

Beyond Functional and Experiential Value: The Mediating Effect of Self-Congruity in the Utilitarian–Hedonic Value Framework

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ABSTRACT: Consumer value perceptions represent the main drivers of consumer attitudinal outcomes by shaping their psychological association with the products and brands. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze the impact of hedonic and utilitarian values on consumer satisfaction with the mediating role of self-congruity. A survey of 225 smartphone users has been conducted to empirically test the utilitarian and hedonic value framework. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were executed using Amos-22 to test the hypotheses. The results highlight that self-congruity mediates the relationship between utilitarian value perception and consumer satisfaction. The research framework provides practical insights to managers by highlighting the significance of both hedonic and utilitarian values in developing products and experiences that resonate with the self-image of the customers. It contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence that self-congruity serves as an important mechanism through which hedonic and utilitarian dimensions enhance customer satisfaction.

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Introduction

Smartphones have revolutionized the way the world communicates, engages, works, buys and plays. Smartphones have transformed the medium of communication into a platform that can be used for a variety of purposes (Chun et al., 2012; Jung, 2014). The rivalry among the manufacturers has intensified since smartphone technologies have continually improved. The differentiation of one product from another is no longer adequate. Rather, businesses are looking for ways to get a competitive edge by providing greater value to the customer and memorable consumption experiences (Shin, 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2021). It is a competitive market, and loyalty is increasingly important as a measure of marketing success. Satisfied customers will stay loyal, buy more and provide positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Oliver, 1980; Fornell et al., 1996). Hence, the issue of customer satisfaction has gained significant interest in the field of consumer behavior and marketing research studies (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Shin, 2015).

Perceived value is an important concept in consumer behavior, as it affects the perception of goods and services (Zeithaml, 1988). It is widely recognized that the concept of perceived value is multidimensional and not a single construct (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Hedonic value and utilitarian value have been major factors of interest in marketing and information technology (IT) research (Babin et al., 1994). Utilitarian value is the value that consumers perceive from a product's functioning and practical uses (Babin et al., 1994). According to Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), Hedonic value represents the pleasure, enjoyment and experiential benefits derived from the use of the product. In both value dimensions, it has been found that these affect consumers' perceptions, satisfaction, and purchase intentions in a digital and technology-enabled environment (Hsiao & Chen, 2016; Pang, 2021).

Smartphones provide a suitable setting for the study of these associations because of their multiple functional utility and their engaging consumption experiences (Chun et al., 2012; Jung, 2014). Hence, the influence of hedonic and utilitarian value on customer satisfaction is still a relevant topic for customer satisfaction studies in today's marketing.

Perceived value is a predictor of customer satisfaction, but it is not the sole determinant of customers' favorable evaluations. The degree to which a product matches the consumers' self-concept also affects the consumer reactions (Sirgy, 1985). The present study is based on Self-Congruity Theory, which proposes that consumers' self-concept has a modulating effect on their assessment of products and brands (Sirgy, 1985). The theory suggests that customers' preferences for products which are consistent with their own image or with their idealized image are based on the fact that such products reinforce self-expression and personal identity (Sirgy, 1985). There have been many uses of the Self-Congruity Theory to explain a variety of consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, satisfaction, and commitment in different consumption settings (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). Smartphones have both utilitarian and hedonic values, which makes Self-Congruity Theory an appropriate theoretical framework for explaining the transformation of consumers' perceptions of hedonic and utilitarian value to customer satisfaction through congruity processes.

Various studies have confirmed that both the hedonic and utilitarian value positively influence customer satisfaction and other attitudinal responses (Babin et al., 1994; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Blut et al., 2024). Likewise, self-congruity has been widely known as a significant determinant of attitudes, brand preference, satisfaction and commitment (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012; Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). Research, however, is limited in explaining the psychological process underlying the relationship between the hedonic and utilitarian values and customer satisfaction. The recent systematic reviews also underscore the need for the extension of the self-congruity studies to other new product categories and new consumption contexts (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). The need is particularly pertinent for smartphones, as consumers evaluate them on their symbolic and functional attributes (Jung, 2014). Thus, examining self-congruity as a mediating process provides a more holistic explanation for the perceived value and its effect on customer satisfaction and extends the scope of the self-congruity theory in the smartphone context.

Hence, this study aims to examine the mediating effect of self-congruity between hedonic value, utilitarian value, and customer satisfaction of smartphone users. The study enhances the explanatory power of the self-congruity theory in the relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction in the context of smartphones. This also enriches the literature on the perceived value literature as it integrates the hedonic value, utilitarian value and self-congruity into a holistic conceptual framework. The results have practical implications for smartphone manufacturers and brand executives looking to boost customer satisfaction by both value development and brand positioning. Specifically, the results can support managers when developing products and marketing programs with functional benefits and entertaining consumption experiences, as well as increased fit with the self-concept of the consumer.

Literature review

Hedonic Value

The concept of hedonic value first appeared in the literature from Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), who defined it as the experiential value from emotions, pleasure, enjoyment or sensory experiences in the consumption process. It is the degree to which consumers seek fun and emotional satisfaction derived from a product, in addition to functional benefits. However, recent consumer study data suggests that consumer decision-making is still driven by hedonic value as people have been valuing products more experientially and emotionally. Empirical research in recent years found that hedonic value has a positive impact on purchase intention, because it creates positive evaluations and enjoyable consumption experiences (Adi et al., 2024). In digital ecosystems, hedonic value can enhance consumers' emotional connection and strengthen their purchasing motivations for goods or services. Hedonic value, in turn, also has a positive impact on consumers' attitudes, as evidenced by various studies showing that experiences that are designed and centered on pleasure can enhance consumers' brand and product attachment (Riptiono, 2024). In addition, recent studies indicate that the importance of hedonic value influences consumers' perceived benefits and emotional feelings, which in turn impacts their behavior (Kurnianingsih et al., 2025). Hence, a hedonic value is an important psychological influence that can influence purchase intention and brand evaluations.

Utilitarian Value

The utilitarian value is related to the functional approach to consumption and is related to the benefits that consumers receive from products or services that are functional and efficient to use (Sheth et al., 1991). It reflects consumers' logical evaluation of the usefulness, convenience, quality, and cost savings. Adi et al. (2024) concluded that utilitarian value positively affects purchase intention because it enhances the perception of the functional benefits and value of the product. A recent study from an online purchasing context also suggests that utilitarian value contributes to buying willingness as it reduces uncertainty and improves perceived usefulness. It also suggests that utilitarian value is the factor that fosters positive attitudes as people create positive evaluations when a brand's functional needs are met (Rominingtyas & Riptiono, 2024). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that utilitarian value can influence the consumer decision-making process, as it emphasizes efficiency, convenience, and practicality (Kurnianingsih et al., 2025). Therefore, utilitarian value provides a cognitive basis for consumers to evaluate brands and develop purchase intentions.

Self-Congruity

Self-congruity is the level of congruity between the self-concept and the perceived image of the product or brand (Sirgy, 1985). According to self-congruity theory, consumers favor brands that would enhance their sense of identity and boost self-expression (Sirgy, 1985). Consumers make more positive evaluations and stronger emotional connections with the brand when they see a high similarity between their self-image and the brand (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). According to a thorough meta-analysis, the positive effect of self-congruity on attitude and purchase intent is found in various contexts of consumption (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). A systematic review recently showed that self-congruity continues to be a well-established theoretical approach to consumer assessments, satisfaction, loyalty, and brand relationships, and offers potential areas for future research in new product areas (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). Consumers are likely to express personal identity and lifestyle through their use of a smartphone, making it a functionally and symbolically important product (Jung, 2014). Therefore, self-congruity is a suitable theoretical framework to explain consumers' attitudes towards smartphone brands and their satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is among the widely researched constructs in marketing and consumer behaviour. Satisfaction is the consumer's judgment of whether the product or service has fulfilled his or her consumption-related expectations and requirements (Oliver, 1980). According to expectancy-dissatisfaction theory, satisfaction occurs when the product performance meets the expectation set before purchase (Oliver, 1980). When the performance of the products meets or surpasses expectations, customers feel satisfied and create positive word of mouth (Schiebler et al., 2026). The satisfaction of customers is known to be an important determinant of customer loyalty, word of mouth, repurchase intention and organizational performance over the last forty years (Mittal et al., 2023). The results of the meta-analysis corroborate that satisfaction remains an important outcome construct, as it exerts a direct influence on both the customer and organizational level outcomes (Mittal et al., 2023). Similarly, a number of recent systematic reviews have identified satisfaction as a baseline outcome of consumers' value perceptions and consumption experiences in various market contexts (Tedja et al., 2024). Customer satisfaction is still a key metric of marketing success as it is more likely to lead to long-term customer relationships (Suchánek & Činčalová, 2024).

Theoretical background and hypotheses

The theoretical underpinning for this research is built on the self-congruity theory, which describes consumer behaviour when consumers' self-concept is congruent with the image of a product or brand (Sirgy, 1985). The theory suggests that when the brand is in line with the self-image of the consumer, the consumer evaluates the brand positively because it helps to support his/her identity and self-expression (Sirgy, 1985; Sirgy, 1985). Many studies have confirmed the self-congruity theory as a valid theory to account for consumer attitudes towards products, satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intentions in a variety of consumption contexts (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). Recently, a systematic review also validates the self-congruity as a robust theoretical lens for the study of consumer behaviour, urging the expansion of the application to the new product areas and digital consumption context (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). As smartphones have functional and symbolic characteristics, the theoretical lens of self-congruity theory seems appropriate for explaining the role of the perceived hedonic and utilitarian value in achieving customer satisfaction via self-congruity.

H1a: Utilitarian Value and Customer Satisfaction

Utilitarian value is the functional, practical and purposeful value that consumers experience after consumption of a product (Babin et al., 1994). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) indicate that the consumer's expectations are usually met, making the product look good. In the smartphone use context, utility value comes from smartphone characteristics like reliability, ease of use, and technological competency (Jung, 2014). Past research has consistently found that utilitarian value contributes to customer satisfaction by encouraging consumers to see more value in using the product (Pang, 2021; Blut et al., 2024). Hence, the satisfaction of consumers will be higher if they report a higher level of utilitarian value on their smartphones

H1a: Utilitarian value significantly influences customer satisfaction.

H1b: Hedonic Value and Customer Satisfaction

Hedonic value refers to the pleasure, joy or emotional gain from using the products (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). These experiential benefits contribute to the general satisfaction of the consumer after using the product (Babin et al., 1994). The hedonic value of the smartphone is evident in its aesthetic appeal and interactive experiences (Jung, 2014). Hedonic value positively influences customers' satisfaction in digital and technology-enabled consumption

contexts in recent studies (Vieira et al., 2022; Pang, 2021). Consumers who derive more satisfaction out of using their smartphones are thus more likely to exhibit high levels of satisfaction.

H1b: Hedonic value significantly influences customer satisfaction.

H2a: The Mediating Role of Self-Congruity in the Relationship between Utilitarian Value and Customer Satisfaction

Self-congruity theory states that positive evaluations occur when a product is congruent with consumers' self-concept (Sirgy, 1985). Products that provide better functional value are more substantial to consumers as they enable them to achieve their daily activities and goals (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Research recently has also shown that utilitarian value can boost consumers' self-relevance, leading to higher positive evaluations of the brand and longer relationships (Hu et al., 2023; Lou et al., 2023). Similarly, recent systematic reviews find that self-congruity continues to be a key psychological mechanism in understanding consumer perceptions, satisfaction and loyalty in various consumption contexts (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). As a result, it is hypothesized that consumers who have higher utilitarian values will have higher self-congruity values, which will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction with smartphone brands.

H2a: Self-congruity mediates the relationship between utilitarian value and customer satisfaction.

H2b: The Mediating Role of Self-Congruity in the Relationship between Hedonic Value and Customer Satisfaction

Hedonic value is the pleasure and emotional satisfaction that customers derive from using the product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Favorable consumption experiences build consumers' emotional bond and validate their sense of identity with a product (Sirgy, 1985). Recent studies suggest that the hedonic value enhances consumers' sense of self-relevance, which in turn leads to positive brand perceptions and long-lasting consumer–brand connections (Lou et al., 2023). Research in today's world of mobile and digital contexts also shows that the hedonic benefit has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which leads to consumers' psychological engagement with the product and the brand (Pang, 2021; Yan et al., 2024). As such, consumers will be more likely to feel a higher level of self-congruity if they believe that the brand of a smartphone provides larger hedonic benefits, thus leading to a higher level of customer satisfaction.

H2b: Self-congruity mediates the relationship between hedonic value and customer satisfaction.

Methodology

Data collection and analysis

A pilot study was done initially to check the validity of the instrument. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 1. A Likert scale shows reliable responses which are easily assessed and studied. The improved version of the questionnaire was filled out by 260 undergraduate students. After the data cleaning procedure, screening the usable questionnaires, 225 usable questionnaires were used for further analysis. Frequency statistics show that 96% participants are between the age groups of 18 and 25. Females are 26%, and males are 74%. 87% participants are undergraduate students.

For reliability analysis, the Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficients were calculated for each scale. Table I shows that Cronbach Alpha values of all scales fall within the satisfactory threshold, i.e. above the minimum .70 level as suggested by Nunnally (1978).

Table I

Latent Constructs	Items/Indicators	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Utilitarian Value	UtilitarianValue1	.65	0.72
	UtilitarianValue2	.52	
	UtilitarianValue4	.60	
	UtilitarianValue5	.73	
	HedonicValue1	.74	
Hedonic Value	HedonicValue2	.91	0.86
	HedonicValue3	.83	
	HedonicValue4	.69	
	SelfCongruity1	.73	
Self-Congruity	SelfCongruity2	.95	0.80
	SelfCongruity3	.61	
	Satisfaction1	.86	
Satisfaction	Satisfaction3	.64	0.70
	Satisfaction4	.51	

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to determine the measurement model and to explore the construct validity of the constructs used in this study. The results indicated good overall model fit. Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/df = 2.586) was found to be a satisfactory fit. The goodness of fit measures also indicated good model fitness with GFI = 0.895, AGFI = 0.844, and CFI = 0.917, which are approaching the values recommended by the researchers. Also, the statistical indices based on residuals were acceptable (RMR = 0.064 and RMSEA = 0.084). Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model adequately reflects the observed data and provides a good level of evidence for construct validity. Figure I and Table II show the confirmatory factor analysis.

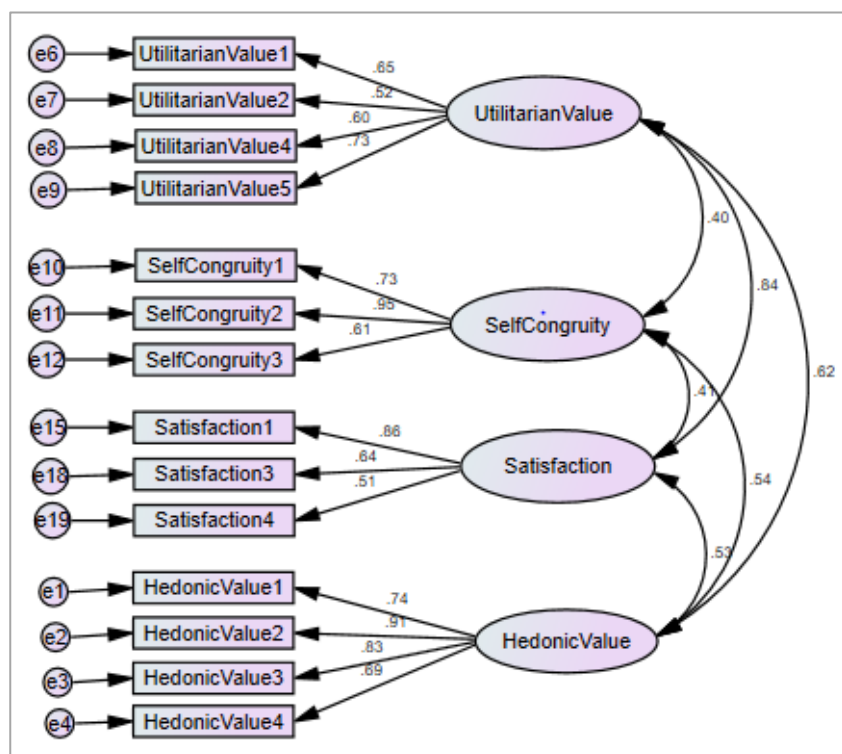
Figure I

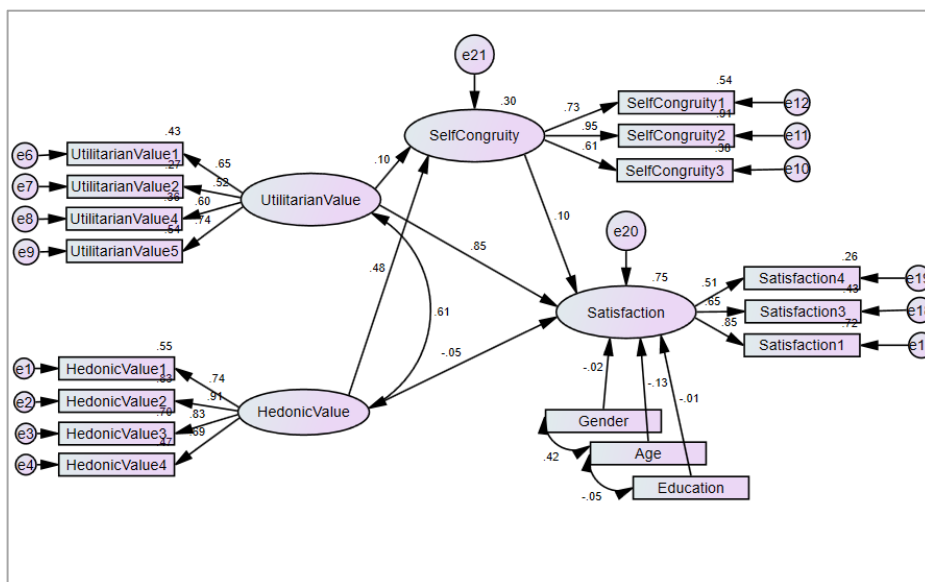
Table 2

Fit Index	Parameters	Observed Scores (CFA)	Observed Scores (SEM)	Recommended Values
Absolute fit Measures	Chi square	183.578	277.515	Near the degree of freedom
	Df	71	113	The greater the better
	Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	2.586	2.456	<2; <3; <5
	GFI	0.895	0.875	>0.90; >0.8
	RMR	0.064	0.056	<0.05 or 0.08
	RMSEA	.084	0.081	<.05 to 0.10
Incremental fit measures	AGFI	0.844	0.831	>0.90; >0.80
	CFI	0.917	0.89	>0.90

Structural Equation Modeling

The proposed relationships among the constructs of the study were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) after the confirmation of the measurement model. The structural model exhibited an acceptable fit to the observed data, with a chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/df = 2.456), GFI = 0.875, AGFI = 0.831, CFI = 0.890, RMR = 0.056, and RMSEA = 0.081. The GFI and the CFI were slightly lower than the recommended level of 0.90, but they were still within the acceptable range for complex models. In general, the model fit statistics suggest the proposed structural model represents data well and is appropriate for testing the hypothesized relationships. Figure II and Table II show the structural equation modeling.

Figure 2



Direct Effects

The structural model results show that utilitarian value has a significant and positive direct effect on customer satisfaction, which supports the confirmation of H1(a). The analysis suggests that when smartphones are able to fulfil their functional purpose and provide practical values, consumers are more satisfied with the device. H1(b) was, however, found to be insignificant, indicating that the direct link between the hedonic value and customer

satisfaction was insignificant. This finding indicates that the experiential and fun value that users get from their smartphones is not enough to directly contribute to users' satisfaction, as in the present study.

Indirect Effects

The mediation analysis showed that utilitarian value was partially mediated by the self-congruity, and thus supported H2(a). The finding shows that the value of the functionality not only directly increases consumer satisfaction, but also reflects consumers' perception of self-concept adaptation, which in turn affects their satisfaction. The other way around, however, was not found to be true: self-congruity did not serve as a mediator between the hedonic value and customer satisfaction. So, H2(b) was not supported, as it is evident that the psychological consistency between consumers and smartphone brands is not the reason for the hedonic value on satisfaction in the present context. Table III shows the direct and indirect effects of the study.

Table 3

Relationship	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Results
Utilitarian - Self Congruity - Satisfaction	.857 ***	.846***	Partial Mediation
Hedonic – Self Congruity - Satisfaction	-.007 (NS)	-.053 (NS)	No Mediation

Table IV shows the results of the hypothesis.

Table 4

Hypotheses related to Direct Effects	
H1(a): Utilitarian value significantly influences customer satisfaction	Supported
H1(b): Hedonic value significantly influences customer satisfaction	Not Supported
Hypotheses related to Indirect Effects	
H2(a): Self-congruity mediates between utilitarian value & customer satisfaction	Supported
H2(b): Self-congruity mediates between hedonic value & customer satisfaction	Not Supported

Discussion

The results show that the utilitarian value has more influence on customer satisfaction of smartphone consumers than the hedonic value. The findings are consistent with prior research, which indicates that consumers have primarily functional, reliability, and usefulness criteria when evaluating their smartphones, irrespective of experiential benefits (Jung, 2014; Pang, 2021). A significant direct link of utilitarian value also supports the multidimensional value perspective (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Blut et al., 2024), which suggests that the practical value is a critical factor in post-purchase evaluations of technology-based products. Sabir (2020) also confirms that partial mediation exists between customer satisfaction and the functional dimension of product design. The negligible hedonic value suggests that, when consumers stress functional performance in their smartphone usage, enjoyable experiences alone are not good indicators of satisfaction.

The mediation results provide further theoretical insights as they showed that self-congruity is a significant psychological mechanism between utilitarian value and customer satisfaction. This result is consistent with a self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1985), (1985) which suggests that consumers evaluate products more positively when they are congruent with their self-concept. This finding also aligns with recent research showing that self-congruity is still a crucial factor while evaluating subjects' satisfaction and evaluation (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). But, for pleasure consumption experiences, it seems that no mediation is present, which indicates that a positive consumption

experience does not necessarily strengthen consumers' self-concept in the smartphone context. The discovery suggests that the functional aspect has a more powerful impact than hedonic aspects on the evaluation of smartphone brands when it comes to identity-related evaluations.

Limitations and future directions

For this study, the data were gathered by a cross-sectional research design, which made it difficult to draw causal inferences between the study variables. Secondly, the sample was composed entirely of smartphone users, which limits the generalizability of the results to other technology products or contexts of consumption. Thirdly, the study only investigated self-congruity as an underlying psychological mechanism between perceived value and customer satisfaction, but there could be other variables that affect these relationships.

Longitudinal or experimental research designs should be used in future research to make more definite causal inferences. Proposed models are also encouraged to be replicated in other cultural contexts in order to increase the external validity of the model. In addition, further research could include other mediators like brand attachment, customer engagement or perceived quality, and other moderators like age, gender, brand familiarity and consumer involvement in the study, so as to get a comprehensive picture of the relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction.

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