H2H MARKETING: RETHINKING CONSUMER BRAND RELATIONSHIP IN THE WEB 5.0 ERA

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ABSTRACT

At a time when digital transformation is redefining the ways in which brands and consumers interact, H2H marketing is emerging as a necessary strategic approach to reconcile technological efficiency and human depth. This article offers a critical review of academic and practical work on H2H marketing, highlighting the limitations of transactional, relational, and data-driven approaches in capturing the emotional and authentic dimension of customer relationships. The analysis highlights the emergence of a logic based on authenticity, empathy, ethics, and emotional engagement, in response to the expectations of postmodern consumers, in search of meaning and proximity.

The article emphasizes the need for brands to design human-centered loyalty strategies based on sincere, personalized, and emotionally engaging interactions. It highlights the structuring role of human-machine symbiosis as a lever for harmonizing technological innovation and human presence, paving the way for a new form of relational co-construction.

Keywords: H2H marketing, consumer brand relationship, authenticity, emotion, empathy, ethics, man-machine symbiosis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The behavior of brands and consumers has never ceased to evolve, in step with social, economic, technological and cultural upheavals. Since the Second World War, four fundamental transformations have marked the evolution of consumer behavior (Degon, 1998): (1) a shift in buying mindsets from utilitarian to meaningful purchasing; (2) a transformation in purchasing behavior from accumulation to arbitrage; (3) an attraction to first-price products, making competition fiercer; (4) zapping behavior in search of variety.

At the heart of these changes, brand strategies have also evolved: from conquest to loyalty, from product orientation to customer orientation, from aggregate approach to individualized approach, and from transactional paradigm to relational paradigm. The central challenge for marketers remains to keep pace with changes in purchasing needs and motivations, by designing marketing that is capable of responding to customers' deepest aspirations, while meeting the objectives of profitability and sustainability (Baker, 2003).

Today, in a world shaped by immersive technologies, the proliferation of massive data and the omnipresence of artificial intelligence, consumers are immersed in intense but often disembodied digital experiences. Faced with this over-technologization of exchanges, consumers are expressing more than ever a thirst for transparency, authenticity and emotion (Pfoertsch, 2024). He expects clarity in brands' intentions and practices, tangible authenticity in their communication and commitment, as well as personal recognition and emotional sincerity in his interactions with them.

This context, at once exhilarating and a source of disillusionment, is prompting an in-depth rethink of marketing strategies, and more particularly of the foundations of customer relationships. It paves the way for a new, deeply human approach to relationships: H2H marketing. This approach, centered on human value, authenticity, empathy, emotional reciprocity and value co-creation, is a strategic response to the limits of dehumanized interactions and the new expectations of post-modern consumers immersed in the digital universe (Pfoertsch, 2024).

Although concepts such as authenticity, empathy, trust and emotional commitment are the subject of growing interest in marketing literature, brand managers are still not well informed about the concrete ways in which they can approach their target market with a truly human-centered approach. Research exploring in depth the issues, challenges and strategic levers involved in implementing H2Hmarketing is still few and far between.

With this in mind, this article aims to enlighten marketers and brand managers wishing to rethink their strategy and place customer relations at the heart of more human, emotionally intelligent and sustainable marketing. It aims to guide them in the development of appropriate relational strategies, likely to become new vectors of loyalty and sustainability in a changing technological environment.

This research therefore seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges involved in maintaining an authentic, lasting relationship with customers in a digitalized environment?

- To what extent can H2Hmarketing be a lever for long-term loyalty?

- What indicators can be used to measure the effectiveness of a human-based loyalty strategy?

2. METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions, this research is part of an exploratory approach aimed at cross-referencing recent academic contributions with emerging professional practices in the field of H2H marketing. Based on a critical review of the literature and an analysis of the operational measures implemented by brands, this research aims to:

- Highlight the added value of H2H marketing compared to other marketing approaches.

- Draw up useful recommendations for managers wishing to adopt this human-centered approach to developing and maintaining a privileged relationship with their customers over time.

Academic sources are mainly selected via open access databases (such as Google Scholar, Researchgate, etc.). Articles published in indexed and/or classified journals have been preferred to ensure a solid theoretical foundation for the findings to be developed. The period covered essentially extends from 2018 to 2025, in line with the rise of immersive technologies and generative artificial intelligence in relationship marketing.

At the same time, an analysis of content from specialized professional blogs will integrate perspectives from the field, shedding light on the evolution of corporate practices and professional discourse relating to customer relationship management in the Web 5.0 era.

These blogs have been selected on the basis of several criteria: expertise and credibility of the authors (consultants, agencies or digital marketing practitioners), relevance of the themes addressed (H2H marketing, customer relations, artificial intelligence, Web 5.0), etc. These sources include blogs such as HubSpot, HulkApps, Business Model Analyst and Onopia. Other sites and platforms such as Marketing Explainers, E-Marketing.fr, culture-regie.com and Renascence.io complete this

selection, providing in-depth insights into customer experience, innovation, artificial intelligence and contemporary communication strategies.

Although this literature review does not follow a strict systematic protocol, it is based on explicit criteria of relevance, topicality and diversity of sources. It thus constitutes a first structuring step for future empirical or systematic research, by laying the foundations of an integrative conceptual framework around H2H marketing in a rapidly changing technological environment.

3. EXPLOSION OF AI AND IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES: CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES

The rise of artificial intelligence and immersive technologies (virtual reality, augmented reality, metavers, etc.) has undeniably contributed to a profound transformation of the marketing landscape.

Many companies are now seeking to stand out from the crowd by offering consumers more dynamic, personalized and instantaneous experiences, in an increasingly tense competitive environment.

This technological transformation has supported the emergence of new marketing pillars, such as:

- Interaction automation (chatbots, voice assistants, predictive responses),

- Algorithmic personalization (adapting content, offers and journeys in real time),

- Immersive experience (via augmented reality, virtual reality, metaverse spaces),

- Instant response (continuous customer service, real-time marketing).

These technological advances have not only enriched and accelerated marketing tools, they have also significantly improved the user experience. However, this momentum is not without its limits. Researchers and practitioners have also revealed that these technologies have impoverished the human dimension of customer relations. Chatbots, intelligent responders and conversational agents are sometimes perceived as standardized, predictable and emotionally neutral. Consumers then interact with automated processes without any real human contact, which can lead to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction (Meuter et al., 2000; Castillo et al., 2021).

Similarly, while predictive AI, big data and recommendation algorithms have paved the way for finer-grained personalization, this is still based on the analysis of generic behaviors rather than a true understanding of the individual. Many consumers then feel not a close connection with brands, but a form of algorithmic surveillance, generating a sense of discomfort and growing distrust towards the use of their data. (Elliott, 2024; Kant, 2020).

In addition, immersive technologies (VR, AR, metaverses) have offered spectacular environments and new forms of expression (Murala & Panda, 2023). However, these virtual spaces are designed in a programmed and symbolic way. This often prevents them from reproducing the sensory and emotional richness of real human connections, which can create a sense of artificiality or emotional isolation (Murala & Panda, 2023).

Today, many consumers are looking for truer, more embodied interactions, where the human voice, sincere intonation and direct gaze regain value and inspire more trust (Elkins & Derrick, 2013). A fatigue of the scripted, the over-perfect is making itself felt, nurturing a nostalgia for more authentic commercial links, more rooted in emotion and shared memory.
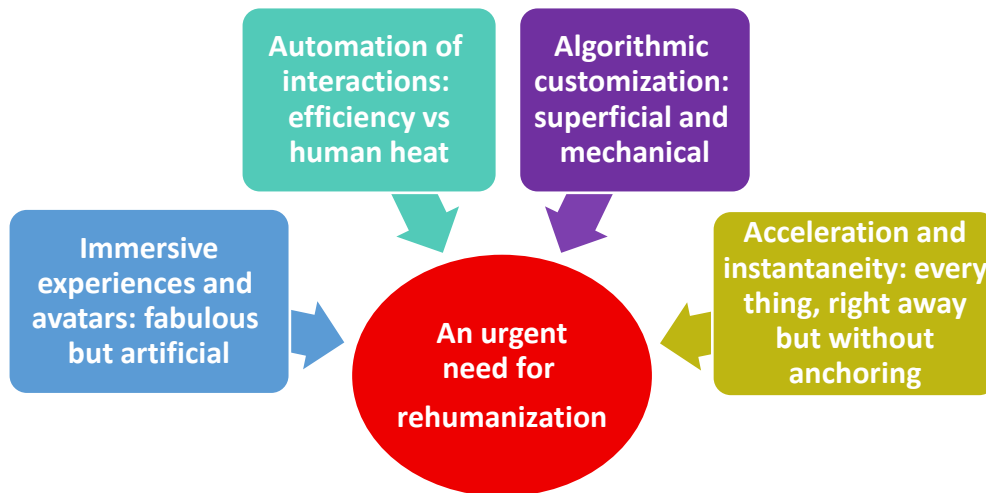
Figure 1: The Dilemmas of the Technological Explosion in the Age of AI

4. H2H MARKETING: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

4.1. What is H2H marketing?

H2H marketing is a human-centered approach to marketing, which emphasizes building interpersonal relationships rather than focusing solely on commercial strategies. This strategy recognizes that behind every customer, whether professional or private, is an individual with specific needs, emotions and expectations. It was developed in response to the limitations of the business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) models, which often neglect the aspect of commercial interactions (Kotler et al., 2023; Posada and Pfoertsch, 2023).

The transition to H2H (Human-to-Human) marketing is largely rooted in the groundbreaking work of Philip Kotler, a seminal figure in modern marketing (Kotler et al., 2021a). Kotler profoundly influenced the discipline by emphasizing a customer-centric approach, valuing the understanding of needs, the creation of value and the establishment of lasting relationships. This orientation paved the way for the H2H philosophy, which advocates genuinely human interaction between companies and their customers (Roshid et al., 2024).

H2H marketing is characterized by a prioritization of the human over the consumer. This approach focuses on the person, their emotions, expectations and needs, rather than on their role as customer or prospect. It is also based on the authenticity of brand offers and discourse (Kotler et al., 2021). Indeed, the communication adopted in this approach is not only personalized but also, and above all, sincere and authentic. The aim is to establish a real dialogue and create a unique experience for each individual. The H2H approach is also based on empathy and active listening to customers (Hattangadi, 2024). Indeed, brands are called upon to go beyond simply satisfying needs, to embrace consumers' emotions, concerns and aspirations. This implies adopting human values such as empathy, benevolence, compassion and a sense of justice, in order to forge sincere and lasting relationships.

However, while human-centric, this approach makes intelligent use of technology to better understand individual needs and personalize interactions on a large scale. It also uses storytelling to create strong emotional bonds with customers, boosting engagement and recall.

This being the case, H2H marketing is a strategy that puts trust back at the heart of managers' concerns (Kotler et al., 2021). It's about building relationships based on trust, authenticity, personalization and empathy, to create an emotionally rich customer experience. This approach is

particularly well-suited to a context where consumers are looking for genuine interactions and sincere commitment from brands.

4.2. Evolution of the Marketing Approach: from Transaction to Human

H2H marketing is part of a logical evolution in marketing, from:

- a transactional logic centered on the product (4P model),

- to a customer-centric, relational logic,

- to a humanistic, empathetic approach to technological saturation and the need for meaning.

The following diagram shows the chronological evolution of marketing approaches, from transactional marketing to the rise of H2H marketing, and including such key approaches as relationship marketing, digital marketing and data-driven marketing.
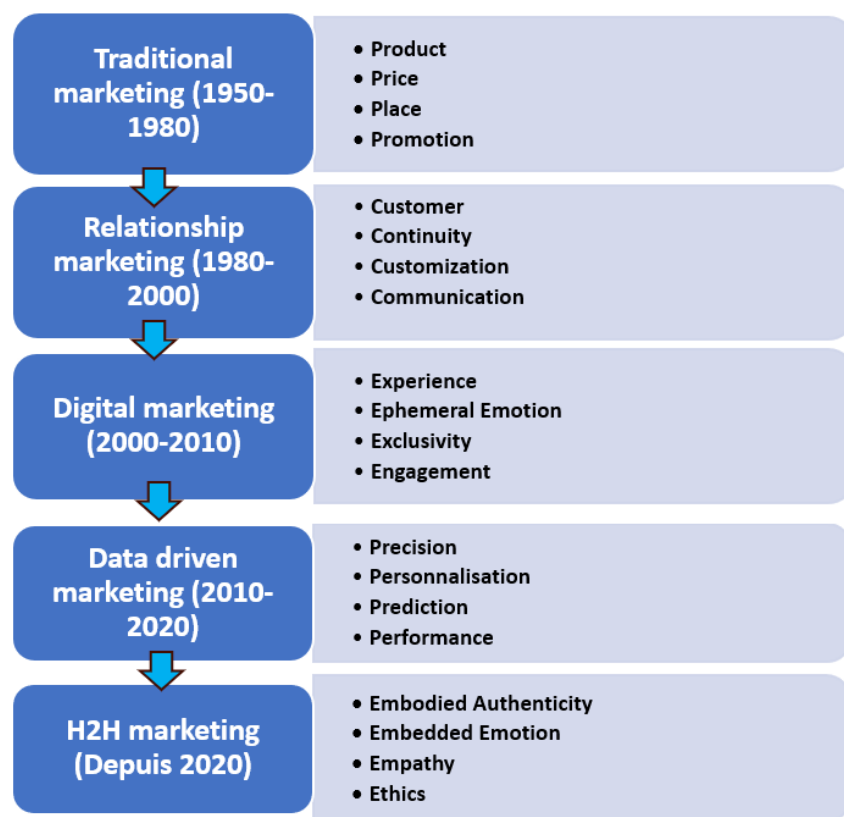

Figure 2: Evolution of the marketing approach

The following table compares the five marketing approaches and draws attention to the inability of transactional, relational, data-driven and digital approaches to highlight the authentic, emotional and ethical dimension of customer relations.

Table 1: Marketing approaches: fundamental characteristics and limitations

Criteria / Approaches	Transactional	Relational	Data-Driven	Digital (Experiential)	H2H (Human-to-Human)
Main Objective	Maximize short-term sales	Develop customer loyalty	Optimize performance through offer personalization	Create a memorable and engaging experience	Build a sincere and lasting human relationship
Time Perspective	Short term	Medium to long term	Short to medium term (depends on real-time data)	Medium term (focused on immediate experience)	Long term (ongoing relationship nurtured over time)
Triggering Context	Mass economy, volume consumption	Market saturation, need for retention	Big data explosion, hyper-connectivity	Rise in consumers' emotional and sensory expectations	Crisis of meaning, technological disenchantment, need for genuine relations
Type of Relationship	Functional, transactional	Contractual, loyalty-based	Algorithmically personalized	Sensory and emotional	Authentic, emotional, ethical
Role of Technology	Low (catalogs, promotions)	Moderately used (CRM, newsletters)	Central (AI, big data, behavioral tracking)	Central (UX/UI, interfaces, immersion, AI)	Supportive but never dominant: technology serves the human
Place of Emotion	Absent or neglected	Intentional but not deeply personalized	Supplemented by weak signal analysis, but lacks real empathy	Artificially stimulated (via design or content)	Core of the relationship: genuine, shared, contextualized emotions
Level of Authenticity	Very low (mechanized relationship)	Medium (constructed relationship,	Low to medium (data-driven interactions)	Medium (authenticity limited by	High (sincere interaction embodied

		sometimes automated)		experiential artifices)	by humans or humanized AIs)
Ethical Dimension	Absent	Weakly integrated (customer-focused, not always ethical)	Questionable (data collection sometimes intrusive or opaque)	Sometimes staged (e.g., solidarity storytelling)	Central to the approach: transparency, respect, human utility, social responsibility
Customer Listening	Limited to satisfaction surveys	Active but management-oriented	Driven by data analysis (mostly quantitative)	Integrated in the journey but not deep	Empathetic, personalized, including emotional and subjective feedback
Main Limitation	Cold, non-lasting relationship	Reward-based relationship logic	Dehumanized relationship, lack of genuine empathy	Sometimes scripted, not truly embodied	Difficulty of large-scale implementation, very high costs

H2H marketing doesn't replace other approaches (digital, data-driven, relational), but recontextualizes them in a more holistic and ethical vision of relationships. It reinjects emotion, authenticity and vulnerability into marketing that has sometimes become too algorithmic or distant.

H2H is relevant because it responds to the dehumanization of customer experience (cold automations, impersonal bots, etc.), aligns with the rise of humanist values (ethics, inclusion, ecology), helps generate lasting attitudinal loyalty and facilitates differentiation in the face of increasingly standardized products (Kotler et al., 2021b; Kotler et al., 2024).

H2H marketing isn't just a trend: it's an all-encompassing approach that brings together the achievements of relationship, experiential and digital marketing, and adds a philosophy of human connection. It's not opposed to technology (it uses it), but puts it back at the service of the human.

For managers, it's an ethical and strategic compass for building lasting, authentic loyalty in an ever-changing world.

5. HOW DOES H2H MARKETING PROMOTE LONG-TERM CONSUMER LOYALTY?

H2H marketing is an approach that can help brand managers forge a special, lasting relationship with their customers, based on authenticity, transparency, trust and ethics. Unlike transactional marketing, which focuses on the attributes of products and services, H2H marketing prioritizes human values over transaction and reward logic. It uses technology and data, as is the case with

digital marketing and data-driven marketing, but mobilizes them in the service of developing a solid relationship, rather than as a substitute for one.

In what follows, this logic is spelled out in the form of modalities designed to establish humanized links. These modalities are complementary. They reflect the brand's focus on developing and maintaining a brand-customer relationship based on human values.

5.1. Authentic, empathetic communication

Brand-customer communication plays a fundamental, structuring role in building lasting relationships (Bahia and Babay, 2023), as it is both the guiding thread of the relationship and the indicator of the quality of the bond between the brand and its customers. Nevertheless, in relationship marketing, communication is strategically oriented towards building loyalty through relational continuity. It relies on personalized campaigns, targeted newsletters, CRM and regular follow-up.

In data-driven marketing, brand-customer communication relies on real-time behavioral data (clicks, histories, cookies, etc.), enables ultra-targeted messages (e.g. push notifications, dynamic retargeting, automated emails) and aims for conversion and immediate effectiveness. However, it can become impersonal or even intrusive (Nadler & McGuigan, 2018) because it speaks for algorithms and doesn't really listen to the customer.

However, in H2H marketing, communication is based on active listening, the intention of deep understanding, and consideration of the customer's emotions (Hattangadi, 2024). It is intended to be dialogical and collaborative. It favors transparency, the sharing of meaning, and the building of an authentic bond, even if this takes time. The brand can admit its mistakes, express its values and open up a genuine exchange with a view to creating an emotional bond and lasting trust.

That being the case, managers adopting a H2H marketing must put forward a transparent, sincere and unscripted communication, where the brand speaks to the customer as a person, with empathy and authenticity. This position generates a climate of collusion, which is essential for lasting customer loyalty.

To achieve this, several modalities are possible, including:

- Using an offbeat and humorous tone, similar to how Netflix interacts with its audience on Twitter/X,

- Using real customer testimonials in communication campaigns, as the Brazilian neobank does, posting videos of customers explaining how they overcame financial difficulties thanks to the bank's services.

- Creating "live Q&A" campaigns on social media with company employees (e.g., a marketing manager explains the behind-the-scenes look at a new product launch).

Examples of empathic discourses are not lacking. One example is the "Real Beauty" Campaign, through which the Dove brand promoted natural beauty and challenged unrealistic standards. In this campaign, Dove chose to showcase real women of varying morphologies, ages and origins, and to focus on messages that were caring, inclusive and centered on self-acceptance.

5.2. Personalization of interactions and offers

Personalization is based on an intimate knowledge of clients' needs, desires, emotions and values. Companies rely on this knowledge to personalize their interactions with customers and their offers,

which reinforces the feeling of being understood and valued (Babay, 2024). This cognitive, emotional and identity proximity promotes brand attachment and repeat purchases.

In relationship marketing, personalization is often based on behavioral categories and business rules (RFM, relational segmentation...). In data driven marketing, it is hyper-targeted and instantaneous but sometimes perceived as cold or intrusive because it lacks explicit emotional intent.

In H2H marketing, personalization is centered on the human being as a whole (emotions, values, vulnerabilities, life context). It is rooted in an active, sincere, often dialogic listening (co-creation, real feedbacks, human interactions) and constitutes an act of empathy aimed at creating an authentic and respectful connection, not simply at maximizing performance.

There are many examples of how to implement it. Starbucks offers personalized recommendations (drinks, promotions) based on the purchase history and location of its customers. Baristas sometimes write down customer names or details to recreate a neighborhood coffee experience.

It is also possible to create "memory" loyalty cards: on which customer preferences are noted (e.g. "Ms. Dupont prefers gluten-free croissants") and integrated into a CRM shared with in-store teams or send personalized emails mentioning a specific detail (e.g. "Thank you for choosing our blue dress on 15/08, here is an accessory idea that would go with it").

5.3. Error tolerant management

Error management plays a central role in the development of a privileged and lasting customer relationship (Degon, 1998). Far from being mere incidents to be corrected, errors are in fact moments of truth that can either destroy a fragile relationship or strengthen a strong bond of trust – depending on how they are managed. In the context of relationship marketing, error management is generally considered from a functional and procedural perspective (setting up reactive service, quick repairs, refunds, vouchers, etc.). The objective is to restore satisfaction and limit loss of confidence through rational management of the incident.

In H2H marketing, error management is not limited to a technical resolution. It is based on a human, empathetic and emotionally conscious approach, which relies on active listening and co-construction of the solution. Indeed, the brand takes the time to listen to the customer, to understand his feelings, not only his complaint. Then, it gives him a place in the resolution process (ex: choice between several compensations, direct exchange with a human interlocutor...). Error management is therefore based on sincere recognition of the error. The brand presents itself as imperfect but benevolent (Kotler et al., 2024); it does not only seek to erase the mistake, but to make it an opportunity to strengthen the bond, which promotes the customer's perception of a sincere and realistic relationship. The customer feels considered, understood and included in an equal relationship, not simply in a service logic.

In this regard, Domino's Pizza has publicly acknowledged the poor quality of its pizzas in a "Pizza Turnaround" campaign, showing employees revising their recipes in response to criticism.

In the same logic of things, it is possible to set up a program "We apologize": Offer a voucher or a complementary service after an error, accompanied by a handwritten message (ex: "Sorry for your damaged package, we suggest you choose a small gift from the following options to make us forgive").

5.4. Value Co-creation

Co-creation strengthens loyalty by transforming the customer into an active partner, creating a sense of belonging and recognition for their expertise (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

In relationship marketing, value co-creation is essentially based on functional interactions and enriched transactional exchanges. The customer is involved primarily as a participant in the process (feedbacks, loyalty programs, suggestions for improvement, personalization based on behavioral data). The relationship is built on the long term, but remains business oriented: the objective is to increase profitability through customer retention.

In H2H marketing, value co-creation is emotional, existential and egalitarian. It is based not only on the client's contribution as a source of information, but on its recognition as a full partner with its emotions, values, dreams, vulnerabilities. The customer co-builds the brand identity, not just its products or services. It is seen as an alter ego, not a target.

In concrete terms, brands have integrated value co-creation activities into their marketing strategies. One example is Dove, who invites real women to share their personal stories of self-acceptance. These stories become the core of these campaigns. The participants do not just give an opinion: they co-construct an emotional narrative with the brand, embodying human values (acceptance, trust, vulnerability).

In the same co-creation logic, LEGO Ideas encourages its fans to design and vote for sets through its platform. Fans come up with ideas for new products; those who get enough votes are made into an official edition, with the creator's name on the box. The brand does not just use ideas as a data but recognizes the individual behind the creation and celebrates his imagination, his passion, his emotional contribution to the Lego universe.

The Starbucks brand, through its My Starbucks Idea platform, has solicited suggestions from customers for new products, services or experiences. Several innovations, such as the Pumpkin Spice Latte are born from this co-creation. The experience is personalized and rewarding, with human responses and public conversations between customers and Starbucks employees.

Another example is IKEA's co-creation hub where customers, colleagues, partners and new startups can come together to interact, experiment and co-create products and services for a positive future for people and the planet. Contributors become passionate ambassadors, strengthening their emotional attachment to the brand.

These examples are inspiring for brands who want to focus on co-creating value as part of their H2H strategy.

5.5. Humanized Customer Service

Despite the virtues of chatbots that can automate repetitive tasks and analyze the emotions of a disgruntled customer, several brands have preferred to maintain humanized customer services to maintain a high level of empathy and creativity in direct interactions with customers. The responsiveness and creativity of human and listening-trained teams generate memorable experiences, reinforcing the attachment to the brand (Cook, 2010). Humanized customer services provide a deep re-humanization of exchanges that cannot be generated outside of H2H marketing.

For example, at Zappos, agents can solve problems without rigid scripts or even send surprise gifts to appease a disgruntled customer. Similarly, the sustainable smartphone manufacturer Crosscall maintains a "zero chatbot" customer service on social networks, with responses written manually by community managers.

5.6. Human-centric loyalty programs

Human-centric loyalty programs are likely to strengthen loyalty by combining material rewards and emotional bonds, turning a transactional relationship into a personalized and memorable experience (Yim et al., 2008)

Several brands have bet on this lever. An example is Sephora Beauty Insider, where members receive free personalized samples, invitations to expert-led makeup workshops and in-store advice. The outdoor clothing brand SunValley focuses on organizing community events such as hiking.

Another way of humanizing loyalty programs is to create a VIP club offering interactive workshops (e.g., a photo course with a pro using your camera). By promoting exchange, trust and a sense of belonging, these programs become more engaging and lasting loyalty levers than mere material rewards.

Ultimately, human-to-human marketing provides a long-term loyalty lever by transforming the customer relationship into a deep, authentic and personalized human connection. Companies that fully embrace this approach are likely to have better customer loyalty and strong market differentiation.

Figure 3: Human-based loyalty strategy

6. H2H MARKETING: RECONCILING TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITY

The real issue for brands today is not a binary choice between technological efficiency and human relationship, but their ability to build a balanced alliance between these two dimensions. The digital age has profoundly redefined consumers' expectations, who now want a fast, personalized and human experience. Today, consumers are demanding from brands the ability to respond instantly to their needs while showing warmth, empathy, true listening and emotional understanding.

In this context, companies that are able to orchestrate a true symbiosis between Man and Machine are potentially better placed to build lasting and strong relationships with their customers.

Technology, including artificial intelligence, chatbots, recommendation systems and predictive analytics, offers unprecedented opportunities to improve the responsiveness, accuracy and personalization of services (Patil, 2024a; Patil, 2024b).

However, if used in a cold or dehumanized way, the technology can generate frustration, mistrust and even rejection. The key is therefore to position the machine not as a substitute for the human, but as a lever to amplify the human intelligence. The machine must assist the human in analyzing data, detecting emotions or anticipating needs, while the human remains the sensitive interpreter, capable of nuancing, personalizing and carrying the relationship on an emotional level.

Thus, in a H2H strategy, technology becomes a means of offering a customer experience that is both ultra-efficient and deeply connected to the human. Brands need to develop hybrid interfaces where technological fluidity and human warmth coexist harmoniously. For example, a chatbot can perform a first rapid diagnosis, but refer the client to a human counselor as soon as the situation requires it to ensure an empathic support. Similarly, behavioral data can guide relevant personalization of offers, but messages must retain a sincere, warm and respectful tone to each customer's individuality.

This fine orchestration between intelligent automation and human authenticity is a new strategic know-how. This is an augmented human-centered management (Wagner, 2020) that allows the brand to meet not only functional needs but also emotional needs: recognition, appreciation, belonging, trust.

In this respect, several brands have already offered concrete illustrations of this technology-humanity conciliation as part of H2H marketing. These include:

- Medtronic: This brand illustrates how advanced medical technology is integrated into a deeply human customer journey. The company has implemented a strategy where connected medical devices are used to improve the lives of diabetic patients, while maintaining personalized support and a relationship of trust with healthcare professionals and patients. This augmented management combines the efficiency of digital tools with the warmth of human interaction, creating a customer experience that is fluid, empathetic and focused on the real needs of individuals (Andolina et al., 2023).

- Siemens: This brand is developing an H2H strategy in which the digitization of industrial processes serves to strengthen human collaboration and the co-creation of value with customers. Siemens uses technology to optimize operations and customize solutions, but above all to build lasting bonds of trust (Lei & Pfoertsch, 2023). Augmented management at Siemens is based on a balance between automation and human interaction, enabling an innovative and human customer experience, where the machine complements and amplifies the relationship rather than replacing it.

- Whole Foods Market is a brand that has integrated technology to merge online and offline shopping experiences, placing the customer at the center of its operations rather than the product. This H2H approach, focused on service and digitalization, has created a new culinary value proposition. The company is also committed to its stakeholders and sustainability, aiming to reduce its environmental impact. This global H2H strategy has propelled Whole Foods as a leader in focusing on value for customers and society (Posada & Pfoertsch, 2023).

These examples illustrate perfectly how today's brands can intelligently orchestrate technology and human interaction to deliver a customer experience that is personalized, fluid and deeply connected to the values of authenticity, empathy and ethics. This orchestration fits these brands perfectly into

the H2H approach, helping them to federate communities of committed, emotionally attached customers.

7. MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN-BASED LOYALTY STRATEGY

In a loyalty strategy based on H2H marketing, classic performance indicators — such as the Net Promoter Score (NPS), the repurchase rate, the average basket or the click rate — are insufficient to grasp the richness of the human and emotional relationships woven between the brand and its customers. These metrics, although useful, are difficult to capture the perceived authenticity of interactions or emotional attachment. Indeed, customers can buy frequently without feeling truly connected to the brand. Conversely, deep emotional engagement, even if not immediately translated into a purchase, can lead to lasting loyalty. The human aspect of a relationship is therefore not only a matter of numbers, but also of quality of experience.

In this context, companies need to combine several qualitative and quantitative tools to measure the quality of their customer relationships. For example, social media interactions can be analyzed alongside transactional data. Analysis of the feelings expressed in customer comments, the emotions conveyed by brand messages, or the perceived sincerity of direct interactions can be added to numerical indicators for a more complete assessment of the brand-customer relationship.

Ultimately, the question is not just about quantifying purchase volume or number of clicks, but rather to understand the depth of the relationship. Therefore, it becomes essential to broaden the range of indicators by integrating perceptual measures (e.g.: measurement of perceived proximity, perceived authenticity, perceived sincerity of the brand, etc.), attitudinal measures (measurement of emotional attachment, emotional engagement, trust, etc.) or behavioral measures (repurchase behaviour, brand recommendation, brand cooperation, etc.) to be able to pronounce on the effectiveness of human-based loyalty strategies.

8. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study clarifies the foundations of H2H marketing as a distinct strategic paradigm, based on authenticity, empathy, ethics and emotion. In so doing, it helps to formalize a field that is still relatively unstructured theoretically.

By highlighting the limits of transactional, classic relational and data-driven approaches, this research contributes to broadening the conceptual framework of customer relationships, integrating a more human dimension in line with the expectations of the postmodern consumer.

It advocates a return to emotional intentionality and sincere personalization as key drivers of customer loyalty. The research also underlines the importance of conceiving human-machine interactions as a harmonious collaboration rather than an automatic substitution of the human.

In terms of managerial implications, this work draws managers' attention to the need to humanize their brands. Companies are now called upon to adopt authentic, emotionally-rooted communication to create a deep bond with consumers. This goes beyond the use of personalized messages and attractive visuals: it's about creating meaningful experiences that resonate with human emotions and values. Managers therefore need to train their teams in the importance of benevolence, empathy and active listening, at all levels of customer interaction (customer support, social networks, etc.).

Companies also need to design loyalty programs that are not based solely on material rewards or economic incentives. They must encourage emotional loyalty, notably by emphasizing authentic moments of sharing and interpersonal exchanges that reinforce trust and mutual understanding.

Finally, one of the greatest managerial challenges will be to reconcile operational efficiency (cost optimization, large-scale management) with human warmth. Marketing managers must adopt an omnichannel-experience, where technology facilitates personalization but remains faithful to the brand's human values.

In concrete terms, brand managers wishing to implement H2H strategies are called upon to:

- Develop an authentic and empathetic "tone of voice": Adopt simple, sincere and personal language, reflecting the brand's true personality and showing a real understanding of customers' needs and emotions. Avoid excessive jargon and overly formal messages to establish a close and equal relationship with customers.

- Train teams in active listening and benevolence: Organize workshops and training courses to make employees aware of the importance of empathy in every interaction, whether digital or physical.

- Implement emotional loyalty programs: create exclusive experiences, events or content that value customers beyond mere material benefits, reinforcing their sense of belonging.

- Use technology to personalize without dehumanizing: Exploit CRM and automation tools to adapt messages and offers, while retaining a human touch in exchanges (advice linked to the product purchased, a warm, personalized message, etc.).

- Encourage transparency and honesty: Communicate clearly about data collection practices, the use of AI, and brand commitments, in order to build a lasting relationship of trust.

- Encourage co-creation with customers: Involve customers in the development of products or services via online communities, surveys or participative workshops, to strengthen the link and relevance of offers.

- Measuring the emotional impact of marketing actions: Integrate qualitative indicators (analysis of customer feelings, emotional engagement rate) in addition to traditional metrics to adjust the H2H strategy.

- Promote a human-centered corporate culture: Encourage human values within teams, valuing diversity, inclusion and employee well-being, which is then reflected in customer relationships.

9. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The limitations of this research are mainly methodological. Indeed, this article is limited to a critical review of academic and practical work on H2H marketing which, while inspiring, deserves to be complemented by other methods of data collection and analysis to enable more refined observations.

Thus, to deepen the knowledge acquired on this subject, this research invites researchers to conduct qualitative and quantitative approaches, in order to better understand brand and consumer behavior in the Web 5.0 era.

In fact, qualitative studies enable in-depth exploration of human-centered loyalty strategies and consumers' perceptions of them. To this end, researchers are now called upon to conduct in-depth interviews with customers using services integrating human-machine interaction (chatbots, virtual assistants, hybrid advisors) to gather their feelings, expectations and perceptions of authenticity, empathy and human warmth. These interviews will help us understand the emotional and cognitive mechanisms underlying loyalty in an H2H context.

Researchers can also organize focus groups to observe how consumers discuss their experiences with brands using intelligent assistance technologies. This method encourages the emergence of shared opinions and nuances on the perceived quality of the brand-customer relationship.

It would also be interesting to collect and analyze transcripts of exchanges between customers and hybrid human-machine systems (chatbots, augmented call centers) to identify linguistic and emotional indicators of authenticity, empathy and satisfaction. This analysis can be based on content analysis or conversational analysis methods.

Furthermore, in longitudinal studies, researchers could follow panels of customers over several months to observe changes in their emotional attachment and loyalty as a function of Man-Machine interaction modalities, in order to model relationship dynamics over time.

At the same time, concepts such as perceived authenticity or empathy, widely studied in traditional contexts, need to be conceptually reconsidered to be adapted to this technologically and emotionally intensive environment.

Finally, it would be interesting to test, in quantitative studies, the effect of this Man-Machine symbiosis on a set of variables such as perceived immersion or perceived social presence, as well as the effect of these variables on the quality of the brand-customer relationship (satisfaction, commitment and trust) and relationship loyalty (re-purchase, recommendation and cooperation with the brand).

10. CONCLUSION

The technological explosion has profoundly transformed consumption dynamics and the ways brands interact with customers. While digital advances have offered considerable operational efficiency gains, they have also weakened the human dimension of customer relationships, creating a paradox that brands must now resolve. It is in this context that H2H marketing is emerging as an essential strategic response, proposing to place people back at the center of the strategy, without denying the benefits of technological innovation.

In this article, we have highlighted the importance for brands to rethink their loyalty strategies by cultivating authenticity, personalization, trust, and emotional depth in their relationships with consumers. Building a true human-machine symbiosis thus appears to be a central path: a harmonious collaboration where technology assists without erasing the human, and where the human gives meaning and emotion to the interaction. Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of a H2H loyalty strategy requires adopting more qualitative and perceptual indicators, capable of capturing the felt authenticity, emotional engagement, attachment, and satisfaction beyond simple transaction or click volumes.

From a managerial perspective, it calls for a reorganization of processes, a thoughtful adoption of technologies, and a systematic humanization of brand-consumer relationships. The challenge for managers is to find the balance between the use of technology and the creation of authentic connections, in order to build lasting and emotionally engaging relationships with consumers.

To take this further, future research would benefit from a more in-depth exploration of human-centered loyalty strategies and consumers' perceptions of them, as well as empirical testing of the impact of these human-centered strategies on the quality of the brand-customer relationship and on consumers' relationship loyalty.

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