

Market-Mediated Self-Transcendence through Spiritual Services

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Abstract

This research explores how consumers experience spiritual services and how market logics shape these experiences. Using a multi-method ethnographic approach, we combine offline and online participant observation, in-depth interviews, and archival analysis of customer testimonials. Results show (1) consumers enter spiritual services from a continuum of vulnerability, spanning no salient vulnerability, everyday vulnerability, and rupture-based vulnerability; (2) spiritual services enable market-mediated self-transcendence across four pathways—intrapersonal, interpersonal, temporal, and transpersonal; (3) well-being outcomes emerge as short-term emotional uplift and lasting developmental gains; and (4) consumers view market logics not as incompatible with spirituality, but as a necessary and delicate balancing act, supporting commercial cues before and after the core service encounter but disrupting immersion during the core spiritual experience.

Track: Service Marketing & Service Innovation