

Institutionalizing Ihsan: A corporate strategy for ethical excellence in business operations

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Abstract

This paper critically re-evaluates the popular business maxim “the customer is always right” through the ethical framework of ihsan, an Islamic principle that emphasizes excellence, compassion, and moral integrity in human conduct. While customer satisfaction is a central business objective, this slogan often leads to ethical distortions—encouraging consumer entitlement, diminishing employee dignity, and undermining organizational harmony. The study aims to challenge this consumer-centric narrative by introducing ihsan as a more balanced and morally grounded alternative in business ethics. The problem addressed is the uncritical adoption of customer supremacy, which prioritizes profit over justice and respect for all stakeholders. Using a philosophical and conceptual methodology, the paper draws on textual analysis of the Qur’an, Hadith, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary literature in ethics and business studies. The findings highlight the dangers of ethical egoism and reveal how ihsan offers a holistic model for ethical engagement that transcends transactional thinking. It encourages fairness, accountability, and mutual respect in business operations. This study contributes to the field of business ethics by proposing a value-based paradigm that promotes ethical reorientation in business practices. By replacing consumer dominance with ihsan, the paper envisions a more just, compassionate, and spiritually conscious business environment.

INTRODUCTION

The “customer is always right” concept alludes to the significant value placed on customer service, particularly in retail. Nevertheless, what is the significance of the consumer always being correct? The term was initially employed in 1909 by Harry Gordon Selfridge, the individual responsible for establishing the Selfridge department store. The primary objective of the customer in question was to persuade buyers of the superior quality of service they would receive. Subsequently, the phrase, as mentioned above, was disseminated and became widely employed globally.

The discourse surrounding customers presents two contradictory portrayals of individuals who engage in the act of purchasing goods and services. Consumers exhibit discerning characteristics, displaying a

propensity for making careful and thoughtful choices. They possess a demanding nature, requiring high attention and responsiveness. Consequently, it is imperative to prioritize their needs and preferences. Hence, the slogan “the customer is “king” is often used. On certain occasions, customers might be perceived as vulnerable individuals requiring protection from various entities such as legal frameworks, individual companies’ consumer charters, consumer protection schemes, and consumer journalism and television.

The discourse that typically evokes the initial impression pertains to the economic interdependence between enterprises and customers. To sustain their operations, enterprises must offer products or services that align with consumer demand while ensuring that the purchasing process is convenient and enjoyable for customers. Suppose the selling style reflects a willingness to make an effort to accommodate the consumer and consider them a priority. In that case, it might be justified by the seller’s dependence on the buyer. A business is inherently subject to the economic influence of its consumers, who are consistently tempted to patronize rivals. For example, a customer who expresses dissatisfaction may potentially impact other customers who observe the complaints (Mattila et al., 2014). This assertion is substantiated by deontological ethics (Folger, 2001), which posits that witnessing unfair treatment towards others will lead to a detrimental appraisal of the service by third parties. Consequently, incidents of inadequate service recoveries can harm consumers who observe the complaint and its resolution since they may perceive the employees’ treatment of the customer as unfair. Therefore, it is advantageous for businesses to employ strategies that cultivate customer retention, such as providing them with exceptional treatment akin to royalty (Sorell, 1994).

However, there is a prevailing belief that the customer-centric approach has become antiquated and lacks contemporary relevance. Indeed, this phenomenon may hinder comprehending the essence of genuinely outstanding customer service. It is a subjective statement that lacks empirical evidence. The notion that the customer is always right is a widely held belief in the business world, but it is essential to analyze this claim critically. While prioritizing customer satisfaction is crucial for business success, it is essential to acknowledge that customers can also be mistaken or unreasonable in their demands (Kim & Baker, 2020). Therefore, asserting that the customer should be treated with respect and their concerns should be addressed rather than mindlessly accepting their every request as infallible is more accurate.

Customers, who are human beings, are also susceptible to making errors, which can occasionally result in unfounded complaints (Baker et al., 2012; Huang & Miao, 2016). Employees must possess the knowledge and skills necessary to manage such situations appropriately. Adopting a “Customer Is Always Right” mentality may adversely affect the morale of one’s service employees. In some industries, one may inevitably encounter aggressive and impolite customers. Managing such consumers can be challenging, and despite the team’s diligent efforts, achieving a favourable outcome may not always be feasible. Aligning with such consumers may potentially create a detrimental impact on the morale and perception of employees.

The notion that the “customer is always right” might be challenged within the context of Islamic thought. While it is understandable that the slogan aims to safeguard customers’ interests, it is crucial to consider the emotional well-being of employees responsible for meeting these customer demands. Those fulfilling customer needs are also human beings possessing emotions and deserving equitable treatment. The principle of equality and equity is a fundamental aspect of the value system of Islam. Equality should not be conflated with or misunderstood as synonymous with identity or stereotype. Islam espouses the belief that in the divine perspective of Allah, all individuals possess equal worth, but they may not necessarily possess comparable attributes.

The individual’s character and personality, as perceived by Allah, are not influenced by factors such as their stock of man, skin color, money, or prestige. The sole differentiation acknowledged by Allah is based on piety, whereas the sole criterion employed by Allah is virtue and spiritual superiority. In the Quran, Allah states, “O humanity, we have indeed created you from male and female, and have diversified you into various nations and tribes, so that you may acquire knowledge of one another.” Undoubtedly, those who are deemed most esteemed in the eyes of Allah are those who exhibit the highest

degree of righteousness. Undoubtedly, Allah possesses profound knowledge and familiarity” Quranic verse 49:13.

This statement posits that under the Islamic faith, it is affirmed that no individual is inherently superior to others or intended to surpass others. The evaluation of an individual's value, as perceived by both other human beings and Allah, is contingent upon their virtuous actions and adherence to the commands of Allah. Despite customers' significance in contributing to the success of businesses, they must refrain from exhibiting egoistic conduct. Furthermore, their behaviour must be treated with respect. The underlying concern in this context pertains to customers' perception that the success of a business is contingent upon their presence. The primary argument posited in this context is that the success of a business is contingent upon the will of Allah, who is considered the ultimate determinant of all outcomes, rather than relying solely on the causal reasoning proposed by David Hume (Awalluddin, 2019), which may lead to rational thinking and destroy the social imbalance and humanistic values.

The primary objective of this paper is to challenge the conventional slogan “the customer is always right” by proposing a corporate ethical strategy grounded in Islamic teachings. Specifically, the paper aims to develop a value-based corporate framework that integrates the Islamic principle of *ihsan*, which emphasizes excellence, compassion, and moral responsibility, into customer relations and business conduct. Originating from Western capitalist contexts, the slogan often reinforces consumer dominance and prioritizes profit over human dignity, leading to ethical imbalances and the marginalization of employees.

In contrast, Islamic ethics uphold justice, equity, and mutual respect for all stakeholders in business operations. Islam does not endorse the absolute authority of customers but promotes balanced and respectful interactions within the marketplace. Unchecked customer entitlement can undermine organizational integrity and employee well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to construct an alternative ethical model as a corporate strategy that aligns business practices with Islamic moral values. By embedding *ihsan* into customer engagement and decision-making processes, the proposed strategy promotes a more harmonious, accountable, and ethically sustainable business environment. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a transformative shift in corporate culture that moves beyond transactional relationships and encourages spiritually grounded stakeholder engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Sovereignty and Corporate Culture Abuse in Capitalist Economies

There are two prevalent misconceptions within businesses that prioritize customer satisfaction. The first fallacy is believing that the customer is infallible and always correct. The second misconception is that any individual eager to purchase should be regarded as a highly esteemed customer. Management principles such as “the customer is always right,” “attentively listen to the customer, or thoroughly understanding the customer are commonly advocated as fundamental tenets for achieving success in the realm of business (Daily, 1996). A potential challenge linked with the “customer is always right” mindset is the implicit assumption that the employee is invariably incorrect. This practice places the employee in a subordinate position to the customers, facilitating the manifestation of undesirable conduct. The outcome entails a dissatisfied employee who may have a sense of insecurity. At first glance, the discourse surrounding the portrayal of customers as prospective victims exhibits a distinct interpretation. This statement highlights the superior financial acumen business professionals possess compared to the average customer.

Moreover, it typically adopts the perspective of individual customers, whose economic influence may be limited, rather than considering the collective economic impact of the masses. Given the inherent power imbalance between customers and the business entities they engage with, providing customers with adequate protection is imperative. This necessity arises from the ethical imperative to safeguard the vulnerable against the dominant. However, there are instances where satisfying the customer's desires can incur moral costs.

The ongoing expansion of the business has elevated the significance of 'customer-employee' relationships to a prominent position. In parallel to the developmental trajectory observed in the United States, it is evident that the United Kingdom's prevailing ideology about customers is often centered around the notion that 'the customer is king.' This concept has gained significant traction and is now widely embraced by businesses operating within modern capitalist economies (Edwards, 1999). The concept of customer sovereignty encompasses the notion of relational supremacy (Hoffman, 1998) as well as individual liberty and choice (Korczynski & Ott, 2004). The "enchanted myth of sovereignty" effectively addresses the business need for efficient service provision while simultaneously persuading the customer that they own control and authority as the sovereign (Korczynski & Ott, 2004).

Customer Abuse and the Ethical Consequences of Excessive Customer-Centricity

Customer abuse refers to the negative behavior exhibited by individuals who prioritize their self-interests as consumers, resulting in the mistreatment of business owners or employees with whom they interact. This mistreatment is often characterized by short-tempered and disrespectful conduct. Customer abuse encompasses customers' unethical and inequitable treatment of service employees (Wang et al., 2011). Customer mistreatment is a comprehensive notion that includes all forms of substandard treatment experienced by employees from their customers during interactions regarding service (Koopmann et al. 2015). Incidents of misconduct in service areas, ranging from pouring boiling water on flight attendants to mistreating sales workers, are documented daily (Huilian et al., 2022). Yagil (2017) indicates that customers are the primary contributors to negativity in service encounters. It can be attributed to their strong adherence to perfectionist norms and the power differentials between customers and employees, often leading to increased customer aggressiveness.

While it is evident that cultivating long-lasting, productive relationships with customers holds significance (Hassan et al., 2015; Itani et al., 2019), the absence of understanding concerning excessive customer-centricity can impose substantial pressure on employees. While employees may prioritize serving happy customers with utmost respect and attention, it becomes a different challenge to maintain the same level of emotional expression as expected by management when faced with offensive customers (Korczynski & Ott, 2004). Nevertheless, it remains obligatory for employees to manage their emotions when confronted with demanding customers appropriately and to consistently exhibit emotions that align with the desired standards established by management to satisfy customers.

The concept commonly referred to as "emotional labour" was first introduced by Hochschild (1983) in a seminal study. She posited that flight attendants are required to regulate their emotions to meet management's expectations and elicit the desired emotional responses from customers. It entails the need for flight attendants to put customer service first and maintain a professional demeanour, regardless of their personal feelings towards various situations. Additionally, she emphasized that flight attendants must concentrate on achieving sales objectives, irrespective of their genuine emotional experiences. Employees who have been victimized by such behaviour are generally subjected to stigmatization and are perceived as being responsible (Cockburn, 1983). Moreover, this behaviour is regularly rationalized and considered acceptable (Handy, 2008).

However, as mentioned earlier, it might be argued that the mantra inadvertently encourages customer aggression. Some scholars have recognized the possibility of customers engaging in bullying behaviour (Hoel et al., 1999). Hoel and Cooper (2000) conducted a comprehensive study on workplace bullying in Great Britain, encompassing a broad geographical scope. The study revealed that a notable proportion, specifically 8 percent, of individuals who classified their encounters as cases of bullying attributed the source of their distress to customers or clients. This trend was particularly pronounced within customer service sectors, such as retailing and hotels. The assertion suggests that the maxim "the customer is always right" may justify customers exhibiting arrogant behaviour towards employees. Furthermore, it eroded positive virtues, including love, compassion, respect, and care. By bestowing the consumer with the title of "king," the social contract between customers and employees in business transactions is altered. This chant conflicts with the teachings and values inherent within the Islamic framework. The

existing power asymmetry within the customer-employee dynamic leads to an inequitable distribution of benefits, thereby fostering resentment and giving rise to social and health-related concerns. Also, this power imbalance might contribute to forming a social hierarchy that contradicts the principles of Islam.

Morality, Self-Centeredness, and the Illusion of Customer Superiority

Ethical egoism is a philosophical doctrine that posits the moral permissibility of individuals acting following their self-interest. It implies that any action should be undertaken to attain personal advantages rather than benefit others. According to Manjunath (2020) and Regis (1980) ethical egoism posits that individuals should prioritize the pursuit of their self-interest without any moral obligation to advance the interests of others. This proposition sets that the paramount ethical duty of an individual is to optimize their personal gratification and contentment in life, irrespective of the potential consequences this may impose on others. Similarly, Pandit (2022) explains ethical egoism as a moral theory centered on self-interest, as it posits that individuals are the exclusive beneficiaries of their actions. The philosophical concept of ethical egoism does not inherently necessitate that individuals should exclusively engage in actions that alone promote their self-interest. Instead, it implies that each activity undertaken by an individual should be motivated by self-interest. An illustration of ethical egoism can be seen when an individual engages in volunteer work within their society due to the anticipated personal happiness and fulfilment that this action is expected to provide.

The doctrine of ethical egoism can be seen as closely aligned with the widely known business principle of “the customer is always right.” The slogan enables customers to pursue their interests while disregarding the interests of others. While it might be argued that consumers are entitled to satisfactory service, it is important to acknowledge the potential for their actions to negatively impact the emotions of others solely for personal gain. In a study conducted by Fisk et al. (2010) it was observed that customers may be reluctant to adhere to the established standards and norms set by organizations to ensure compliance during a service contact. Kim and Baker (2020) research indicates that adhering to the standard business philosophy of prioritizing customers can result in businesses having to address unfounded complaints. This sort of conduct tends to lead individuals to engage in morally objectionable behaviours or harm to the well-being of others without considering any potential consequences.

The connotation associated with ethical egoism stems from the term “egoist” or “big ego.” Customers who express a desire for their rights to be acknowledged and attended to can be perceived as self-centred, exhibiting a lack of concern for the needs and perspectives of others. Some philosophers, referred to as “ethical egoists,” contend that acting morally entails the maximization of one's self-interest, notwithstanding the negative connotations associated with this perspective. Morality necessitates individuals to uphold their commitments, exhibit equitable treatment towards others, and extend assistance to those who are in a disadvantaged position. It necessitates that individual refrain from prioritizing their interests, especially when potential benefits may be associated with reneging on commitments, engaging in unfair treatment towards others, or neglecting to assist those in need.

Nevertheless, morality continues to be a subject of uncertainty and ambiguity. Ethical egoists claim that all human actions are ultimately driven by self-interest and perceive their actions as morally obligated. In this scenario, the customer asserts their position as buyers by emphasizing their role as the party responsible for wealth contribution for businesses via payment of products or services. This scenario indicates a dictatorial master who subjugates others to fulfill their demands, leveraging their financial resources and asserting ownership over businesses for their sustenance.

Moreover, Adam Smith, often regarded as the father of economics, advocated ethical egoism as a viable and applicable concept. The optimal promotion of the common good would be achieved by each businessperson prioritizing their interests, as the “invisible hand” of the free market would effectively coordinate individual economic actions (Adam, 1976). It suggests that to thrive, businesses must be prepared to subordinate themselves to external entities, with the ultimate goal of achieving maximum profitability to secure their long-term sustainability. Another philosopher who aligned themselves with him is Ayn Rand. Rand posits that ethical egoism, sometimes known as selfishness, can be considered a

virtuous trait. The concept of altruism, characterized by the expectation of individuals to prioritize the needs of others over their own, can be perceived as morally objectionable. According to the author, the utmost importance is placed on life, therefore arguing that any society lacks value for an individual's existence if it requires them to forfeit their right to live (Ayn, 1964). Voicing concerns over the sustainability of civilization, she critiques the role of altruism as a significant factor contributing to the decline of civilized society. Given the innate reason of human beings and the profound importance of life, it is argued that humans should endeavour to pursue "rational selfishness." Engaging in rational behaviour involves deliberate consideration and prioritization of one's interests, a perspective widely seen as ethically defensible.

Given their Western origins, it might be argued that slogans primarily promote the self-interest of one party, namely the customer. The intended purpose of the saying was to offer businesses a competitive edge over their rivals by establishing customer dominance. However, those behind the slogan may be unaware that they are inadvertently treating customers as masters. Since its inception in 1909, the saying "the customer is always right" has continued to present challenges. However, while the slogan was not intended to be interpreted literally, it has become deeply ingrained in customers' minds and has remained impactful. Within the Islamic framework, individuals mustn't be subjected to a hierarchical structure where one person assumes the role of a master over others. The importance of customer respect is widely acknowledged, but ensuring fair treatment of businesses for all parties is imperative. If customers encounter issues with a business's product or service, these incidents must be resolved adequately.

The Role of Religion in Shaping Business Conduct

Religion constitutes an integral aspect of human existence, profoundly influencing individuals' belief systems and behavioural patterns. In a business context, religion can impact the frameworks and behaviours related to business affairs, encompassing the strategies and choices made by management and employees and interactions with customers. Academic scholars have claimed that the significance of religion in many human interactions appears to be inherently intertwined and difficult to separate (Abdulla, 2018; Krok, 2015). Tsai et al. (2013) also underscored the substantial impact of religion on the formation and structure of society. When engaging with customers, Islamic principles integrate maximizing value with the principle of justice, aiming to achieve more excellent societal benefits and welfare.

The ethical framework advocated in Islam is considered of eternal divine origin and serves as the fundamental basis for constructing an Islamic civilization. Islamic ethics dictate that adherents must diligently safeguard their conduct, speech, cognition, and intentions while adhering to specific standards and moral principles in various aspects of their familial matters, interactions with relatives, neighbours, and acquaintances, business dealings, social engagements, and both personal and public spheres of life. One distinguishing characteristic of the Islamic ethical system is its comprehensive integration into various aspects and domains of human existence. Islam possesses a unique value-oriented ethical framework for business dealings. The notion of "the customer is always right" is flawed as it confers an unjustifiable advantage to customers at employees' expense.

The primary purpose of a business is to cater to the needs and satisfaction of its customers. Consequently, if a customer expresses dissatisfaction or raises a complaint, it is reasonable to attribute responsibility to the business for the issue at hand. There may be potential issues with the business product, how people interact with customers or the effectiveness of marketing activities. Contrary to the popular belief that the customer is always right, it is argued that this notion is fundamentally flawed. This occurrence is attributed to individuals being prone to making errors (Kovacs et al., 2021). Allah's forgiveness of sincere repentance is emphasized in various verses of the Quran. Human beings possess an inherent inclination towards fallibility, whereby they are susceptible to harbouring erroneous opinions and thoughts across a wide range of subjects and contexts. Individuals have the potential to make faulty decisions and engage in negligent conduct.

Equal Moral Standing of All Stakeholders in Islamic Ethics

Nevertheless, Allah, the Creator of humankind who possesses knowledge of their imperfections, also grants forgiveness for errors committed. Without the benevolence of Allah's "forgiveness," attaining paradise would be unattainable for any individual. Hence, the critical argument this paper seeks to propose pertains to the ethical dilemma of passing judgment on those who commit errors. Rather than perpetuating the notion of customers as king, it is more helpful for customers to comprehend the fundamental aspect of human nature, which entails the natural propensity for making actual mistakes that are universally shared.

In the Islamic faith, all individuals, whether customers or individuals involved in dealing with customers, are considered human beings and are entitled to fair treatment without any form of preferential treatment. The assertion that Islam diminishes consumer rights is unfounded. Safeguarding customers against unethical conduct by traders and commercial entities is a significant obligation within the framework of Islamic principles. The Qur'an and Hadith established the fundamental framework of safeguarding customers approximately 1,400 years ago, and these principles are relevant in contemporary times, just as they were throughout the esteemed era of the Prophet and the correctly guided caliphs. The Qur'an explicitly condemns all forms of unjust practices in Surah An-Nisa, addressing the believers with the following statement: "O you who have faith!" Do not squander your possessions among yourselves in frivolous pursuits; instead, engage in commerce and trade with one another through mutual goodwill" Quranic verse 4:29.

To mitigate the potential conflict arising from the "customer is always right" slogans, it is argued that businesses and employees should also adhere to Islamic principles when conducting business transactions. The emergence of these concepts can be attributed to the deceptive practices employed by sellers. In modern shopping markets and malls, merchants enforce strict procedures about returns, exchanges, and refunds. These policies often impose limited timeframes for returns; sometimes, refunds may be denied even if the items are in satisfactory condition. In adherence to principles of responsible consumerism, Islam mandates that sellers grant customers the opportunity to return purchased items. According to the narration by Abu Dawood, the Messenger of Allah stated that "if an individual retracts a sale made to a fellow Muslim, Allah will provide forgiveness for their transgressions." It suggests that under the teachings of Islam, there is a strong emphasis on encouraging adherents to acknowledge their errors to mitigate any animosity from customers who have purchased their wares. Hence, if customers commit an error, they must acknowledge it and demonstrate respect toward customers by restoring their rights.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a philosophical and conceptual methodology to investigate the ethical tensions underlying the widely accepted business maxim "the customer is always right," particularly from the standpoint of Islamic moral philosophy. The approach is grounded in normative ethical reasoning and conceptual inquiry, rather than empirical data collection. Through critical reflection and value-based analysis, the research interrogates prevailing customer-centric narratives in corporate culture, which often prioritize consumer satisfaction at the expense of employee dignity and organizational balance. The objective is to construct an alternative ethical paradigm that aligns with Islamic values, offering a more holistic and morally responsible approach to business interactions.

To substantiate its arguments, the study draws on established Islamic scholarship in the fields of ethics, jurisprudence, and business thought. These intellectual resources are not examined as primary data but are used to support the theoretical development of the concept of *ihsan*, which reflects excellence, compassion, and moral integrity in conduct. In parallel, the study engages with contemporary academic literature on business ethics, organizational behaviour, and customer relationship management to critically assess dominant practices and ideologies. By synthesizing insights from both Islamic and

modern ethical discourses, the study constructs a conceptual framework that reimagines customer engagement through a spiritually grounded and stakeholder-oriented corporate model.

DISCUSSION

Ihsan as a Foundational Ethical Principle in Business Conduct

The paper seeks to refute the “customer is always right” argument from the perspective of Ihsan's Islamic thought. Ihsan is an Islamic term that implies doing good or performing one's duty or any lawful/productive work in the best available way, with excellence and perfection. The phrase ihsan stems from the Arabic root word “hasan,” which signifies “beauty, goodness, and excellence.” Ihsan refers to acts of worship performed by a believer with a conviction that Allah is present and monitoring that act of worship. In other terms, it implies worshipping Allah as if Allah is seeing him (Kadhim et al. 2017). According to the Prophet, “al-Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) Allah sees you. “Furthermore, Allah revealed in the Quran, “To those who do right is a goodly (reward)- Yea, more (than in measure)!” No darkness or humiliation shall shroud their faces! They are garden companions; they will stay” Quranic verses 10:26. Culturing sincerity in worship and the profound love for Allah are pivotal factors that contribute to an individual's attainment of the esteemed status as one of the people of al-Ihsan. The individuals residing in al-Ihsan are seen as exemplary servants of Allah, actively engaging in virtuous actions that promote positive outcomes and spiritual instruction (Al-Maraghi 1946; Al-Razi 1981). As adherents of Islam, we must cultivate the virtue of ihsan inside ourselves, just as we strive to uphold other ethical principles of our faith in our professional endeavours and acts of worship.

The notion of ihsan can be classified into three distinct components, which are intricately interconnected (Endot, Zin, and Mamat 1998). The initial component of the discussion is the correlation between ihsan and the manifestation of appropriate actions, behaviours, honesty, and kindness, with a particular emphasis on prioritizing the well-being of others. The second component of the discussion is how ihsan guides individuals toward the successful and proficient completion of a certain work. The third component of ihsan entails fostering a sense of Allah's presence and His vigilant observation of our acts. Within the framework of this research, the notion of ihsan can be extended to encompass both customers and businesses, as well as the employee involved. As customers, the practice of ihsan entails treating others, particularly businesses, with compassion, respect, and fairness. Customers are advised to pursue reparation or lodge grievances in a nonviolent manner. The escalating assertiveness exhibited by customers who assert their dominance has brought attention to the detrimental nature of toxic customers, revealing a deficiency in the practice of ihsan. These customers frequently engage in manipulation tactics and derive satisfaction from creating obstacles and fostering unnecessary conflicts for business owners and employees. Moreover, these people impose excessive burdens on businesses, especially those that allocate substantial resources to nurturing customer relationships. They exhibit a challenging disposition and engage in strategic maneuvering to advance their interests.

As a result of the pursuit of profit maximization through the satisfaction of customer egoism, employees are discouraged from engaging in both confrontational and defensive responses to customer hostility. Instead, they are required to meet customers' demands. Gremler and Gwinner (2000) and Liao and Chuang (2004), it is widely acknowledged that acquiring new customers and retaining existing ones are crucial factors for businesses. Consequently, these businesses are required to deliver services of superior quality. Furthermore, employees working in the business sector frequently encounter various forms of negative behavior from customers, including verbal aggression such as yelling and swearing, nonverbal expressions of contemptuousness, and unreasonable requests or expectations. These scenarios do not align with the principles and teachings of Islam. The standard business dealing notion, as observed in the United States, serves as a model that is subsequently adopted by Europeans, Asians, and other regions (Handy, 2008). De George (1982) the core principles encompassed within this framework include freedom, competition, individualism, the importance of monetary orientation, and the pursuit of profit. It diverges from the ideals rooted in the Islamic way of life, particularly ihsan, which necessitates

mutual respect and affection between both parties. In this scenario, it is noteworthy that the Quran and the hadith are the fundamental pillars guiding Muslims in their conduct, interactions, and muamalah.

The attainment of a specific objective should not be pursued by the deliberate undermining, damaging, or dismantling of another party, even if that individual can. All aspects of life are interconnected with the principles and values of Ihsan. In the Qur'an, Allah emphasizes the importance of justice, benevolence, and generosity towards families while prohibiting cruelty, wrongdoing, and hostility. The teachings of Allah aim to impart valuable lessons to individuals. The verse imparts a moral instruction, emphasizing the obligation to uphold justice and virtue (ihsan) while prohibiting the engagement in reprehensible actions, known as munkar, which have the potential to inflict harm. The Qur'an and Hadith consistently emphasize two important qualities that play a crucial role in promoting exceptional performance, mas'uliyah (responsibility) and ihsan (virtue) (Furqani, 2015; Irmadariyani et al., 2016; Mohiuddin et al., 2013).

In reframing the maxim, the virtue of ihsan can be employed to alter the view of customer dominance by emphasizing virtues such as forgiveness, clemency, compassion, and mercy. On the contrary, the malevolent characteristics of enmity, envy, pride, and rage are vehemently denounced and seen as deleterious misconduct. The practice of ihsan eliminates discriminatory treatment based on social position, distinguishing between customers and employees, as Islam upholds the principle of the Universal Brotherhood. Moreover, the saying is often associated with the notion that customers tend to be dissatisfied, frequently voicing their grievances, and exert significant influence to pressure employees. Rather than focusing solely on their self-interest, customers should reconsider the concept of ihsan, which is treating others as they would. One should inquire about the potential emotional response that individuals would experience if they were subjected to similar treatment by others. Muslims believe that every action they undertake is closely observed and monitored by Allah. Do individuals demonstrate compassion or love towards others when they engage in acts of aggression or cause distress to another individual? Does Allah find pleasure in our behavior of condemning others?

Therefore, customers must utilize all three aspects of ihsan before initiating actions against employees. This kind of inquiry will aid us in redefining our thinking and reconsidering if our efforts align with the principles of ihsan. This statement aligns with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad as recorded in the hadith, wherein it is emphasized that if an individual inflicts evil upon others, they will be subjected to harm by Allah. The narration in the matter, found in the works of Abu Dawood, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maajah, Ahmad, at-Tabaraani, al-Bayhaqi, and al-Kharaa'iti, is attributed to Abu Sirmah. According to this narration, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) stated: "Anyone who inflicts harm upon others will be reciprocated with harm from Allah, and anyone who causes hardship to others will face hardship from Allah." The adoption of ihsan leads to the subsequent attainment of taqwa. The term ihsan is frequently interpreted as "engaging in virtuous deeds" or "engaging in actions that are aesthetically pleasing," it is intricately connected to the notion of taqwa, which refers to the state of being devoutly pious. It implies that when customers exercise their rights in a manner characterized by sincerity, excellent manners, and a desire to please Allah, they will receive the blessings of Allah.

CONCLUSION

The notion of "customer is always right," or customer-centricity, has assumed heightened significance in contemporary times. However, it is important to note that the mere assertion of the customer always being right does not inherently render it an absolute truth. The allegation that the widely criticized maxim commonly imparted to employees is fundamentally flawed. Due to the adoption of this thought, customers are progressively testing limits by presenting unreasonable demands that compel employees to violate regulations. Furthermore, they resort to issuing negative customer service reviews on social media platforms as a means of coercion if their requests are unmet. Most concerning is the occurrence of intimidating behaviours, such as verbal abuse, spitting, and physical assault towards the individuals tasked with providing assistance and engaging in bullying tactics to fulfil their desires. The motto fosters a dichotomous mindset, wherein individuals are categorized as either winners or losers. It is predicated

on the notion that if the customer is consistently deemed correct, it logically follows that the employee must invariably be considered incorrect. The prioritization of consumers' interests may lead them to prioritize victory over employees, thus disregarding excellent value.

The present framework places customers in a position of power, which has become a significant platform for exhibiting many dysfunctional behaviours in today's society. Unfortunately, many of these behaviours negatively affect employees' well-being and safety. Due to this reason, the maxim mentioned above is contradicted within the context of Islam, as Islam advocates for the intrinsic equality of men and women before Allah, irrespective of their social standing. The study proposes the implementation of the principle of *ihsan* to rethink the notion of consumer rights and satisfaction. The term "always right" in the maxim ought to be omitted due to its association with the inculcation of egoistic values, including arrogance, narcissism, self-absorption, selfishness, boastfulness, and bragging.

The concept of *ihsan* in Islamic teachings transcends the mere fulfilment of religious duties, encompassing a profound commitment to authenticity and conscientiousness in one's conduct. Islamic business places a strong emphasis on the principles of equality. Following the principle of *ihsan*, it is recommended that customers exhibit a reduction in egocentric tendencies and prioritize their pursuits by considering the impact of their activities on others. Customers need not be concerned about their rights, as Islam ensures customer rights protection. Islamic teachings emphasize the promotion of harmonious situations that value the well-being of all parties involved without emphasizing determining winners or losers. Hence, the article argues against the notion that customers should abandon their self-centred behaviour and instead practice *ihsan*, or excellence, when interacting with others when attempting to assert their rights. When customers seek to resolve their conflicts in a graceful manner, they are more likely to garner respect from others and have their needs met via acts of love and compassion. Islamic values differ significantly from the secular world regarding how individuals are treated. This disparity arises from the fundamental Islamic principles of equity and justice guiding our actions. As adherents, we prioritize conducting ourselves in a manner that aligns with the teachings of Allah and seeks His approval.

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The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Muhammad Aiman Awalluddin was primarily responsible for compiling the literature review, collecting and processing secondary data, analyzing the data, and drafting the article. Anisa Safiah Maznorbalia supervised the research process, provided critical supervision, provided conceptual and methodological direction, and ensured the manuscript adhered to academic rigor and substantive clarity. Mohd Ramlan Mohd Arshad co-supervised the research process, provided input on the results, and assisted in finalizing the article for publication.

AI GENERATIVE DECLARATION

The author declares that generative AI tools were not used in the creation of this article, except for text paraphrasing and cross-checking references. The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of this work.

RESEARCH ETHICS STATEMENT

The author(s) declare that this study did not involve any human biological samples or data, or animal subjects. Consequently, formal ethics committee approval and informed consent were not required for this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to institutional and ethical requirements.

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