



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (IJEMP)

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# THE SUCCESS FACTOR OF SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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### Article Info:

#### Article history:

Received date: 15.03.2023

Revised date: 10.04.2023

Accepted date: 31.05.2023

Published date: 06.06.2023

#### To cite this document:

Mohamad, V., Abdul, S. A., Putit, L., Osman, A. A., Dwita, V. (2023). The Success Factor of Spirituality Towards Customer Satisfaction. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices*, 6 (21), 20-45.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEMP.621003.

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### Abstract:

Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of our inner identity that shapes our behaviour in society and cognitive processes. While previous research has primarily examined spirituality from a religious perspective, marketing scholars are now exploring how individuals interact with spiritual products, services, and locations to enhance their spiritual well-being and create meaningful experiences. This has led to a ground-breaking study in the Malaysian mobile service provider industry, where researchers sought to understand how spirituality influences customer satisfaction. The social exchange theory has proven that the exchange of benefits has determined its ability to satisfy individual needs and desires through this study. Using a purposive sampling method, 187 responses were gathered and analysed using the PLS-SEM technique. The results were astounding, revealing that all factors significantly impacted customer satisfaction. Specifically, spirituality mediated the relationship between brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, and customer satisfaction. This discovery has opened new doors for companies to connect with their customers on a deeper level and for researchers to explore the intriguing intersection between brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, and spirituality. On top of that, this study has achieved two critical criteria by looking at spirituality from the perspective of subscribers' behaviour in society and cognitive processes, eliminating the influence of materialism. The findings anticipate that when mobile service providers offer their best services to their

customers, it will bring about significant changes in the industry, leading to a higher quality of life during the endemic. This is especially relevant given the high reliance on digitalisation among customers today. In summary, this study highlights the importance of spirituality in shaping customer behaviour and satisfaction, offering exciting opportunities for companies and researchers alike.

**Keywords:**

Brand Prestige, Alternative Attractiveness, Customer Satisfaction, Spirituality, Social Exchange Theory, Mobile Service Provider

## Introduction

Spirituality is a moral standard that defines an individual's identity. Previous research had focused on spirituality in a religious context (Alhazmi, 2019; Muflih & Juliana, 2021; Sudi et al., 2017). Nonetheless, studies on moral equivalence are rare in the context of customer behaviour towards customer satisfaction, especially in the Malaysian mobile service provider (MSP) industry (H. W. Chuah et al., 2015; Hajar et al., 2019).

Recent spirituality research has attracted the curiosity of marketing scholars, as it investigates how consumers interact with spiritual goods, services, and places designed to improve spiritual well-being and create spiritual experiences (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). Much of the research in this area has focused on how marketers imbue their products and brands with spiritual significance in order to make them more appealing, as well as how consumers transform everyday purchasing decisions into sacred experiences (Belk & Tumbat, 2005).

Certain businesses may make an effort to attract their customers' spiritual ideals in order to foster a sense of community or build solid brand prestige (Pirnazarov, 2020). For example, a company that sells eco-friendly products could emphasise its commitment to environmental preservation in order to appeal to customers who have moral or spiritual beliefs about environmental preservation. In this case, a customer's spiritual beliefs may influence their decision to continue business with the company.

As the mobile service provider industry is distinct, establishing a direct relationship between spirituality and it poses certain challenges. Spirituality refers to a person's belief in or search for meaning and purpose in life, which often involves a connection with a higher or transcendental power (Aziz et al., 2021), whereas the mobile service provider industry refers to companies and organisations that provide mobile telecommunications services such as telephone and internet access. However, there was a limited exploration of spirituality's influence on customer satisfaction within the Malaysian mobile service provider industry that defined subscribers' spiritual journey.

As a digital lifestyle becomes more common, so does the demand for connectivity. As a result, total mobile cellular subscriptions increased by 8% in 2021 to 47.2 million, up from 43.72 million in 2020. To meet rising demand, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) received 200,675 complaints about network performance and coverage, as consumers expected high speed and seamless connectivity (MCMC, 2020). This has resulted in an adaptation period as they adjust to their new normal. Dissatisfaction is unavoidable, and the desire to port out has been considered.

The question is how spirituality can influence customer behaviour to the point of affecting customer satisfaction. In order to answer the research question, this study aims to examine the success factor of spirituality on customer satisfaction within the Malaysian mobile service provider industry.

### ***Literature Review***

***This section discusses the literature in the related on this study, that indicating the influence of spirituality on influence brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, and customer satisfaction. This section will begin with the theoretical application to move this study accordingly.***

#### **Social Exchange Theory**

Customer behaviour is frequently linked to social exchange theory to gain a better understanding of loyalty and individual consumption behaviour. There is a theoretical basis in marketing literature for customer satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, switching costs, and the attractiveness of available alternatives (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Gremler, 1995).

According to Blau (1964), the social exchange can be viewed through a utilitarian perspective of social behaviour, in which social actors' behaviour is primarily determined by analysing the expected rewards that may accrue to them. Individuals tend to choose an alternative action that maximises benefits or minimises costs from this perspective. Homans (1958), on the other hand, assumes that people behave in their relationships with others out of habit or emotion rather than on the basis of rational decision-making. According to the utilitarian viewpoint, people prefer to focus on future benefits, whereas the reinforcing viewpoint assumes that people focus on the value of previous rewards. The reinforcement principle was derived in part from B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory in the 1960s explains the persistence of habits in exchange relationships (Cook & Rice, 2006).

According to this theory, the relative benefits and costs to participants determine the value of a particular exchange, and the value of a particular reward or cost is determined by its ability to satisfy individual needs and desires. In their interactions with others, people are motivated to seek rewards and avoid costs. They make decisions about whether or not to participate in specific interactions based on their perceptions of the potential benefits and costs associated with that interaction. According to the theory, people have a general tendency to seek balance in their social exchanges, which is known as the principle of equity. Individuals can try to restore equity by increasing benefits or decreasing the costs of benefits, and costs are out of balance.

Brands can use social exchange theory to boost prestige by offering distinctiveness, conspicuousness, and dependability. The perceived benefits and costs may also influence alternative attractiveness or the perceived attractiveness of a particular option relative to other available options. Although social exchange theory and spirituality have some overlap, social exchange theory is a broad and generalizable theory that is not specifically focused on spiritual or religious issues. Finally, service providers can use social exchange theory to build positive emotional connections with their customers by demonstrating dependability, responsiveness, and trustworthiness that go beyond simple cost-benefit calculations to boost customer satisfaction.

### ***Customer Satisfaction***

The world has been changing dramatically. Companies, that can survive and achieve sustainable growth in today's business environment, have to be well-balanced and emphasize the stakeholders, supply chain sector, society and environment. The most important stakeholder is the customer, who plays the main role in driving business growth. Thus, customer satisfaction is an essential component that should be considered in every business.

Ihtiyar et al. (2019) cited Warde (2017) who defined satisfaction as the extent do customers consider the service episode to have been fulfilled, failed, or exceeded their expectations. Customer satisfaction is determined by the reaction and experience after their use, which is the result of comparing their expectations with the actual service received. It is important to thoroughly understand the customer's desires in order to accurately assess satisfaction (Oliver & Swan, 1989). Expectations refer to the level of performance that customers expect from a product or service, before using it. Expectations are formed based on various factors, such as past experience, marketing and advertising, and customer perceptions of the company and its products or services. Expectations are important in determining customer satisfaction because they provide a benchmark against which customers judge the actual performance of a product or service. The "moment of truth" refers to the point where the customer experiences the product or service for themselves, and it is at this point that their expectations are compared to the actual performance. If actual performance meets or exceeds customer expectations, they are likely to be satisfied. If it does not meet their expectations, they may be disappointed and dissatisfied. This research will investigate the determinants of customer satisfaction within the mobile service providers industry.

The main objective of this research is to examine the success factor of spirituality in improving customer satisfaction as it would become an asset to the organization. Satisfaction is also fundamental to achieving loyalty and profitability (Ihtiyar et al., 2018, 2019) and is the businesses' most crucial promotion source (Ihtiyar et al., 2019). In the last few decades, researchers have begun to elaborate on the process by which customer satisfaction influences profitability by providing high-quality products and services. Building from the individual-level model of customer satisfaction proposed by Oliver (1980). According to Anderson et al. (1994), firms that achieve high customer satisfaction also enjoy superior economic returns. Anderson et al. (1994) also indicated that economic returns from improving customer satisfaction are not immediately realized. Because efforts to increase current customers' satisfaction primarily affect future purchasing behaviour, the more significant portion of any economic returns from improving customer satisfaction will also be realized in subsequent periods.

Pursuing customer satisfaction is a critical goal for organizations, especially for highly competitive sectors such as the mobile network provider industry. There are many alternatives that customers can choose from and the cost of switching from one service provider to another is modest (Sandvik & Grønhaug, 2007). ant principle in organizations. Therefore, learning how to define and measure customer satisfaction is a significant task for mobile service providers.

### ***Brand Prestige***

Brand prestige is defined as a relatively high status of product or service positioning associated with a brand (E M Steenkamp et al., 2003; J. Hwang & Han, 2016; J. Hwang & Lee, 2019). A genuine, superior, and exclusive "know-how" related to the specific possessions, or the overall

performance of a product or service is a key criterion to evaluate whether a brand is prestigious or not (Choi et al., 2017; Dubois & Czellar, 2002; E M Steenkamp et al., 2003; Gin Choi et al., 2001). However, Kim et al. (2020) acknowledge the research by S. Kim et al. (2019), which postulated that the customer experience creates prestige and enhances the value of perception and loyalty perception.

Teng et al. (2022) and Chu et al. (2022) quote that brand prestige can reinforce customers' perceptions of its upscale and high-status position (E M Steenkamp et al., 2003), interacting with customers and establishing the symbolic value (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Thus, brand prestige designates a brand's positioning strategy, which ranks a relatively high level of luxury perception in customers' minds.

In the self-enhancement theory (Brown et al., 1988), self-enhancement is a type of motivation that helps people feel good about themselves and maintain self-esteem. Torres et al. (2018) believed that to achieve a higher degree of self-esteem, a person intends to affirm and maintain positive self-views. For self-enhancement purposes, customers are also likely to create ties with reputable organizations or brands. Since prestigious brands have a superior reputation, clients may use them to fulfil their self-enhancement needs. Therefore, the higher status of specific brands, considered in this study as brand prestige, would elevate self-improvement needs (Liao et al., 2021), improve customer satisfaction, stimulate purchasing intention and build trust, attractiveness and loyalty (Ahn et al., 2015; Baek et al., 2010; J. Hwang & Han, 2016; J. Hwang & Hyun, 2017; Lo & Yeung, 2020).

The main antecedent of brand prestige is customer experience, while brand prestige positively affects customer understanding and behavioural intentions, including satisfaction and loyalty S. Kim et al. (2019). On top of that, brand prestige would increase satisfaction in the consumption experience and reduce switching intention (Zarei et al., 2020). Customers compare brands if they have the intellectual, behavioural, and emotional experiences to determine which brand is prestigious (Choi et al., 2017). Prestige has a halo effect that can affect the experience (Casidy et al., 2018). For instance, Baek et al. (2010) claimed that brand prestige positively affects customers' hedonic and social values since a prestigious brand is considered to increase customers' social status and wealth.

There are two dimensions of brand prestige; functional and hedonic (E.M Steenkamp et al., 2003). Hwang and Hyun (2017) cited Wiedmann et al. (2009), whom that explained the functional dimension of a prestigious brand refers to consistency, uniqueness, usability, reliability and longevity as main product advantages and essential utilities.

The hedonic dimension consists of individual prestige value factors focusing on the personal orientation towards prestige consumption and discusses personal issues such as materialism (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) suggested five values that can be offered as brand prestige; conspicuous value (to signify wealth or social status), limited value (scarcity), social value (highly valued by the social group and individual), hedonic value and quality value. While social or interpersonal effects are correlated with the first three values, the latter two values present personal effects. The study explicitly notes that customers choose prestigious brands because of the opinions of others and not just because of consistency or personal satisfaction. In relation to the research context, mobile service providers offer various packages with a various range of prices and offer after-sales services. From the packages, various ranges of prices and after-sales services, customers can easily categorise the mobile

service providers based on the level of prestige. At the end of this research, the most prestigious brands will be decided by the scientific findings.

### ***Alternative Attractiveness***

Alternative attractiveness is defined as the customer's estimate of the likelihood of satisfaction in an alternative relationship (Patterson & Sharma, 2000). The term "alternative attractiveness" refers to a positive feature of a competing service provider that influences customers' intent to switch (Putit & Abdullah, 2019). According to Putit and Abdullah (2019), alternative attractiveness is defined as "any attractive variables at a destination that can act as a pull factor for the customer to that destination." The number of available alternatives, the degree of difference between them, the difficulty understanding them, and the difficulty comparing them are the four dimensions that define alternative attractiveness (J. C. Anderson & Narus, 1984). New technology developments may result in lower information costs as customers become more knowledgeable about their product or service brands. Customers have been encouraged to switch and discouraged from remaining loyal to their service providers, even when they are satisfied (Sánchez García & Curras-Perez, 2019). MSPs have recognised that the most effective core marketing strategy is to retain existing customers by meeting their needs through excellent service delivery as the MSP industry becomes more diverse and competitive (S. H. W. Chuah et al., 2017).

The MSP industry, on the other hand, is frequently cited as having a high switching cost and attractiveness of alternatives (S. H. W. Chuah et al., 2017; Malhotra & Kubowicz Malhotra, 2013; Wirtz et al., 2014). Switching to another mobile service provider will result in significant financial losses for subscribers (e.g., fees to break a contract, loss of points and rewards). Non-monetary switching costs (time spent obtaining and reviewing information on reasonable service providers) are frequently incurred by customers (S. H. W. Chuah et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2014).

### ***Spirituality***

A person's spirituality is defined as interactions with other people and nature. Their perspectives on meaning and self-worth are influenced by the spiritual component, which is characterised as a connection with Allah (Ghobary Bonab et al., 2013). Spirituality is a spiritual shape that encompasses values, actions, and thoughts in various aspects of life, including marketing and branding decisions (Ab Hamid et al., 2019; Ahmad & Khan, 2016; Bahadori et al., 2019; Farooq & John, 2021; Haq & Yin Wong, 2010; Kurt et al., 2016). In the social marketing literature, Hastings (2017) and Afiff and Astuti (2013) believed that humanity and moral values were the antecedents of spirituality. They also emphasised compelling evidence that this type of morbid force exists in marketing, including the alternative self-inflicted conception. Excessive advertising of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, and highly processed foods, for example. Despite the fact that we can think for ourselves, we appear to be content to accept our fate without dissent or participation in our demise—the role of spirituality in screening any unhealthy marketing to influence customer behaviour. Bertella (2019) defined spirituality as a vision of what a human being can achieve if he or she fully develops their potential belief in the most profound values and meanings by which people seek to live. According to this study, being religious is synonymous with being spiritual; thus, religion and religious practice have always been expressions of spirituality (Cova & Cova, 2019; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019; Jarratt & Sharpley, 2017; Rinallo & Alemany Oliver, 2019; Stolz & Usunier, 2019). Many argue that we are entering a "new age" of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Spirituality, rather than material rewards, is more likely to motivate people

because those who are spiritually motivated are more likely to take action to preserve and protect what they hold sacred according to their spiritual beliefs. There is growing interest in the relationship between spirituality and commitment, but previous research has only examined this relationship in terms of organisational commitment. According to these studies, spiritually motivated people are more committed, loyal, and satisfied with their jobs (Kurt et al., 2016).

Discussions of the potential causes of such a shift should be approached with caution, as the expression in religious, secular, and spiritual aspects is becoming increasingly difficult to define (Dodds et al., 2018). Spirituality must be examined throughout the arguments and statements of previous research to explain the spiritual experience that drives the increase in total MSP subscriptions in Malaysia.

### Proposed Conceptual Model

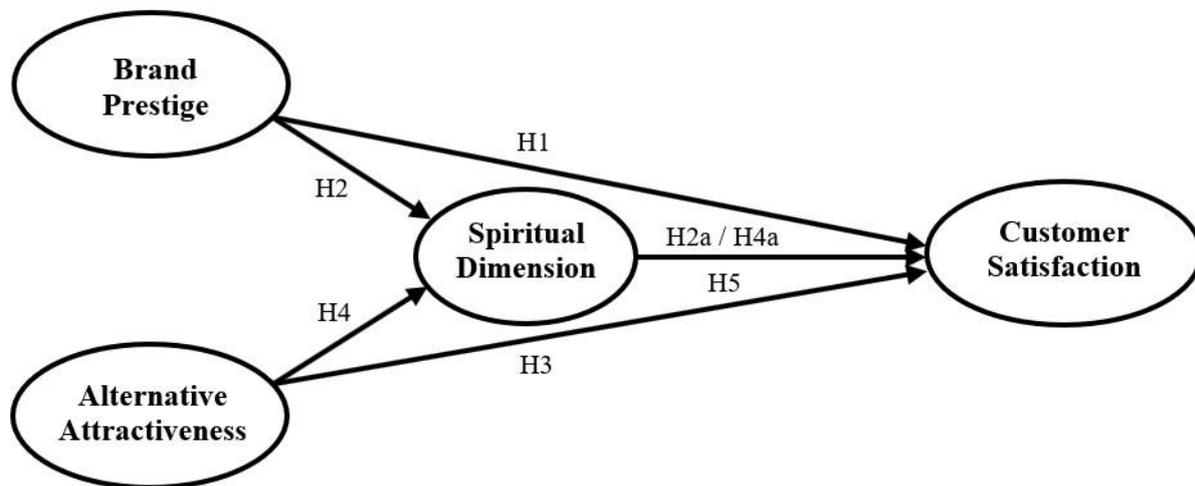


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### Brand Prestige, Customer Satisfaction, and Spirituality

A good mobile service provider subscribers' consumption experience will drive satisfaction. In this study, brand prestige was tested in this research as a driver for this consumption experience. As mentioned in the literature earlier, brand prestige comprises functional and hedonic dimensions that involve cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensory, and social components (Loureiro & Cunha, 2017) that compel the process of consumption stages (i.e., pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase). In previous studies, the discussion of brand prestige was more focused on the effects of brand prestige over hedonic value (S. H. Han et al., 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019). Hedonic value is also at the heart of the understanding of spirituality (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). In this relationship, this study analyses the brand prestige influence on spirituality. However, this study will not investigate the factor of hedonic value. Instead, it will investigate the customer experience that reflects on the spiritual point of view. As a result of this process, this research wants to seek the relationship between brand prestige and customer satisfaction, the relationship between brand prestige and spirituality, and the success factor of spirituality as a mediating variable between brand prestige and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypotheses are thus suggested in the mobile service provider industry:

- H1.* Brand prestige has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.
- H2.* Brand prestige has a positive relationship with spirituality.
- H2a.* Spirituality mediates a positive relationship between brand prestige and customer satisfaction.

### **Alternative Attractiveness, Customer Satisfaction, and Spirituality**

The role of alternative attractiveness as an element that reduces the satisfaction of the existing mobile service provider was conceptualized in the literature review. The study on alternative attractiveness is a study of rationality involving two elements: customer expectations and customer perceptions. The higher the level of expectations for alternative attractiveness, the higher the level of perception will apply. The more alternative attractiveness provided by a mobile service provider, the stronger the effect of customer satisfaction will be (S. H. W. Chuah et al., 2017; Putit & Abdullah, 2019; Saidin et al., 2018). This is because every referent expectation is considered for a customer to make a loyal decision (Sánchez García & Curras-Perez, 2019b; Wu, 2011). This may affect the overall decision toward all alternatives available. The decision derived from this situation would be influenced by all the resources and information that subscribers gather throughout the analyses that he or they made on each alternative (Xue et al., 2020). This analytic focus on what kind of functional value may influence spirituality, and this will enable another contribution to the study. Therefore, the following hypotheses are thus suggested in the mobile service provider industry:

- H3.* Alternative attractiveness has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.
- H4.* Alternative attractiveness has a positive relationship with spirituality.
- H4a.* Spirituality mediates a positive relationship between alternative attractiveness and customer satisfaction.

### **Spirituality and Customer Satisfaction**

It indicates that businesses that make an investment in spirituality can develop a distinctive value proposition and set themselves apart from competitors. Research on including hedonic elements, such as spirituality, on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the mobile service provider industry may be significant. This would make it simpler to comprehend how spirituality and customer behaviour relate to one another in this situation. The study also focuses on the Malaysian mobile service provider industry; therefore, it would be fascinating to find out if the same conclusions apply to other nations and cultures. Research in various cultural contexts may reveal differences in the value placed on spirituality among various markets and customers. Furthermore, by evaluating spirituality through the eyes of its adherents' behavioural interactions and cognitive processes, as well as avoiding the effect of materialism, this study will meet these two critical conditions. The study of spirituality has not yet reached a saturation point, and not so many studies can be found to parse the current debate, especially in studies that discuss the spiritual level of individuals in identifying the level of satisfaction with products or services consumption. Therefore, the following hypotheses are thus suggested in the mobile service provider industry:

- H5.* Spirituality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

### **Research Methodology**

A cross-sectional approach is a positivist method that aims to collect data from multiple contexts simultaneously. This approach involves collecting data only once over a short period of time, and it provides a snapshot of the current situation. Therefore, a cross-sectional process

will examine correlations among the variables in a large sample (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019a; Leguina, 2015). This research adopted a quantitative research methodology as a methodological choice. According to Yannis and Nikolaos (2018), a quantitative research methodology allows researchers to explain the phenomenon under examination using various statistical methodologies. Because the goal of this study is to discover if there is a meaningful relationship between the variables and explicitly identify the variables that influence the dependent variable, it can be classified as a correlational rather than a causal study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

### Sample and Data Collection

This study has applied a judgemental sampling method to cover the research scope (i.e. subscribers of Malaysian MSPs). Only subscribers aged above 20 years old and who have currently subscribed to the same mobile service provider for more than six months are eligible to be the respondent of this research. According to the Hand Phone Users Survey 2018, it has been established that mobile phone users within the age range of 20 to 34 constitute the second largest group, accounting for 88.0% of subscribers. Conversely, subscribers under the age of 20 make up the majority, representing 93.5% of all mobile phone users. Given the complexity of the variables in question, it is imperative that respondents aged 20 and above be selected to ensure a more robust and meaningful impact on scientific research. There is a concern that the constructs of brand prestige and spirituality may be misinterpreted. Failure to select an appropriate sample of respondents for this study may lead to results that are not representative of the actual situation, highlighting the importance of proper sampling techniques in research (Hulland et al., 2018). PLS-SEM has been used to analyse the research data, and the validation used are convergent validity and discriminant validity. For PLS-SEM, earlier research recommended a threshold sample of 100 (Hair, Black, et al., 2019; Memon et al., 2020). In turn, power analysis based on the criterion with the greatest number of predictors can calculate the necessary sample size (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019a). G\*Power software was used to determine the minimal sample size for this study. The minimal sample needed is 107, given the effect size of 0.15, the statistical power of 0.95, and the number of predictors (spirituality) of 2. Therefore, our goal was to gather a total of data greater than or equal to the necessary number.

This study applied a Likert 5-point scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure items. This study conducted a survey to evaluate our research model to validate these hypotheses. The questionnaire included demographic information, as well as self-reported items from respondents. The questionnaire contained four constructs: brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, spirituality, and customer satisfaction. To begin, we extracted measurement items from previous studies (Ahn et al., 2015; S. H. W. Chuah et al., 2017; Hastings, 2017; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019; Y. Hwang & Mattila, 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2019; Sánchez García & Curras-Perez, 2019; Shith et al., 2018; Wu, 2011; Yu & Chen, 2022). Then, the items were adopted and adapted to maintain the accuracy of the intended meaning of the items to match the research objective.

### Data Collection

This study conducted an online survey via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook, and the surveying period lasted from 7 May 2022 to 6 June 2022. This research gathered 241 responses within a month of the data collection period. However, nine responses were answered by non-eligible respondents. These respondents are considered

non-eligible because they are either below the age of 20 or have subscribed to any mobile service provider for less than six months. After excluding those considered non-eligible, the total number of samples left was 232. Nevertheless, the remaining eligible samples still exceeded the minimum number required for this study. All reported information is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Survey Responses Information**

No	Information	Count
1	All responses	241
2	Non-eligible respondents	9
3	Eligible respondents	232
4	Minimum required samples	107

Suspicious responses in the dataset were tracked by computing each response case's standard deviation. The interpretation of zero standard deviation is that there is no variation in every response (answer) provided by a specific case (respondent) (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). No variation indicates that a particular respondent answers all questions with the same rating score (i.e., straight-lining answers). In the meantime, identical standard deviation values between two or more cases (respondents) imply that those responses may be redundant (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). As a result, there were 45 cases with standard deviation values equal to zero. As a result, 45 respondents responded to the questionnaires with straight-line answers. As a result, leaving 187 samples to proceed to the next screening stage. This study utilised 187 eligible samples, representing 187 subscribers that lived across states in Malaysia.

Table 2 summarises the demographic information of the respondents. The majority of the respondents are female (69.5%). There are an almost equal proportion of respondents in the range of 41 – 50 years (34.8%) and respondents in the range of 31 – 40 years (34.2%). Meanwhile, with respect to religion, most of the respondents are Muslims (96.8%), followed by Christians (1.1%), Buddhists (1.1%) and Hindus (1.1%). Most of the respondents subscribed to Celcom (36.4%), followed by Maxis (22.5%) and Digi (18.2%), which majority of the respondents chose a post-paid plan (75.4%) as their subscription plan. Finally, majority of the respondents have subscribed for more than 5 years (57.2%).

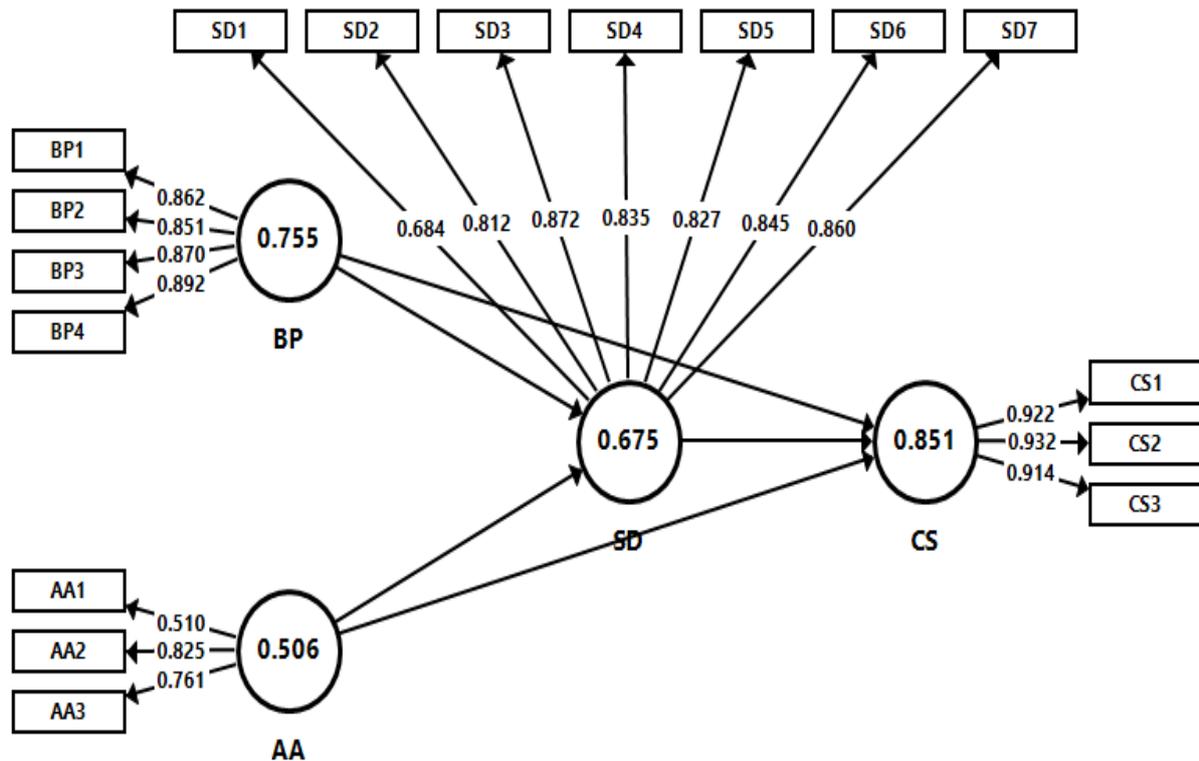
**Table 2: Background of the Respondents**

	Information	Frequency	Percent
<b>1</b>	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	57	30.5
	Female	130	69.5
	Total	187	100.0
<b>2</b>	<b>Age</b>		
	20-30	36	19.3
	31-40	64	34.2
	41-50	65	34.8
	>51 years	22	11.8
	Total	187	100.0
<b>3</b>	<b>Religion</b>		

	Islam	181	96.8
	Christian	2	1.1
	Buddha	2	1.1
	Hindu	2	1.1
	Total	187	100.0
<b>4</b>	<b>MSP</b>		
	Maxis	42	22.5
	Celcom	68	36.4
	Digi	34	18.2
	U Mobile	11	5.9
	Webe (Unifi)	15	8.0
	RedONE	8	4.3
	ONEXOX	3	1.6
	Other	6	3.2
	Total	187	100.0
<b>5</b>	<b>Plan Type</b>		
	Prepaid	46	24.6
	Post-paid	141	75.4
	Total	187	100.0
<b>6</b>	<b>Subscription Period</b>		
	6 months to a year	11	5.9
	1 - 5 years	69	36.9
	> 5 years	107	57.2
	Total	187	100.0

## Results and Discussion

A measurement model is a component of a path model that includes indicators and their relationships to constructs. It is also known as an external model in PLS-SEM analysis (Sarstedt et al., 2017). In this study, the measurement model was evaluated using the PLS Algorithm in SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2020) to assess construct reliability and validity, subsequently to answer all the research questions (Hair, Black, et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2017). The measurement model of this study is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Measurement Model**

Internal consistency reliability is a measure of the reliability of a test when used multiple times with the same group of people. It is represented by the composite reliability coefficient ( $\rho_c$ ), which should be at least 0.70 (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). Convergent validity is a measure of how well a test correlates with other tests that measure similar constructs. It is determined through the value of average variance extracted (AVE), which should be at least 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, et al., 2019; Hair, Risher, et al., 2019). As such, all constructs were acceptable for this study. The result of internal reliability and convergent validity are summarised in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity Results (Reflective)**

Constructs	Items	Loadings	$\alpha$	$\rho_c$	AVE
Alternative Attractiveness (AA)	AA1	.510	.590	.748	.506
	AA2	.825			
	AA3	.761			
Brand Prestige (BP)	BP1	.862	.892	.925	.755
	BP2	.851			
	BP3	.872			
	BP4	.891			
Spirituality (SD)	SD1	.684	.919	.935	.675
	SD2	.813			
	SD3	.872			
	SD4	.835			
	SD5	.827			
	SD6	.846			
	SD7	.860			
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	CS1	.923	.913	.945	.851
	CS2	.932			
	CS4	.913			

As a result, all constructs passed the composite reliability test, with  $\rho_c$  coefficients ranging from 0.748 to 0.945. Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019) considered composite reliability values between 0.70 and 0.90 to be acceptable in exploratory research. Values of 0.95 and higher, on the other hand, are problematic because they indicate that the items are redundant, reducing construct validity.

HTMT is the ratio between the mean of all items' correlations across constructs measuring the same construct (Henseler et al., 2015). HTMT ratio greater than 0.90 indicates a problem of discriminant validity (Gold et al., 2001; Roemer et al., 2021). Hence, it was confirmed that there was no discriminant validity problem for all the constructs in the measurement model, as illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4: Results of HTMT Ratio**

Constructs	AA	BP	CS	SD
AA				
BP	.636			
CS	.612	.856		
SD	.481	.741	.753	

*\*Note. AA = Alternative Attractiveness, BP = Brand Prestige, CS = Customer Satisfaction, SD = Spirituality*

The main idea of descriptive analysis is to generate respondents' feedback towards the measurement items in the questionnaire and to provide important information based on mean scores that have been segmented into five levels (Hamzah et al., 2016) as illustrated in Table 5.

**Table 5: Mean Score For Five Likert Scale**

Mean Score	Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

Based on Table 6, the overall mean score for all the construct range between 3.35 and 3.78. These scores imply that the respondents' behaviour was neutral to somewhat agreed that they are loyal to their existing mobile service provider at a high level.

**Table 6: Level of Constructs**

Construct	N	Mean	Level
Alternatives Attractiveness (AA)	187	3.69	High
Brand Prestige (BP)	187	3.52	High
Spirituality (SD)	187	3.35	High
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	187	3.65	High

**Table 7: Crosstabulation Between Religion and Spirituality**

Score		Spirituality					Total
		1.14 - 1.86	2.00 - 2.86	3.00 - 3.86	4.00 - 4.86	5.00	
Religion	Islam	7	30	95	42	7	181
	Christian	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Buddha	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Hindu	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total		7	31	100	42	7	187

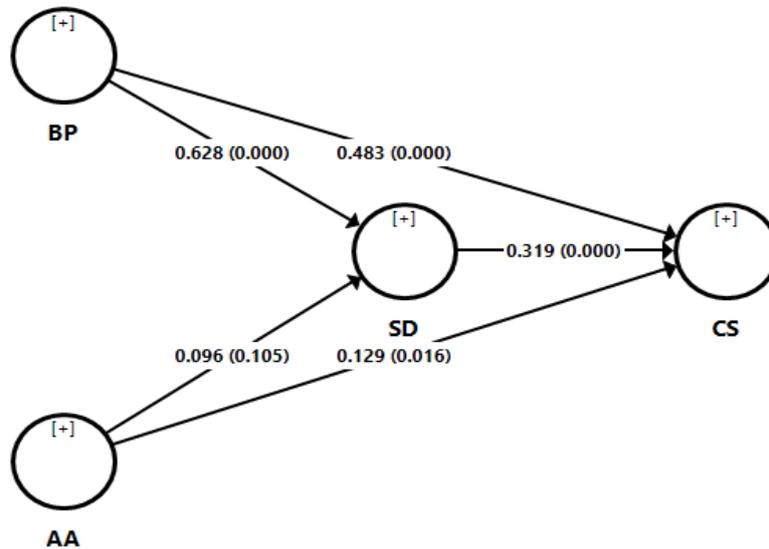
As illustrated in Table 7, the majority of the respondents are Muslims (181 respondents). However, 3.87% chose strongly disagree, 16.57% chose to disagree, 52.49% chose neutral, 23.2% chose to agree, and 3.87% chose strongly agree. Thus, their faith has affected their behaviour more on neutral to somewhat agreed that spirituality determined the level of satisfaction towards their existing mobile service provider.

**Table 8: Results of the Collinearity Test**

Predictors	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	
	CS	SD
Alternative Attractiveness (AA)	1.483	1.465
Brand Prestige (BP)	2.213	1.465
Spirituality (SD)	1.893	-
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	-	-

Collinearity, also known as multi-collinearity, is a phenomenon that occurs when two or more predictor variables in a statistical model are highly correlated. This can lead to unstable and biased estimates of model parameters and impact the validity of model findings. One way to assess the severity of collinearity in partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-

SEM) path models is to calculate the variance inflation factor (VIF). A VIF value of 3.3 or higher may indicate that collinearity affects the structural model and its results (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). As a result, all predictors produced VIF values that were less than 3.3 (see Table 8). Hence, collinearity was not a significant problem in this structural model.



**Figure 3: Structural Model (Significance Testing)**

Typically, the significance of hypothesised relationships is decided based on the ability estimated (p-value), p-value represents the probability of error for assuming that a path coefficient is significantly different from zero (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). The p-value of 0.01, 0.05 and 0.10 represent 1%, 5% and 10% of error probability. It also means that only 1%, 5% and 10% of the hypothesised relationships occur by chance. However, American Statistical Association (ASA) highlights that reporting p-value alone does not provide a proper measure of evidence regarding a model or hypothesis (Ramayah et al., 2017). Therefore, this study also reports other measures, including t-value and confidence interval, as additional evidence to accept or reject the hypothesised relationships (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019a; Leguina, 2015).

Commonly used benchmarks of t-value in one-tailed tests are 2.33, 1.65 and 1.28, for  $p < 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and  $p < 0.01$  consecutively (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019). Meanwhile, for confidence interval values, the upper limit (UL) and lower limit (LL) values must be either both positive or negative, which indicates that zero does not fall into the range of upper and lower bound values (Hair et al., 2017). In this study, significance testing was performed using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2017) to test hypothesised relationships and subsequently answer the research questions, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 demonstrates direct relationships between constructs, as well as interactions between independent variables and mediator variables (mediating relationships). The arrows represent relationships between constructs with the values of path coefficient,  $\beta$  (outside brackets) and the t-values (inside brackets). Relationships with t-value more than 1.65 ( $t > 1.65$ ) were significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

The Model's explanatory power is measured by  $R^2$  value (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019), or known as the coefficient of determination (Hair et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2017).  $R^2$  represents the

model's in-sample predictive power (Rigdon, 2012).  $R^2$  value ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a greater explanatory power.  $R^2$  value equal to or larger than 0.10 is considered as acceptable (Falk & Miller, 1992; Raithel et al., 2012). According to Chin (1998) which consider for  $R^2$  values as the following: 0.67 (substantial), 0.33 (moderate), and 0.19 (weak).

Table 9: Results of Significance Testing and IPMA

Relationships	$\beta$	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Confidence Interval		Effect Size ( $f^2$ )	Explanatory Power ( $R^2$ )	Decision	Importance (Total Effects)	Performances (Index Values)
				LL	UL					
BP → CS	0.483	6.203	<0.001	0.365	0.62	.320 (weak)		Supported		
AA → CS	0.129	2.149	0.016	0.025	0.221	.034 (weak)	0.664	Supported		
SD → CS	0.319	4.648	<0.001	0.203	0.43	.163 (weak)		Supported		
BP → SD	0.628	9.657	<0.001	0.512	0.727	.510 (moderate)		Supported		
AA → SD	0.096	1.254	0.105	- 0.034	0.215	.012 (weak)	0.466	Not supported		
BP → SD → CS	0.2	4.542	<0.001	0.132	0.279			Supported		
AA → SD → CS	0.031	1.129	0.130	- 0.008	0.079			Not supported		
Brand Prestige									0.684	63.268
Spirituality									0.319	59.303
Alternative Attractiveness									0.158	69.039

\*Note. One-tailed test.  $p < 0.05^*$ .  $p < 0.01^{**}$ . BP = Brand Prestige, AA = Alternative Attractiveness, SD = Spirituality, CS = Customer Satisfaction.

\*Note. Sorted in Descending Order Based on Importance (Total Effects)

As a result, customer satisfaction demonstrated a moderate explanatory power at  $R^2 = 0.664$ , which implies that all predictors (i.e., Brand Prestige, Alternative Attractiveness, and Spirituality) had explained 64.4% of the variance in Customer Satisfaction. While Brand Prestige and Alternative Attractiveness explained 46.6% of the variance in Spirituality.

Researchers can also examine how the removal of a specific predictor construct affects the  $R^2$  value of an endogenous construct. This metric is known as the effect size ( $f^2$ ), and it is comparable to the size of the path coefficients. When comparing the sizes of the path coefficients and the effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), the rank order of the relevance of the predictor constructs in explaining a dependent construct in the structural model is often the same (Hair et al., 2021). PLS-SEM applications works of literature (Manley et al., 2021; Ringle et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020) have suggested that substantive effect predictor variable on dependent variable should be reported. In Smart PLS version 3.0, the values of  $f^2$  are automatically provided by the software, unlike the previous version, where analysts need to manually calculate it. The effect size ( $f^2$ ) indicates the change in the  $R^2$  value when a specified exogenous construct is omitted from the structural model. All results of  $R^2$  and  $f^2$  from the structural model analysis are illustrated in Table 9. Hence, H1, H2, H3, and H5 were supported. These findings interpreted that as the level of Brand Prestige increased, the level of Spirituality also increased. In addition, the level of Spiritual increased, and the level of Customer Satisfaction also increased. For the indirect relationship between H2a and H4a, only H2a was supported, as illustrated in Table 9.

The Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) is an extra feature to extend the results presentation of the standard PLS-SEM estimations by contrasting the total effects of the latent variables on some target variables with their latent variable scores (Hair et al., 2017). IPMA analysis can be used to identify key areas for improvement and to prioritize action plans. Areas where customers rate high importance, but low performance can be prioritized for improvement, as they are most likely to impact customer satisfaction. Therefore, the present study employed IPMA on the key target construct (Customer Satisfaction) to identify potential areas of improvement that should receive high attention, as illustrated in Table 9. Alternative Attractiveness showed the highest performance, but it was not the most important variable in the prediction of Customer Satisfaction. On the other hand, Brand Prestige was the most important variable in the prediction of Customer Satisfaction, however, has slightly lower performance compared to Alternative Attractiveness. Overall results showed a performance level of below 70%. This indicated that all variables in this study have room for improvement that might need more attention in future. In the next sections, this study will discuss on contributions derived from the research findings.

### Theoretical Contribution

This study makes several contributions to the literature on consumer behaviour, service marketing and generational cohorts. First, it provides insight into value from a customer perspective and the influence of brand prestige and alternative appeal on spirituality in a continuous service setting such as the mobile service provider industry. The findings show that customers use services not only based on functional and hedonic factors but also through the lens of humanity and moral values (i.e. spirituality) to have satisfactory mobile plans and packages. Moreover, it highlights the role of social exchange theory in this scenario, which states that there are tangible and intangible exchanges. Second, it highlights the role of spiritual experience in driving the increase in mobile service provider subscriptions in Malaysia.

## Practical Implications

The research findings have important practical implications for companies that offer ongoing services and want to improve their customer retention strategies. Building customer loyalty is a major concern for marketers (S. H.-W. Chuah et al., 2017, 2018). Instead of using a generic approach, mobile service providers should tailor their satisfaction strategies based on the duration of the customer-firm relationship. To achieve this, mobile service providers must demonstrate that they are able to anticipate their customers' needs. Customer satisfaction strategies in mobile service providers often involve rewarding customers for their continued use of the service. This can be accomplished through a variety of means, including providing discounts on services or products, exclusive access to certain features or benefits, or simply diminishing the attractiveness of alternatives. The goal of these strategies is to increase customer satisfaction and retention, as satisfied customers are more likely to return and recommend a service to others.

One practical implication of customer satisfaction strategies in mobile service providers is that they can help to reduce customer churn or the rate at which customers leave the service. By providing incentives for customers to stay with the service, providers can help to maintain a stable customer base, which can result in long-term financial benefits. Another practical implication is that can help mobile service providers distinguish themselves from their competitors. A provider can stand out in a crowded market and attract new customers by offering unique or highly valued rewards through strong brand prestige. This is extremely significant in the mobile service providers industry, where competition is often fierce, and customers are willing to switch providers in search of the best deal or the one with the most appealing perks. Overall, customer satisfaction strategies can help mobile service providers build stronger relationships with their customers while driving business growth. By understanding their customers' needs and preferences, as well as offering tailored rewards and incentives, providers can create a sense of value and appreciation, which can help to drive customer satisfaction through moral values.

## Discussion

This study discusses the impact of spirituality on customer satisfaction, particularly in the context of the Malaysian MSP industry. Previous research has largely focused on spirituality in a religious context, but this study aims to explain spirituality influences customer behaviour to the point where it affects customer satisfaction. The social exchange theory helps to answer the ultimate research question by creating positive emotional connections with customers by demonstrating reliability and responsiveness. This goes beyond simple cost-benefit calculations, as well as increasing customer satisfaction.

The results showed that the relationship between alternative attractiveness and spirituality was not supported. This is because the functional relationship of alternative attractiveness is more important than the psychological relationship of spirituality (J. Kim et al., 2020; Lee & Kim, 2022). The analysis identified that brand prestige influences spirituality positively. The analysis findings are a new record in studies involving brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, and spirituality, especially studies that examine the relationship between brand prestige and alternative attractiveness towards spirituality. As the current study examined the role of spirituality in enhancing mobile service providers' subscriber satisfaction, the finding revealed that spirituality positively influenced customer satisfaction. The data supported Bhat et al. (2019), who introduced the social marketing and well-being model with spirituality as one of the social marketing antecedents.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations, though, on the brighter side, it does provide directions for future research endeavours. This study has a shortcoming, which is how the online questionnaire was handled. The respondents misinterpreted the questions since the researcher was not present to further clarify any ambiguities and, most importantly, the significance of this questionnaire itself to them. The results have an impact on the study's overall quality. Apart from that, the triangulation study method can be proposed to increase the strength and effectiveness of the study by using more than one method or approach in collecting and analysing data. The triangulation study method allows the researcher to examine the researched question from various points of view or different perspectives while improving the shortcomings that may exist in each method or approach that is used individually. Triangulation study methods can use qualitative or quantitative methods, or a combination of both, depending on the needs and objectives of the study. It would also be interesting to investigate how relevant the research model proposed in this study, is to other service businesses such as insurance, banking, and health care.

### **Conclusions**

This research aims to examine the success factor of spirituality between brand prestige, alternative attractiveness, and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian mobile service provider industry. Results showed that all factors except alternative attractiveness had a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Spirituality was found to impact the relationship between brand prestige and customer satisfaction, suggesting that customers may be more satisfied if a brand aligns with their values and beliefs. This study on spirituality in the Malaysian mobile provider industry has been successful in meeting its goals. The results have shed light on the key factors that influence the customer satisfaction of subscribers to their current mobile service provider. This information is valuable for Malaysian mobile service providers, as it can be used to develop more effective marketing strategies and improve customer satisfaction through spirituality. The findings of this study have made a significant contribution to the existing literature on customer satisfaction in the Malaysian mobile service provider industry. The results provide empirical evidence of the importance of various factors such as advertising, branding, customer service, and promotional activities in stimulating spirituality in determining customer satisfaction. These findings can serve as a reference for future studies and help to expand the existing body of knowledge in this field. In conclusion, this study has not only provided a valuable resource for Malaysian mobile service providers but also made a notable contribution to the academic literature on spirituality in the telecommunications industry. There is potential for further research to build on these findings and explore other important factors that may impact customer satisfaction.

### **Acknowledgement**

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Sciences, Ethics, and Civilizations (KonSEP) 2023 and the International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices (IJEMP) in creating a stimulating environment for academic exchange. Their commitment to promoting knowledge sharing and fostering collaboration among researchers greatly enriched the conference experience.

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