

## Article

# Spiritual Experience and Parishioners Satisfaction in the Online Eucharist: A Latin American Case Study

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**Abstract:** This research contributes to the scarce literature that exists on the perception that Catholics have about the Eucharist online, which was continued through various digital platforms, but once the emergence of the COVID-19. In this way, the perception of Catholics is identified, regarding their spiritual experience, their satisfaction, and their intention to continue attending this type of religious practice in the future, but online. For this, a quantitative study was carried out through the PLS program with a sample of 1423 parishioners in the city of Bogotá, Colombia. Bearing in mind that Latin America has the largest number of Catholics in the world, the results of this study help the Catholic Church to generate possible strategies that can be developed in various parts of the world, to combine this type of religious services with the various virtual platforms.

**Keywords:** parishioner satisfaction; spiritual experience; online eucharist; Catholicism in Latin America



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## 1. Introduction

According to figures given by the Vatican, through the 2022 Pontifical Yearbook and the 2020 Ecclesial Statistical Yearbook, Catholics accounted for 17.7% of the world's population by 2020. This is the equivalent of approximately 1360 billion people; of which 48% of these Catholics are in America, but especially in the Latin American region (Vatican News 2022).

In the light of the foregoing, several studies demonstrate the importance for Catholics of attending the Eucharist as an act of encounter with God, enabling them to increase their faith, His devotion, besides receiving various sacraments essential for this Christian community (Rymarz and Graham 2005; Vide and Wroblewski 2022; Harwood et al. 2022).

According to Olson (2020), the COVID-19 presented a series of challenges for all religions around the world, due to the social estrangement that occurred at the beginning of the pandemic, which prohibited face-to-face attendance at the different prayer temples, during the quarantine period. Faced with this, a challenge was presented to the Catholic Church, in which its millions of parishioners around the world were forbidden to leave their own homes. That is, when parishioners needed more spiritual help, which would allow them to increase their emotional strength to face the fears associated with both the COVID-19 pandemic and the quarantine, they were not allowed to go to church. Specifically for Christianity, the interest arose to know how religious services would continue, but without the physical presence of the parishioners. In this way, like other economic and social sectors, the Catholic Church implemented around the world the Online Eucharist as a contingency mechanism to continue performing their religious services.

Thus, on 14 March 2020, the Prefecture of the Pontifical House announced that all the Liturgical Celebrations of Holy Week would be held without the physical presence of the parishioners, to prevent the spread of the pandemic (Vatican 2020). Even the Sacrament of Holy Communion celebration was suspended, because no physical contact could happen between priests and parishioners.

In this way, at the beginning of this situation, Catholics felt that the liturgical, pastoral and sacramental meanings of Holy Week were lost, due to the online Eucharist; since traditionally, these rites were in person and were attended by thousands of people as one of the religious services with greater symbolic and emotional significance for Christians (Parish 2020).

However, the transmission of liturgies through various digital media quickly had its own audience, because there was a need to be closer to God in times of uncertainty and fear that was never seen before at that time. That is, the COVID-19 generated a spontaneous resurgence and importance of religiosity, due to the fear that the pandemic and the mandatory isolation created. Which in turn, generated a relationship never seen before between religion and technology, which facilitated the proliferation of religious services in a digital context (Parish 2020).

For example, the events held during Holy Week and Vatican Easter in 2020 were transmitted through various digital platforms around the world, generating an audience of millions of viewers that were part or not of the Catholic Church. This same effect was replicated throughout the world in the different transmissions that made parishes of each country, with their own religious services (Parish 2020; Johnson 2020; Corpuz and Sarmiento 2021).

In this way, although before the pandemic of the COVID-19 there were already TV channels that transmitted Eucharistic through this means, the attendance to this type of religious meetings through TV was very limited, compared to the face-to-face Eucharistic. Bearing in mind this, and the impossibility of performing face-to-face Eucharistic celebrations during the pandemic, some previous research shows the strategies of the Catholic religion to face this situation and to continue to carry out the various religious practices but through virtuality (Johnson 2020; Galang et al. 2021; Corpuz and Sarmiento 2021).

According to Parish (2020), at the beginning of the quarantine, it was evident a spontaneous resurgence of religiosity in the parishioners, due to the fear and uncertainty generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, and because the only means available to attend the Eucharist were digital media, it could be induced that such virtual Eucharists allowed parishioners to attend their religious needs, as the only alternative during the quarantine.

Once the emergency was overcome by COVID-19 and the obligatory quarantine was lifted, the churches returned to physical Eucharistic. However, it has been shown that several churches continued to perform their Eucharist online, which was developed simultaneously between presence and virtuality as a way to reach a greater audience. With this in mind, the need arises to identify how the connection of parishioners with God is perceived, and who continues to attend these Eucharistic celebrations in a digital environment after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking into account the above, this research presents three specific novelties: The first consists in analyzing the religious experience of Catholics through the Online Eucharist, the second novelty is to determine their satisfaction level towards these Online Eucharistic, and the third and last novelty, is to determine the intention to continue attending this type of Online Eucharist in the future. All this with reference to the virtual Eucharist, which has continued in this way, but once the mandatory quarantine is over.

In this way, this research seeks to contribute to the study of how spirituality is perceived through the Eucharist performed in digital channels, and not from the Eucharist performed in person in churches. In this way, some strategies could be implemented by the Catholic Church, to face these changes in the behavior of parishioners after COVID-19, and their relationship with new technologies.

Based on the above, this research can contribute to the study of how the spirituality of the Eucharist is transmitted, but through digital channels, and not from physical Catholic churches; and in this way raise questions about how the church could face these changes in parishioner's behavior after COVID-19, and its relationship with new technologies.

Below we detail the structure of this research: After conducting the introduction, we present the theoretical framework of the study variables: 1 Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist; 2 Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist, and 3 Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future, with their respective hypotheses. After this, we present the methodology used in this research, the results, and finally, the conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist*

According to [Soósová and Mauer \(2021\)](#), spiritual experiences are specific feelings that people possess, through which they experience a process of transcendental growth. This is achieved through a spiritual connection between the individual and a higher authority.

This higher authority is omnipresent, so it does not possess a human nature, but its nature is of divine character. This higher authority is usually called in different ways according to each specific culture; however, for all cultures, it symbolizes a higher being. In this way, they usually call him: God, Allah, Higher Power, Divine Being, Sacred Source, Life Force, Supreme Value, Great Mystery etc. ([Soósová and Mauer 2021](#)).

For [Dulin \(2020\)](#), spiritual experience tends to prompt people to experience situations in which they feel that God speaks to them within their own mind, through a divine that leads them repeatedly to do God's will. That is, a kind of impulse that comes from God, when he speaks to people, through his own personal thoughts.

On the other hand, in the spiritual experience, there are often related factors that are considered sacred and that usually represent the mystery of God, and the different feelings towards him, such as, for example: fear, hope, gratitude, etc.

For this, various elements are usually incorporated that allow a greater spiritual connection with this divine being such as prayer and rituals, among other religious acts, ([Soósová and Mauer 2021](#)).

Taking into account the above, several studies have shown how a religious experience is usually generated through the Liturgy, which is a space of connection between God and man, through various symbols that represents a religious meaning for the faithful. For example, one of the main acts of the Eucharist is the representation of the communion of the apostles at the Last Supper with Jesus Christ. This scene represents how these apostles received from Jesus Christ himself, his body and his blood through communion: this is a symbolic act, in which they eat bread and drank wine. This rite is brought to the present, through the host and the wine; being this, one of the main Christian rites, because it symbolizes the reception of God, within the body, mind and soul of each who receives communion in the Eucharist ([Sulikowska-Bełczowska 2022](#)).

In this way, it can be said that the Eucharist is an act that allows its assistants to have a religious experience through the affective, sensory and corporal dimensions, but in a sacred context. For this, some Eucharist specific rites are followed, which were built for years, thus achieving a special position in the parishioner's minds, through a liturgical tradition. In this spiritual experience, from the sensory dimension, it is required that parishioners participate in a Eucharist where they can experience various emotions through all their senses, such as touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. For this reason, various elements are often used in the Eucharist, such as the chalice, bread, wine, incenses, clothing, songs, readings, among other elements, which have a specific meaning, full of mystery and solemnity, which help build that experience in a sensory way ([Gschwandtner 2019](#)).

On the other hand, from the affective dimension, the experience of the Eucharist generates emotions for the parishioners, where often feelings of wonder, veneration, joy, peace, love, and reconciliation are generated, among others. Almost always, these feelings, although they arise within the individual, are usually experienced among other people who also attend such a meeting, since the Eucharist is a community event, not individual. In other words, the feelings of the Eucharist are often shaped significantly by what happens within the group of participants. However, it is important to mention, that it is possible

to have the experience of the Eucharist at times or places outside the temple, where the parishioner achieves that special connection with God and where the liturgical act can be carried out, like in a hospital room for example. From the bodily dimension, the participants usually perform various actions with their body, such as bowing, kneeling, crossing hands, crossing, standing, sitting, greeting, singing, etc. In this way, the Eucharist involves not only the way we move with our bodies but also the gestures we perform and obviously the activities involved in receiving communion physically (Gschwandtner 2019).

Therefore, it can be explained how the Eucharist generates a religious experience through affection, senses and corporality.

## 2.2. Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist

According to Giese and Cote (2000), it is possible to find in the literature three common elements regarding the concept of satisfaction. The first is based on the emotional or cognitive response, the second on the expectation that is possessed, and the third on the response that is generated after the accumulated experience. In this way, and in a broader sense, it can be said that satisfaction is an effective response that summarizes some kind of experience about a particular interest.

Although the definition of satisfaction tends to focus on the concept of consumer satisfaction, and therefore it is usually referred to the use of various products and services, and because of that, on the consumer satisfaction that he/she has with them; For this study, we wanted to tackle this concept, but from a religious perspective, analyzing the satisfaction of the parishioner regarding the Eucharist as a religious service.

It is important to mention that the churches in which the Eucharist is performed are often very important places for the Christian community, because in one way or another, they are present throughout their life cycle. In these places, the parishioner usually performs various religious services such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages and vigils. On the other hand, they are usually the places where a greater connection with God is perceived through prayer and the Eucharist (Silverman et al. 1983).

Through the various religious services, parishioners are involved in various social processes, through group rites that influence their interpersonal relations, within this social group. That is, religion exerts a social influence on all its members and on their development as individuals and on their interaction with other members of the community. In this way, the Eucharist is usually interpreted as group events, which allow the community to get closer to God, and at the same time be part of a social event (Silverman et al. 1983).

The Eucharist is also called Holy Communion, the Mass or the Lord's Supper, and is considered the most studied ritual in the history of mankind, because it is the main act of worship of the millions of Christians around the world. In this way, the Eucharist is considered as a habit within the Christian community, whose rites pass from generation to generation, and whose ceremonies are seen as events of promise and hope for their parishioners (Ford 1995).

For Frankovich (1981), the Eucharist is seen as an explicit act of forgiveness and reconciliation, in which forgiveness is offered and accepted by all participants. It is not even necessary to pronounce words of "forgiveness", since the Eucharist represents in itself a symbol of forgiveness. However, the theme of forgiveness in the Eucharist is also explicit, through the prayers offered in the midst of the liturgy, especially in some opening prayers. In this way, Christians bring to the Eucharist their sins and their offenses towards the community and towards God, which are healed and forgiven in this religious act. Based on the above, through the celebration of the Eucharist, a reconciliation is generated between the heart and mind of the faithful.

For theologians, the purpose of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist is to lead the parishioner to a spiritual relationship with Christ through the "receiving process" of Christ's body and blood as a symbol of life based on faith. For this, the ecclesiastical authorities determined that only a duly ordained priest is the only person who can make Christ present in the Eucharist. In this Eucharist, a series of popular rituals are performed,

which are based on the belief that certain prayers and actions help improve the presence of God in the Eucharist (Macy 2012).

Taking into account the above, for this research it is considered that the satisfaction of the parishioners in the Eucharist represents their affective response to the experience they have about their connection with God, for which various rites and symbols are used that help to generate such a connection during the Eucharist. In this way, the greater the connection you feel with God, the higher your level of satisfaction, and the less you feel with God, the less your satisfaction with the Eucharist.

Based on previous studies by De Keyzer (2005) and Radcliffe (2008), parishioners would be expected to achieve through the Eucharist a greater connection with God, which allows them to have greater peace, faith, commitment, love, and other positive values for their own lives. That is, it would be understood that the Eucharist generates a satisfaction in the parishioner who attends this type of religious services and that generates a greater connection with God.

However, there are few studies that analyze the satisfaction of the parishioner in the Eucharist, and even fewer studies on the satisfaction of the parishioner in the Online Eucharist. With this in mind, consumer satisfaction is taken into account in this research, but in other social areas, such as work, leisure and sport.

In this way and based on previous studies of Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra (2022a); Martin et al. (2022); Areiza-Padilla et al. (2021); Favale et al. (2020), for this research it is considered that there is a positive relationship between Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist and the parishioner's satisfaction. Taking this into account, the following hypothesis is presented:

**Hypothesis (H1):** *Spiritual experience in the online Eucharist has a positive effect on the parishioner's satisfaction attending this type of Eucharists.*

### 2.3. Intention to Continue Attending Virtual Eucharistic in the Future

For Catholics, there is a deep-rooted custom of attending the Eucharist every Sunday, because this Catholic event is considered the most important event of the whole week. On the other hand, for Catholics, attending the Eucharist represents a social event and a family tradition, since it is also the rest-day for most families (Inglis 2007).

During the Eucharist, Catholics manage to generate greater contact with God, through various ceremonial rites that are performed, which allow them to feel an emotional connection with God, in this way it is hoped that the Eucharist will generate a satisfaction in the parishioners towards their faith (Soósová and Mauer 2021).

Due to this satisfaction in the spiritual faith of a parishioner, and to the cultural translation that exists of attending the Eucharist on Sundays, it can be identified that there is a willingness of the parishioner to continue attending the Eucharist every Sunday.

However, due to the scant literature that exists on the intention of parishioners to continue receiving Eucharist, but in a virtual way, for this research we have focused on interpreting how it is the intention of consumers to continue receiving different services, but online; as for example in the field of virtual classes and online concerts (Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra 2022a). In this way, we try to interpret how this concept would be applied, but to virtual Eucharist.

From the consumer behavior's point of view, it is expected that a satisfied customer intends in the future to continue buying the service that allowed him to have such satisfaction, in this way a satisfied customer generates a repurchase and also a positive recommendation to other consumers (Wen et al. 2011).

For this reason, if a consumer intends to continue consuming an online service, he needs to have a positive consumer experience previously. If his experience was negative, and did not generate satisfaction, it will neither generate an intention to continue using this virtual service on other future occasions (Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra 2022a).

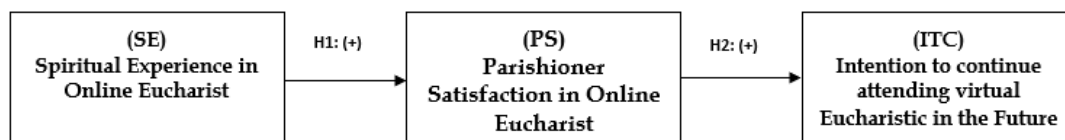
With this in mind, for this research, we interpret that the intention of parishioners to continue receiving online Eucharist reflects the spiritual satisfaction that this type of religious service generates in their faith.

Based on the studies of [Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra \(2022a\)](#) in the field of virtual education after the pandemic, which allow to show how students consider that classes with a virtual interaction and methodology are perceived as quality classes, which generate student's satisfaction in their academic process; therefore, a predisposition to continue using or choosing this methodology in the future.

In the same way, but in the leisure sector, it was found that concerts transmitted by virtual platforms are perceived as quality recreational services for virtual viewers, which in turn generates the intention to participate again in this type of virtual concerts ([Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra 2022a](#)). Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

**Hypothesis (H2):** *Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist has a positive effect on the Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future.*

In [Figure 1](#), the proposed model for this research, with its respective hypotheses, is presented as a summary:



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model and hypothesis. Source: Author's own compilation.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Sampling Procedure and Collection of Data

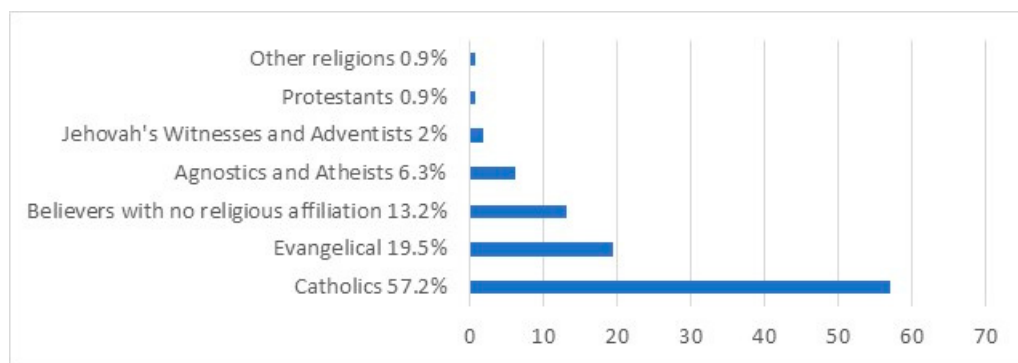
Given that the largest number of Catholics in the world meets in Latin America, for this study, we have chosen Colombia to develop this research. Taking this into account, this research was based on a convenience sample of Catholics in the city of Bogota. The details of the sample are detailed below.

It is important to mention that according to previous studies of [Beltrán and Silva \(2020\)](#), with the support of the National University of Colombia, World Vision, Swedish Church and the Inter-Ecclesial Commission of Justice and Peace, by 2019, 57.2% of Colombians were Catholics; this means that 6 out of 10 Colombians consider themselves Catholics. In this way, the importance of the Catholic religion in this country is verified and its impact on Colombian culture can be understood.

The second largest religious group in Colombia corresponds to the evangelicals with 19.5%. On the other hand, believers without religious affiliation account for 13.2%, agnostics and atheists for 6.3%, Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventists for 2%, Protestants for 0.9% and finally those with other religions for 0.9%. Thus, it is evident that Colombia is a predominantly Catholic country. Religious affiliation of Colombians is presented in the [Figure 2](#).

On the other hand, Due to the sociodemographic characteristics of the Catholic population on which this research was based, and especially to the people's age who often attend the Eucharistic celebrations, it was decided to collect the information in person. For this and considering that the most important Eucharist for Catholics is the one that occurs each Sunday, the data collection took place this day of the week. In this way, the sample was collected in person, on Sundays between the second semester of 2021 and the first semester of 2022, in the sector of the Parish of Sanctuary of the Divine Child Jesus, (Santuario del Divino Niño Jesús) in the neighborhood of "20 July" in the city of Bogota, Colombia (South America).

It is important to mention that this Catholic church belongs to the "Salesian community" and refers to the child Jesus.



**Figure 2.** Religious affiliation of Colombians. Source: Author’s own compilation based on studies by Beltrán and Silva (2020).

The child Jesus is the name by which Catholics recognize the devotion to the childhood of Jesus of Nazareth, from his birth to the commemoration of Jesus at the age of 12 and his appearance in the temple. Some of the most recognized devotions of the Child Jesus in the world are described below in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Devotions to the child Jesus in the world.

Name	City	Country	Region
The Divine Child	Bogota	Colombia	Latin America
Infant Jesus of Escuque	Trujillo	Venezuela	Latin America
El Niño pan	Xochimilco	Mexico	Latin America
Holy Child Jesus of Health	Puebla	Mexico	Latin America
Child Jesus	Prague	Czech Republic	Europe
Holy Child of Atocha	Madrid	Spain	Europe
Holy Child Jesus of the Afflicted	San Cristóbal de La Laguna	Spain	Europe
Holy Child of Aracoeli	Roma	Italy	Europe

Source: Author’s own compilation.

This setting was chosen for 5 specific reasons: (1) This parish was inaugurated in 1942 and is considered one of the most important and largest Catholic shrines in Bogota. (2) This church is visited mostly by parishioners living in Bogota, without distinction of income, education or gender. With this in mind, we consider it appropriate to collect the sample in this church, which represents the demographic data of this city. (3) Because of the above, it is one of the places of greatest pilgrimage and prayer in Bogota, since it received before COVID-19, approximately 70,000 parishioners every Sunday of the month. (4) In order to attend this number of parishioners, Eucharistic services are offered on Sundays every hour, from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the usual time before COVID-19; however, during the collection of the sample, the church was operating on Sundays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., after restrictions were lifted by COVID. (5) Due to the number of parishioners, 2 simultaneous Eucharists are usually made every hour, one inside the temple and another outside the temple in the adjacent square.

3.2. Sample

Participants said they attended at least one Online Eucharist either through social networks, television, or other digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, among others. This Online Eucharist had to be performed after September 2020 and until the date of this study in the first semester of 2022.

In Colombia, through Decree 1168, issued by the National Government on 25 August 2020, face-to-face Eucharistic ceremonies were again allowed from 1 September 2020.

It was clarified to the parishioners, that the Online Eucharist in which they had participated should not necessarily be from the parish “Sanctuary of the Divine Child Jesus” but could have been from any other Catholic parish in Colombia, and with any kind of religious service that had a Eucharist, that is, it was not necessary to have a Sunday Eucharist.

On the other hand, they were also informed that their participation in this survey was voluntary and anonymous, because the personal data of the respondents were not collected.

In view of the above, 1.423 valid questionnaires were collected, of which their socio-demographic characteristics can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Sample.

	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	498	35.0%
Women	925	65.0%
<b>Age</b>		
18–25	46	3.2%
26–35	171	12.0%
36–45	364	25.6%
46–55	410	28.8%
>55	432	30.4%
<b>Digital tool through which the Eucharist was received</b>		
TV	619	43.5%
Social Networks	305	21.4%
Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, others	499	35.1%
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Lives in Bogota	1267	89.0%
Resides outside of Bogota	156	11.0%
<b>Educational level</b>		
No schooling	20	1.4%
Primary	375	26.4%
Secondary	515	36.2%
University	286	20.1%
Postgraduate studies	227	16.0%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	94	6.6%
Worker	427	30.0%
Self-employed	172	12.1%
Unemployed	145	10.2%
Housekeeping duties	282	19.8%
Retired	303	21.3%



**Table 2.** *Cont.*

	N	%
<b>Income</b>		
Up to 2 MLW	377	26.5%
2–3 MLW	564	39.6%
3–4 MLW	189	13.3%
4–5 MLW	134	9.4%
More than 5 MLW	159	11.2%

MLW: The minimum wage in Colombia is equivalent to approximately 230 American dollars. Source: Author's own compilation.

Regarding these demographic characteristics, we can highlight the high participation of women in the Eucharist with 65%, compared to men with 35% of the total sample. Taking into account that the data collection was done in person at the Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays but based on the attendance at Eucharistic celebrations in a virtual way, we can deduce that, both in the face-to-face Eucharistic celebrations as in the Online Eucharistic, women are the main audience for these religious services in Catholicism.

According to 2018 figures from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), of Colombia; in this country 48.8% are men and 51.2% are women, being a population by gender in an equitable manner (Dane.gov.co 2018).

However, in order to explain the difference between the participant's gender for this research, we can draw on previous studies by Loewenthal et al. (2002); Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012); Schnabel (2015); Penny et al. (2015); Schnabel et al. (2018); which show that the Catholic woman is much more religious than the Catholic man, due to cultural and social factors.

For these reasons, women have religious beliefs and habits more deeply rooted than men; and therefore, it could be explained in this way, their greater participation in this type of events, which is one of the main religious acts of Catholicism.

On the other hand, it is also evident the age difference of the participants, since 84.8% had an age equal to or greater than 36 years old, which shows that this type of religious services is not usually for a young public, but instead, is focused on people with a mature age.

### 3.3. Sources of Measured Items

For this study, scales previously validated in the literature were used, which were translated into Spanish and adapted for the purpose of this research on online Eucharist. In this way, the 16 items of the Underwood and Teresi (2002) were used for "Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist", and the 8 items of the Larsen et al. (1979) scale were used for "Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist".

Finally, due to the few literatures that exists on "Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future", this study decided to adapt the scale used by Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra (2022a), which was used to measure the "Intent to continue using virtual classes in the future", who in turn adapted and combined the scales of Chang et al. (2020); Udo et al. (2011) for this.

Participants had to answer each question with a score of 1 to 7 according to the Likert scale: 1 was "totally disagree" and 7 "totally agree". Table 3 summarizes the scales used in this study.

**Table 3.** Sources of measured items.

Study Variable	Author(s)	Item(s)
Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist	Underwood and Teresi (2002)	16
Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist	Larsen et al. (1979)	8
Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharist in the Future	Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra (2022a); Chang et al. (2020); Udo et al. (2011)	5

Source: Author’s own compilation.

#### 4. Results

For this quantitative type of research, the data were processed through the PLS-SEM 3.2.7 software, due to the predictive nature proposed by this research and the adaptation and precision that this type of technique allows in the social sciences (Barroso et al. 2010). Based on that, two phases were performed. In the first phase, the measurement scales of the variables under study were verified through their validity and reliability. After this, the structural model was estimated by evaluating the weight and magnitude of the relationships between the study variables.

##### 4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To validate the measurement scales of this research, which are reflective or Mode A, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed through the individual reliability of its items (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) and its composite reliability (CR) whose values were greater than 0.7 (Thompson 2007).

On the other hand, for the convergent validity, the extracted variance (AVE) of each variable is used, where the results must be greater than 0.5, (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Considering the above, it was necessary to eliminate the items (SE11; SE13; SE14) of the variable “Spiritual Experience in the Online Eucharist” as well as the item (SP5) of the variable “Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist”, to be able to have the AVE of both variables with a value greater than 0.5 that allow to demonstrate an adequate convergent validity for the model.

The results of Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ , the Composite Reliability (CR) and the variance extracted (AVE) can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Sources of measured items.

Variables/Items	Mean	St. Dev	Loadings Factor
<b>(SE) Spiritual Experience in the Online Eucharist</b> ( $\alpha = 0.821$ ; CR = 0.865; AVE = 0.507)			
(SE1) I feel God’s presence in the Online Eucharist	2.67	1.93	0.911 *
(SE2) I experience a connection to all life in the Online Eucharist	2.33	1.78	0.776 *
(SE3) During Online Eucharist, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy, which lifts me out of my daily concerns.	3.27	2.18	0.916 *
(SE4) I find strength in my religion or spirituality through the Online Eucharist	2.67	1.87	0.643 *
(SE5) I find comfort in my religion or spirituality through the Online Eucharist	3.05	1.70	0.726 *
(SE6) I feel deep inner peace or harmony in the Online Eucharist	2.77	1.87	0.739 *
(SE7) I ask for God’s help in the midst of the Online Eucharist activities.	3.34	1.94	0.913 *

Table 4. Cont.

Variables/Items	Mean	St. Dev	Loadings Factor
(SE8) I feel guided by God in the midst of the Online Eucharist activities.	2.70	1.75	0.918 *
(SE9) I feel God's love for me, directly in the Online Eucharist	2.91	1.89	0.790 *
(SE10) I feel God's love for me, through others in the Online Eucharist	2.36	1.70	0.827 *
(SE12) I feel thankful for my blessings in the Online Eucharist	3.13	1.74	0.759 *
(SE15) I am closer to God in the Online Eucharist	2.55	1.82	0.703 *
(SE16) In general, I feel closer to God in Online Eucharist	2.64	1.79	0.812 *
<b>(PS) Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist</b> ( $\alpha = 0.823$ ; CR = 0.834; AVE = 0.511)			
(PS1) How would you rate the quality of the Online Eucharist you have received?	3.22	1.81	0.742 *
(PS2) Did you get the kind of Eucharist you wanted?	3.18	1.90	0.816 *
(PS3) To what extent did the Online Eucharist meet your needs?	3.58	2.17	0.882 *
(PS4) If a friend were in need of similar help, would you recommend the Online Eucharist to him or her?	3.39	1.84	0.875 *
(PS6) Have the Online Eucharist you received help you deal with your problems?	3.33	1.95	0.914 *
(PS7) In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the Online Eucharist you have received?	3.41	1.37	0.722 *
(PS8) If you need to receive a Eucharist again, would you return to the Online Eucharist?	3.72	1.36	0.788 *
<b>(ITC) Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future</b> ( $\alpha = 0.710$ ; CR = 0.849 AVE = 0.721)			
(ITC1) If I need to attend the Eucharist in the future, I will connect through digital tools.	3.89	1.76	0.891
(ITC2) Besides using the church website, I will also use other virtual tools more frequently to receive the Eucharist online	3.67	1.47	0.872
(ITC3) I will suggest others to use the online Eucharist where they cannot attend it in person	4.56	1.88	0.814
(ITC4) I know that I get a good religious experience in the online Eucharistic	3.04	1.77	0.751
(ITC5) I will probably attend another online Eucharist	4.39	1.84	0.799

Note:  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; \*  $p < 0.01$ .

On the other hand, Table 4 also allows us to see a descriptive summary of the results obtained from all the items that make up the measurement scale for each variable. These results show a low spiritual experience through the online Eucharist, a moderate satisfaction of parishioners in the online Eucharist, and a positive intention to continue receiving this type of religious services through online media.

For the discriminant validity of the measuring instrument, the criteria of [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#) were included, in this way the square root of the AVE of each variable must be greater than the correlations that this one has with the rest of the variables of the model. On the other hand, Heterotrait-Heteromethod-HT and Monorrasgo-Heteromethod-MT (HTMT), ([Henseler et al. 2015](#)), have values  $< 0.9$ , which allows confirming the discriminant validity of the measurement model, of all reflective or Mode A variables. These results can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Discriminant validity.

	Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist	Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist	Intention to Continue Attending Virtual Eucharistic in the Future
Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist	<b>0.829</b>	0.334	0.398
Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist	0.567	<b>0.788</b>	0.237
Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future	0.455	0.568	<b>0.794</b>

Note: On the diagonal: square root of the AVE values. Below the diagonal: correlations. Above the diagonal: HTMT values. Source: Author's own compilation.

#### 4.2. Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

After the process of confirming the measurement scales, the structural model of this research was estimated through the PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares) software, in addition to bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples (Henseler 2017).

The results obtained through the coefficients of the trajectories were significant for the two hypotheses of this research, however for hypothesis 1 (H1), a contrary trajectory to the one shown in the initial model was offered, since a positive relationship had been presented between Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist and Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist, however the relationship was negative, so this hypothesis was rejected, ( $\beta = -0.175$ ;  $p < 0.006$ ).

On the other hand, for Hypothesis 2 (H2), the trajectory was in the same positive relationship raised in this research, so this hypothesis was accepted, ( $\beta = 0.183$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ).

Besides this, the verification of the explanatory power of the structural model was carried out through the coefficients of determination  $R^2$ , which allow to indicate the amount of variance of the endogenous variables. Thus, for each relationship between the constructs, the desirable values must be above 0.3, although minimum values of 0.2 are accepted (Chin 1998).

Likewise, an evaluation of the structural model in terms of its predictive capacity was carried out, which is measured through the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  test (Geisser 1974; Stone 1974). Thus, if  $Q^2$  is greater than 0, it means that the model has predictive relevance (Chin 1998; Hair et al. 2021). The results allow us to show that all the  $Q^2$  obtained are positive and higher than 0, which confirms the predictive relevance. All the above data are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Structural model results.

Hypothesis	$\beta$	t	p Value	Contrast
H1: (SE) Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist- (PS) Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist	-0.175	4.906	0.006	Not Accepted
H2: (PS) Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist- (ITC) Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future	0.183	4.381	0.000	Accepted

Note:  $R^2$  (PS) = 0.473;  $R^2$  (ITC) = 0.328;  $Q^2$  (PS) = 0.179;  $Q^2$  (ITC) = 0.156, Source: Author's own compilation.

## 5. Discussion, Theoretical Implications and Limitations

### 5.1. Discussion

Although before the pandemic of COVID-19 in several countries of the world, there were already television programs or channels in which Eucharistic TV was broadcasted; It was during the pandemic that parishes were forced to perform the Eucharist through various online platforms, as the only means of reaching their parishioners, due to mobility restrictions imposed by the different governments of the world. Due to the fear, uncertainty

and other negative emotions that occurred during the compulsory quarantine, there was a resurgence in devotion in Catholics who clung to their faith in God to deal with this situation. This caused thousands of Catholics in the world to seek a greater connection with God and discover in digital platforms the mechanism to attend the Eucharist without leaving home.

It could be indicated that the Catholic Church found in technology, a contingency to be able to face the mandatory quarantine, and in this way, to reach the millions of its parishioners around the world. For this reason, during this period of time, the Eucharists through Facebook, YouTube, Teams, Zoom, Meet and other digital platforms, managed to reach their largest audience until that moment, because along with TV, were the only way to attend such religious services. It is important to clarify that once the quarantines were lifted, many churches saw in the technology a mechanism to reach more parishioners through the internet. In this way, it has become common for a face-to-face Eucharist to be transmitted simultaneously by various online platforms. For this reason, the need arises to know the perception of parishioners regarding these virtual Eucharist, so that the Catholic Church can continue to develop strategies that allow it to adapt to a post-pandemic world and to the new behaviors of its parishioners, regarding technology.

Taking into account the above and following the qualitative analyses of this research, a descriptive summary of the results obtained in the study is included in Table 4. Based on these results, it is necessary to highlight the low values that the sample has regarding the variable "Spiritual Experience in Online Eucharist" where all its items have a score of 2 and 3, of a maximum of 7 points, being these the lowest scores in the entire study. In other words, this study can conclude that Catholics do not have a positive spiritual experience through the virtual Eucharistic.

On the other hand, this research shows a low satisfaction of parishioners when taking a virtual Eucharist with a score above 3 points out of a maximum of 7. However, it is interesting that this variable has higher values than the variable of "Spiritual Experience in the Online Eucharist". This may be due to the status that Catholics grant to the Eucharist as a "sacred event". For this reason, it is not usual to make negative judgments on the liturgical act, even though it has been viewed online and does not generate a positive spiritual experience for the Christian faith.

Finally, it should be noted that the highest values in this research are awarded to the variable "Intention to continue attending virtual Eucharistic in the Future", with scores between 3 and 4 out of 7 points. This result is very significant and of great academic interest, because, although this study showed a low perception of positive "Spiritual Experience in the Online Eucharist" and "Parishioner Satisfaction in Online Eucharist", faithful people expressed their interest in continuing attending such religious services through virtual platforms. This can be explained by the strong Catholic tradition that exists in Latin America, of attending the Eucharist. Religion in these countries is a fundamental part of their social behavior and permeates their entire culture; and therefore, they feel the moral and religious obligation to attend these religious services, even in virtual form, in cases where they cannot be present; and also, an adaptation of the Catholic parishioner to this type of virtual Eucharistic, as a result of his/her experience during the pandemic.

## 5.2. Theoretical Implications

Taking into account the above, we can explain the results of the hypotheses raised in this research. Regarding Hypothesis 1 (H1), the results show a significant and negative relationship between the Spiritual Experience and the Satisfaction of the Parishioners in the virtual Eucharist, ( $\beta$ :  $-0.175$ ;  $p$  value  $0.006$ ), Hypothesis 1 (H1) should be rejected. This relationship had been placed in the opposite direction, in other words, positively.

It is important to clarify that, due to the few studies on virtual Eucharists and their relationship with parishioner's satisfaction, for this research the level of satisfaction was considered from the perspective of the consumer, in other areas of virtual services, such as work, leisure and sport and not of the parishioner himself. For this reason, the previous studies of

Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra (2022b); Martin et al. (2022); Areiza-Padilla et al. (2021); Favale et al. (2020), that use the perspective of the consumer, were analyzed to propose Hypothesis 1, and show that this type of clients achieve positive satisfaction of online services in different academic, sports, and cultural fields. However, taking into account the results of this research applied in religious services, it can be stated that this type of service does not behave in the same way as in the services previously studied; Indeed, it contains spiritual connotations that do not allow its comparison with other types of services different from religious ones.

To better understand this situation, we could take into consideration the studies of Sulikowska-Belczowska (2022), which explains how, for Catholics, the act of communion is perceived as one of the most important rites of the Eucharist, because it symbolizes Jesus' last supper with his apostles. In this way, this rite of communion symbolizes the reception of God in the body, soul and mind of the parishioner.

Considering that in a virtual Eucharist there is no way in which the parishioner receives communion, for this research, we can interpret that this factor negatively influences their experience because the most sacred act of such a ceremony is lost and therefore the spiritual experience diminishes.

On the other hand, the studies of Gschwandtner (2019) show that the Eucharist is a religious act full of different symbols, which allow the parishioner to generate a religious experience through its affective, sensory and corporal dimensions, where the church as a place of worship plays a very important role. Therefore, it could be deduced that in the virtual Eucharist, these dimensions cannot be promoted in the same way, because the parishioner is not physically in a place that he considers sacred, as it is the church. That is why he or she does not feel the same solemnity in the Eucharist, because it can be attended from home, on the bus, in the park or anywhere; but none of them is considered sacred.

On the other hand, this research was able to verify Hypothesis 2 (H2) which demonstrates the positive and significant relationship between the variables Satisfaction of Parishioners in the Online Eucharist and Intention to continue attending the virtual Eucharist in the Future ( $\beta$ : 0.183; p value 0.000). For this hypothesis and also due to the lack of literature about it, we rely again on the previous studies of Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra (2022b) in the field of virtual education after the pandemic, which demonstrate how students have a positive predisposition to continue using this virtual methodology in the future. On the other hand, we also consider this intention to continue with this virtual methodology, but related to virtual concerts, which was positive and significant (Areiza-Padilla and Galindo-Becerra 2022b). With this information in mind and the results obtained in this actual study, we can say that in the religious sphere, the result is also positive and there is an intention to continue attending the virtual Eucharist.

However, we consider that the reasons for continuing to use these technological tools are different depending on the area under analysis. In the two previous studies on education and virtual concerts, a high perceived quality is perceived in this type of online services; but in this specific research on religious issues, the results on the experience and satisfaction of the parishioner are low. In order to explain the intention of continue attending virtual Eucharists, despite not having a good experience and satisfaction, we have to consider the cultural importance of the Eucharist for the Latin American Catholic people., which at pandemic time allowed him to have a "connection" with God. Nowadays, although the parishioner can attend face-to-face Eucharist, but for some reason he cannot be present, he will not reject the possibility of attending the Eucharist in a virtual way. This explains why many churches kept their virtual Eucharist at the end of the quarantine when they returned to the face-to-face contact.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Lines of Research

Finally, this research presents below some limitations, which could also be considered as future lines of research, and that allow us to continue knowing the perception of Catholics with respect to virtual Eucharist. On the one hand, this research had a sample of

convenience in the city of Bogota, therefore, new studies could be made through a multi-group analysis where parishioners are compared by age range and gender. The intention is to know if there are significant differences for each study group, and in this way, better understand the behavior of each specific group.

On the other hand, this research shows a very strong bias in its sample, towards the population older than 36 years, being 84.8% of the total sample. Although these data show that people over 36 years old are the population group that most attends the Eucharist, only 15.2% of the sample was 18 to 35 years old, so the behavior of such younger parishioners could be lost among the overall results. For this reason, it would be interesting to be able to carry out new studies focused on the younger populations exclusively, as well as the studies of [Kinnaman and Hawkins \(2011\)](#); [Hughes \(2015\)](#); [Shepherd \(2016\)](#).

In addition, the sample of this research was concentrated in Colombia due to the importance of the Catholic religion in Latin America; however, we consider of great importance to be able to replicate this study in other countries that have conservative Catholic circles as in Central and Eastern Europe, in order to know if there are significant differences.

Finally, because this research allows to demonstrate the intention of Catholics to continue attending the virtual Eucharist, it is necessary to continue carrying out more studies to identify how the spiritual experience and the satisfaction of the parishioner could be improved in this type of Eucharistic, through various digital platforms, in which they allow a greater connection with God.

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