025). The model is a synthesis of conceptual relations and not a statistically tested causal model.

Two dimensions of digital Umrah service should run in parallel. The first is digital efficiency, which comprises speed, accessibility, transparency and ease of process. The second is experience quality, which comprises certainty, responsiveness, accompaniment, trust and humane interaction. Their integration is the foundation for Umrah service management oriented towards pilgrim experience.

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Figure 4
The Digital–Human Pilgrim Experience Management (DH-PEM) Framework



Source: Authors' conceptualisation from the literature synthesis.

DISCUSS

The findings show that digital service transformation in Umrah travel management cannot be understood merely as the use of technology in service activities. It is a change in how agencies design, manage and deliver services across multiple touchpoints, and the pilgrim's experience is formed through the whole process, from information search and registration to guidance, accompaniment and post-return service. This answers RQ1 and RQ2 and is consistent with customer experience management, which directs attention to consistency across the customer journey rather than to the final result alone (Schmitt, 2009). It also fits research that sees experience as developing across journey stages and touchpoints (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024; Van De Sand et al., 2020), and research on complex digital services that stresses the connectedness of touchpoints (Kandil et al., 2024; Terpoorten et al., 2024). The implication is that digitalisation acquires managerial meaning only when technology improves ease of use, clarity of information, speed of response and continuity of service for pilgrims.

Compared with earlier work, the findings both confirm and extend what is known. They confirm that trust is central to pilgrim satisfaction (Fadilah & Solahudin, 2025; Yanti et al., 2025) and that quality, trust and satisfaction are tied to loyalty and commitment (Ardhani et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2023). They extend these findings by placing trust and satisfaction at the end of a managed journey rather than treating them as independent variables. The partial non-significance of service quality reported by Fadilah and Solahudin (2025) becomes interpretable from the journey perspective: pilgrims' perceptions are likely to depend on the coherence of the whole interaction, as the journey-quality literature suggests (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021; Reitsamer et al., 2024), and not on isolated quality dimensions. The finding that medical and religious guidance matter more to spiritual satisfaction than accommodation (Hassan et al., 2022a) supports the claim that ritual and care touchpoints deserve priority in a hybrid design. Evidence from other contexts that integrated interactions across channels build trust (Lin et al., 2023) and that customers evaluate robots, chatbots and employees differently (Leiño Calleja et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023) also converges with our reading. Differences in context (pilgrims versus retail customers), method (library synthesis versus experiments or surveys) and cultural setting may explain why effect patterns differ and caution against direct transfer of results.

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The theoretical contribution is threefold. First, the study applies customer experience management and service-dominant logic to a religious service, showing that the notion of managed experience remains useful where the core value is spiritual. Second, it shows that digital transformation should be read as organisational change that reorganises service structure, interaction and value creation (Deiters & Meister, 2025), which supports the argument that success depends on organisational capabilities (Albannai et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2025). Third, it refines phygital and human–technology research by proposing that role allocation between technology and people should be determined touchpoint by touchpoint, in line with the call for multi-actor perspectives that include employees (Mulcahy et al., 2026; Gustafsson et al., 2024) and with the view that humans and AI are entangled resources in value co-creation (Kaartemo & Helkkula, 2025). The service-marketing view that customer orientation, technology integration and process management together create service value (Zeithaml et al., 2022) is thereby specified for pilgrimage services through the DH-PEM framework.

Practically, the findings suggest that agencies should map the pilgrim journey end to end, identify the touchpoints that most need technological or human support, and design each accordingly (Table 4). Technology can be directed at needs that require speed, accessibility, transparency and consistency of information, whereas human interaction should be maintained where empathy, consultation, guidance, accompaniment and problem resolution are needed. This helps agencies avoid digitalisation that serves only internal efficiency. For policymakers and associations, the evidence from Hajj health services on the costs of fragmented systems (Aljohani et al., 2022) and from large-scale Hajj operations (Abalkhail & Al Amri, 2022) suggests that interoperable information systems and shared service standards are worth encouraging, while evidence on personalisation and privacy (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2024; Vu et al., 2026) points to the need for clear data-handling practices. Investment in the training of guides and frontline staff is equally important, since employee and customer experience are intertwined (Gustafsson et al., 2024).

Table 4
Managerial Implications of the DH-PEM framework

No.	Implication	Recommended action	Evidence base
1.	Journey mapping	Map every pilgrim touchpoint from first enquiry to post-return contact and record where pilgrims wait, drop out or complain	Jaakkola & Alexander (2024); Kandil et al. (2024)
2.	Role allocation	Assign information, payment and status tracking to digital channels; keep consultation, ritual guidance and problem resolution human-led	Leiño Calleja et al. (2023); Hassan et al. (2022a)
3.	Seamless handover	Design handovers between chatbot or system and staff so that pilgrims do not repeat information or lose continuity	Lin et al. (2023); Zhu et al. (2023)
4.	Capability building	Invest in digital leadership, staff training and guide competence	Albannai et al. (2025); Fallah & Muhajarah (2024)
5.	Trust safeguards	Make costs, schedules and terms transparent and handle personal data responsibly	Fadilah & Solahudin (2025); Chan-Olmsted et al. (2024)

Source: Authors' synthesis.

Contextually, the findings are relevant to developing-country and religious settings, where the pilgrimage is a significant life event and where trust in the agency has social and moral weight. Indonesian agencies work in a market in which many pilgrims depend on

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intermediaries, which may increase the importance of reliable human contact even as digital channels expand. Research on Indonesian halal tourism indicates that religiosity and digital halal literacy raise satisfaction (Abror et al., 2025), and the Saudi policy focus on pilgrim experience (Pilgrim Experience Program, 2026) raises the standard against which Indonesian service will be compared. For da'wah management, the DH-PEM framework suggests that managing digital Umrah services is a form of managing religious service in which spiritual accompaniment, trustworthiness and technological competence are complementary. Limitations should be noted: the framework is not empirically tested, the corpus is constrained by language and database coverage, and the evidence on Umrah services is smaller than on religious tourism in general, so some propositions rely on analogies from other service contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explain how pilgrim experience is managed in the digital transformation of Umrah services. It shows that transformation is a change in how agencies design and manage the whole pilgrim experience across the stages of the customer journey, from information search, communication, registration, administration and payment to guidance, departure, accompaniment and post-return service. Digital technology makes services easier to access, faster, more informative and more responsive, while human interaction remains necessary for empathy, consultation, ritual guidance, accompaniment and problem solving. From the synthesis, the study formulates the DH-PEM framework and six research propositions in which digital service transformation shapes the customer journey, which is then managed to produce pilgrim experience that supports trust and satisfaction.

The study contributes to theory by integrating customer experience management, service-dominant logic and customer journey research in a religious service context; to method by showing how a transparent thematic library research can build a service framework where evidence is dispersed; and to practice by showing how agencies can map the journey and allocate digital and human roles. Academically, the findings refine the understanding of trust and satisfaction as outcomes of managed journeys; practically, they show that success should be assessed by the ability to integrate technology, process and people into a continuous experience, and not by the amount of technology adopted. Policymakers and associations can use the framework to set service standards and to encourage integrated information systems.

Future research should deepen the framework through field studies. Qualitative case studies of agencies that have digitalised, with interviews of managers and pilgrims, observation of service processes and analysis of digital documents, can show how each touchpoint is managed and how pilgrims make sense of their experience. Quantitative studies can test the propositions, in particular the conditioning roles of organisational capabilities and digital–human integration and the mediating role of trust, among larger pilgrim populations. Comparative work across countries and agency types, and longitudinal work that follows pilgrims from before departure until after return, would further strengthen the empirical base for pilgrim experience management in digital Umrah services.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, K.A.R., F., C.C. and K.S.; methodology, K.A.R.; formal analysis, K.A.R.; writing original draft preparation, K.A.R.; writing review and editing, F., C.C. and K.S.; supervision, F., C.C. and K.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Claude (Anthropic) to assist with literature identification, language editing and drafting of the manuscript structure. After using this tool, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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