

## THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND MARKETING STRATEGIES IN ENHANCING CONSUMER EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF WHOOSH HIGH-SPEED RAIL SERVICE IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

*This study explores the interplay between marketing strategies, human resource performance, and consumer behavior in the use of the Whoosh high-speed rail service in Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative approach supported by secondary data and a limited primary survey among early users of the service. Whoosh's marketing initiatives include dynamic pricing, strategic collaborations with tourism and culinary destinations, and accessible multi-channel ticket purchasing. From a human resource management perspective, the quality of front-line service personnel such as responsiveness, communication, and professionalism plays a critical role in shaping customer satisfaction. Findings indicate that consumers are drawn to the service for its efficiency, convenience, punctuality, and positive user experience, influenced not only by marketing efforts but also by the competence of its service staff. The study highlights the importance of integrating human capital development with strategic marketing to enhance user trust, service loyalty, and long-term adoption. The implications support the need for continued investment in HR training and customer experience management to sustain service excellence in modern transportation systems.*

**Keywords:** high-speed rail, marketing strategy, consumer behavior, human resources, service quality

### Introduction

Transportation indeed has a significant impact on various aspects of life, both individually and collectively, within the context of society, economic development, and the socio-political dynamics of a country. In this era of globalization, the transportation sector has become a crucial and strategic pillar supporting economic activities, with its influence extending to various aspects of daily life. The reality is evident in the increasing need for transportation services and mobility, encompassing the movement of people and goods to various regions throughout the country (Kamaludin, 2003:20). According to Rothenberg, "mobility is the life of modern society", which indicates that mobility is the essence of modern society. The human need to move from one place to another for various activities results in movements with different characteristics, depending on the purpose of the trip, the mode of transportation used, and the time of execution (Tamin, 1997). This causes each individual to have a unique movement profile, which in turn can trigger various urban problems, including issues related to transportation services. Urban transportation problems often include congestion, limited infrastructure, technological backwardness, and uneven service quality. Therefore, effective transportation planning and management are key to ensuring smooth and efficient mobility, supporting economic growth, and improving the quality of life for the community.

Whoosh Indonesia's first high-speed rail is one of the latest initiatives in transportation in Indonesia, aiming to improve the efficiency of intercity travel. Since December 2003, the Whoosh high-speed train has officially been operating, opening new chapter in rapid transportation in Indonesia. With the introduce of the Whoosh, there are certainly significant changes in the transportation behavior of Indonesian society. Connecting marketing strategies to the role of transportation with consumer behavior towards service usage will certainly open up interesting perspectives on how mobility and transportation choices influence lifestyle, preferences, and consumer decisions. Whoosh, Indonesia's first high-speed rail connecting Jakarta and Bandung, represents a major milestone in modernizing national transportation. As congestion and long travel times continue to challenge intercity connectivity, the introduction of Whoosh provides a fast, efficient alternative. Compared to global high-speed rail leaders such as Japan and China, Indonesia's Whoosh project represents a nascent but ambitious endeavor. While Japan's Shinkansen is lauded for its technological precision and China's CRH for scale and affordability, Whoosh must establish its unique value proposition in a competitive and culturally distinct Southeast Asian market. Integrating these aspirations with Indonesia's National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN 2020–2024), the Whoosh service also seeks to address long-standing

transportation inefficiencies and bridge urban-regional disparities. Comparative insights from Japan's Shinkansen and China's Fuxing HSR can inform Whoosh's strategic development. The Shinkansen emphasizes "omotenashi" the spirit of selfless hospitality ingrained through intensive staff training and service rituals. Meanwhile, China's Fuxing integrates AI for real-time performance monitoring and customer engagement, enabling agile responses to customer needs. For Whoosh, adopting a hybrid strategy — merging Indonesian cultural warmth with tech-enabled service — may unlock greater brand distinction. These international models suggest that the future of high-speed rail depends not only on speed but also on the psychological comfort, digital convenience, and relational trust built through staff-consumer interactions.

Transportation services today are not only about moving people, they are about delivering experiences that influence consumer decisions, economic outcomes, and urban development. Consumer preference is no longer determined solely by ticket prices or schedules. Instead, consumer satisfaction is increasingly linked to the full-service experience beginning with the ticket purchase and continuing through the journey. Survey data from Katadata Insight Center shows that 87.9% of the public believes that the presence of the Whoosh high-speed train improves intercity access (Databoks). Most users also consider this service efficient and comfortable, which supports Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, where functional aspects (speed, comfort) are the main priority.

In this context, marketing strategy and human resource performance jointly shape user perception. According to Kotler and Keller (2022), marketing success is greatly influenced by a deep understanding of consumer needs and desires, as well as the implementation of targeted strategies. On the other hand, competent human resource management ensures that employees are able to provide the best service, creating a positive and sustainable experience for customer. Edvardsson et al. (2005) emphasize that service experience is created through interaction between customer and service providers. Human Resource has an important role in shaping service culture, training, and monitoring service quality. Heskett et al. (1994) in the Service Profit Concept states that customer satisfaction starts from employee satisfaction. This paper explores the integrated role of marketing and human resource management in delivering superior consumer experiences. The analysis includes marketing initiatives such as dynamic pricing and promotions, alongside the role of front-line staff in delivering hospitality and professionalism that reflect the brand promise.

In the context of high-speed rail, human capital is not merely an operational resource but a central pillar of strategic differentiation. Unlike in traditional transportation sectors, where the technical infrastructure dominates competitive advantage, in premium services like Whoosh, the experiential value offered by front-line personnel significantly shapes customer perception. According to Ladhari (2009), emotional labor, empathy, and cultural competence are core attributes that distinguish excellent service staff in hospitality-driven industries. As Whoosh caters primarily to professional urban commuters, the emphasis on service personalization and emotional engagement becomes even more critical. This calls for the institutionalization of continuous learning, staff feedback systems, and HR analytics to proactively address service quality gaps.

## Methods

Calderon (2006) defined descriptive research as a purposive methodology of gathering, studying, categorizing, and tabulating data about prevailing conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect continue to make adequate and valid interpretations about such data with or without and sometimes minimal assistance of statistical methods. Descriptive research is described as an analysis method that explains the characteristics of type population or phenomenon that is analyzed (Sukmadinata, 2012).

The primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, distributed to 30 purposively selected respondents representing urban professionals using Whoosh regularly. While the sample is not statistically representative of the entire user base, it reflects early adopters critical to service diffusion. Secondary data were validated using source triangulation, drawing on cross-referenced news articles, government reports, and academic publications to strengthen analytical reliability.

This research adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach, combining secondary data analysis with a limited scale survey conducted users of Whoosh. Respondents all office workers commuting between Jakarta and Bandung provide feedback via structured questionnaires on aspects such as service experience, information accessibility, frequency of use, and satisfaction. Secondary data were drawn from publicly available studies, news reports, and organizational press releases to frame the broader trends. The study also incorporates theoretical frameworks including the Marketing Mix (4Ps), Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and internal marketing theory to interpret consumer behavior and human resource contribution.

## Results and Discussions

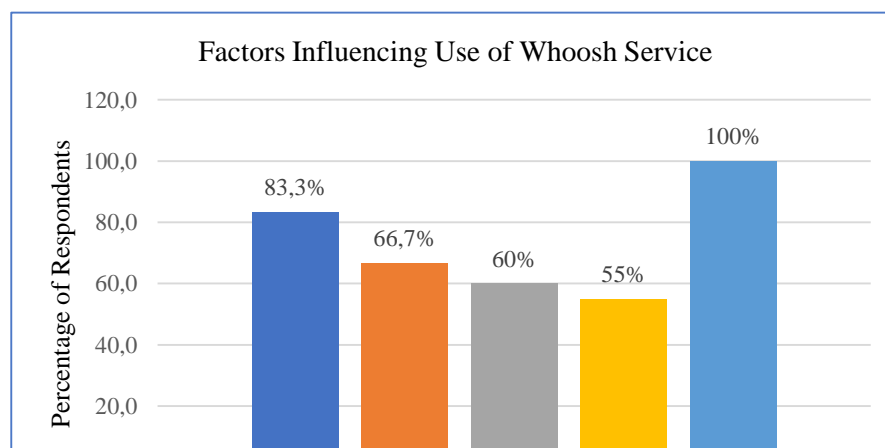
The results of the study underscore the strategic interplay between marketing innovation and human resource excellence in shaping the consumer experience of the Whoosh high-speed rail service in Indonesia. One key strategy is the implementation of a dynamic pricing model, which allows for flexibility in adjusting fares based on travel time and seasonal demand. This strategy aligns with the Product and Price principles

within the Marketing Mix (4Ps) concept proposed by Kotler and Keller (2022), where price flexibility can broaden consumer reach and increase service accessibility in specific segments. Furthermore, partnerships with tourist and culinary destinations enrich the added value of the journey, making Whoosh not only a mode of transportation but also part of a lifestyle experience. Promotion through social media is the main channel for introducing this service, although survey results indicate that advertising visibility is still limited. Nevertheless, word-of-mouth and positive user testimonials play an important role in driving organic adoption, consistent with the findings of Schiffman & Kanuk (2008), which state that consumer decisions are strongly influenced by the social and psychological perceptions of their environment.

From the HR perspective, frontline personnel play a crucial role in shaping the customer experience. Respondents rated attributes such as friendliness, responsiveness, and communication as key factors in creating a satisfying service. This aligns with the concept of internal marketing introduced by Berry (1981), where employees are positioned as internal customers who need to be empowered and motivated to create a quality service experience. When HR is technically and interpersonally trained, they can become a tangible representation of the brand promise built by the company. This is further supported by Huang and Rust (2021), who argue: "A strategic role of human resources is evident in-service industries through employee engagement and empowerment, which directly affects customer experience." KCIC's commitment to employee development is evident through its collaboration with hospitality and communication training institutions, as reported by Kompas (October 2023).

These initiatives have enhanced the soft skills and service orientation of Whoosh's onboard crew, reinforcing brand image and customer trust. Strategically integrating human resources and marketing efforts has created a robust service-profit chain (Heskett et al., 1994), wherein empowered employees deliver superior experiences that generate consumer satisfaction and repeat patronage. With digital tools, real-time scheduling, and streamlined booking systems further enhancing service delivery, Whoosh is positioned as a high-value mobility solution for Indonesia's urban professionals. To sustain and elevate service excellence, Whoosh must continue aligning HR development with evolving consumer expectations, leveraging feedback loops, and deepening its customer relationship management (CRM) strategies. From a broader perspective, the integration of digital tools and AI in transportation services is beginning to shape next-generation user experiences. As digital transformation shapes transportation services, Whoosh must accelerate the integration of AI-powered CRM systems and user data analytics. Tools such as personalized travel recommendations, real-time disruption notifications, and loyalty-based dynamic pricing models are becoming standard in modern mobility ecosystems (Huang & Rust, 2021). With most Whoosh users discovering the service through digital channels, digital UX becomes a key value driver. Incorporating AI chatbots, multilingual digital assistants, and seamless mobile ticketing can enhance the user journey and differentiate Whoosh in a competitive intercity travel landscape. Huang & Rust (2021) suggest that AI enhanced personalization not only improves efficiency but builds emotional connections with consumers particularly in service-based industries. Whoosh could explore predictive ticketing, behavioral-based promotions, and feedback-driven employee performance systems to build upon this paradigm.

The expansion of high-speed rail in Indonesia also demands strategic alignment with urban infrastructure and public transport planning. Integration with light rail transit (LRT), bus rapid transit (BRT), and smart city frameworks will be essential for Whoosh to operate as a seamless urban mobility solution. Public-private partnerships should focus on transit-oriented development (TOD) around stations to stimulate regional economies, reduce congestion, and support environmental targets. Furthermore, policymakers must ensure regulatory frameworks support innovation in fare structures, data governance, and HR development to maintain service competitiveness. Managers in service-intensive organizations like Whoosh must embrace a cross-functional approach where marketing, operations, and HR co-create the brand experience. This includes implementing integrated performance dashboards that link employee engagement scores with customer satisfaction and operational KPIs. Future research may explore longitudinal studies on consumer trust in public infrastructure services, or comparative analyses between Whoosh and legacy intercity transport services (e.g., Argo Parahyangan). In addition, future empirical work could investigate the effect of specific HR interventions (e.g., hospitality training, incentive design) on service ratings and brand equity.



**Figure 1**  
**Factors influencing Use of Whoosh Service**

Surveys indicate that the primary motivations for users choosing Whoosh are punctuality (100%), speed (83.3%), and convenience (66.7%). These preferences demonstrate the fulfillment of consumer needs at both basic and psychological levels, consistent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where functional aspects such as efficiency and safety are top priorities, followed by convenience and social prestige. This aligns with the study by Edvarsson, Gustafsson, & Roos (2005), which emphasizes that service perception is shaped by a combination of technical and emotional quality perceived during the service process. Regarding usage frequency, 50% of respondents use the service several times a month and 33.3% several times a week, with commuting as the main motivation. This pattern indicates that Whoosh has become part of consumers' routines, particularly for professional commuters, and demonstrates loyalty and trust in the service. This loyalty is not only a result of effective marketing but also of direct interaction between customers and service staff, which creates emotional connections and trust, as described in the service-profit chain by Heskett et al. (1994). In terms of information channels, 66.7% of respondents learned about Whoosh from social media, but all respondents (100%) stated that information access was very easy to obtain. This highlights the importance of digital marketing strategies and search engine optimization (SEO) in reaching users, and indicates that the integration between offline and digital marketing is highly relevant. As emphasized by Kotler & Keller (2022), the combination of conventional and digital promotions is essential in today's information age to shape a comprehensive brand perception. Furthermore, digital-based promotion strategies and consistent customer experience also strengthen Whoosh's branding.

A positive brand image is inseparable from the consistency of service quality, cleanliness, facility comfort, and the clarity of information provided by the staff. This forms a competitive advantage that is not easily replicated by other modes of transportation. Within the framework of Relationship Marketing, long-term interactions between the company and customers become the core of creating sustainable customer value (Rakhmat et al., 2011). Overall, the results of this study show that the synergy between innovative marketing strategies and professional human resource management can create superior customer experiences. Future studies should consider larger, statistically representative samples to validate current findings, as well as longitudinal methods to assess consumer loyalty trends over time. Additionally, there is a research opportunity to analyze the regional economic uplift generated by HSR station hubs and their integration into urban planning frameworks. For service providers, refining HR development and marketing analytics will be essential in ensuring that Whoosh not only sustains, but expands, its role in Indonesia's transport revolution. Service organizations like Whoosh must regard human resources not merely as support, but as an integral part of marketing strategies and customer experience. As explained by Hadi (2019), human resource management in the service sector needs to adopt an adaptive and collaborative approach, oriented toward the sustainable creation of service value.

The components marketing strategy and human resource management are intrinsically linked in shaping the overall customer experience. Effective marketing campaigns create awareness and attract passengers, but sustained success depends heavily on the front-line employees who provide the service. Aligning human resource policies with marketing objectives ensures that staff are well-trained, motivated, and able to embody the brand's values. As customer expectations evolve, so must the competencies and attitudes of personnel, emphasizing continuous training, employee engagement, and a service-oriented culture. This synergy facilitates seamless service delivery that consistently exceeds customer satisfaction, transforming marketing promises into experiential reality and strengthening brand loyalty.

In essence, the integration of marketing strategies with human resources creates a feedback loop: marketing sets expectations and communicates value, while HR ensures operational capabilities and employee behavior align. When executed harmoniously, this approach builds a resilient, competitive service ecosystem in the rapidly developing Indonesian transportation sector. Moreover, engaging employees as brand ambassadors through internal branding initiatives reinforces the marketing message from within. When employees feel valued, motivated, and aligned with the company's vision, their behavior naturally reflects the brand's

promises, creating authentic interactions with passengers. This internal alignment acts as a reinforcing mechanism that sustains customer loyalty and enhances the overall reputation of the service.

Furthermore, feedback from frontline staff who are in direct contact with customers can be invaluable for refining marketing strategies. Employees often observe shifts in customer perceptions and preferences first-hand, providing insights that can be fed into future marketing and service improvement initiatives. This continuous feedback loop fosters a culture of collaborative growth, where marketing and HR actively support each other to adapt and innovate dynamically.

In the context of Indonesia's rapidly evolving transportation landscape, fostering this close integration between marketing and human resources creates a resilient and adaptable organization capable of providing consistently excellent service, driving customer satisfaction, and achieving long-term success.

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