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**Digital Spirituality: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of User Experiences of  
Spiritual Mobile Application “The Beacon by Soul 33”**

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## Abstract

Spirituality is associated with a wide range of benefits including reduced stress and improved mental and emotional wellbeing. Due to rapid advancements in technology spirituality is now accessed through digital devices and mobile applications (apps). This research was designed to investigate digital spirituality by exploring user experiences with the spiritual mobile app *The Beacon by Soul 33*. The design of this study was qualitative and utilised semi-structured interviews. Five participants from around Aotearoa New Zealand were interviewed via Zoom and contributed to this research. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA was chosen due to its methodology for analysing subjective experiences and its underlying theoretical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Three Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and nine subthemes emerged from the data: (1) spiritual mentorship - subthemes (a) using the app for guidance and support, (b) belonging and reassurance, (c) sharing spiritual knowledge; (2) achieving remarkable growth - subthemes (a) advancing emotionally, (b) developing spiritually, (c) improved relationships; and (3) attitudes towards spirituality - subthemes (a) positive feelings about meditations, affirmations, and journalling, (b) spirituality an important aspect of life, and (c) spirituality and mental health. The results of this study indicated that using a spiritual mobile app can provide meaningful guidance, support, and connection. Participants described various benefits, including personal development and enhanced mental and emotional wellbeing. The results highlight potential implications for mental health practitioners, who may wish to incorporate or recommend spiritual based apps as a means of supporting wellbeing. Future research should include longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of using

spiritual mobile apps. Research on specific demographic groups and user experiences with AI-generated spirituality could also provide valuable insights.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Overview of Research

Advancements in technology and the widespread use of digital devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones have become an important part of our everyday life (Gan, 2018; Kim et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022). These technological developments have transformed many aspects of daily living, including the ways in which we communicate, learn, and socialise (Lyu, 2022). Across the globe, individuals increasingly rely on smartphones and mobile applications (apps) to access a wide range of services and activities (Kim et al., 2016). Tasks such as instant messaging, emailing, social media, internet browsing, purchasing consumables, and making online payments can now be completed with a single touch.

Religion and spirituality have also undergone a transformation, with many practices now accessible digitally and through mobile apps (Rathi & Kumar, 2020). Engaging with digital religion and spirituality has become increasingly common, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic which emerged in 2020 (Laird et al., 2024). During this time, individuals were compelled to seek alternative ways to maintain and participate in their usual religious and spiritual practices and connections due to heavily imposed restrictions worldwide (Laird et al., 2024).

A recent study found that an increasing number of individuals are choosing to engage with religion and spirituality through digital means. Proposed explanations for this shift include increased convenience and its ability to help people mitigate barriers such as time constraints, family responsibilities, transportation issues, and the costs associated with attending services in person (Laird et al., 2024).

More than a decade ago, Buie and Blythe (2013) reported that over 6,000 religious and spiritual mobile apps were available on the iTunes App Store in December 2012. It was anticipated that this figure would continue to grow. Obtaining a more recent figure for the number of spiritual mobile apps currently available has proven to be difficult. Primarily because the category “spiritual mobile apps” overlaps with other types of categories such as wellness, lifestyle, and religious apps. Nonetheless, the spiritual wellness app industry has been estimated to be worth more than US \$2.1 billion, with this figure continuing to grow (Grand View Research, 2025).

Despite the growing popularity and uptake of digital spirituality and spiritual mobile apps, research in this area remains limited. Calls have previously been made urging for further research into the use of digital technologies in spirituality and religion. However, these appeals appear to have been largely overlooked and remain unanswered (Buie & Blythe, 2013).

This study was developed to address existing gaps in the literature and to contribute to the research area of digital technology use in spirituality. Specifically, it examined the subjective lived experiences of individuals who use a spiritual mobile app. For this study a single spiritual mobile app *The Beacon by Soul 33* (Soul 33 app) was selected for exploration. The app was created by Gāyathirī (Gaia) Chinniah, a New Zealand based healer, medium, and spiritual coach. The app was first launched in 2020 and is available for download through both the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store (Soul 33, 2024b).

This research investigated digital spirituality by exploring users’ experiences with a spiritual mobile app. A qualitative research design was selected, as it aligns with the view that there are multiple ways of producing and acquiring knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and were chosen as they allow for the flow of

conversation to occur between researcher and participant (Karatsareas, 2022). Moreover, the use of semi-structured interviews provides the ability to gather data that is rich in detail and explores topics that are subjective and personal (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The data was analysed using the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA was selected as the method of data analysis as it provided a way of focusing in on individuals' subjective lived experiences and the meanings and interpretations that they attach to them (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Additionally, IPA is grounded in phenomenology, enabling subjective experiences to be explored from the perspective of the research participant (Alase, 2017; Harper, 2011).

## **Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and an overview of the existing literature on spiritual mobile apps. During February 2025, an extensive literature search was conducted across the following databases: Google, Google Scholar, and Massey University Discover. The initial search revealed that research specifically focused on spiritual mobile apps is extremely limited.

One notable study stood out and was found to be frequently cited in the existing literature. This particular study by Buie and Blythe (2013) was completed more than 10 years ago, and was intriguingly titled: *"Spirituality: There's an App for That! (But Not a Lot of Research)"*. The title of this study seemed fitting as the search for literature continued. Coincidentally, this appears to remain true even after more than a decade.

The first section of this literature review will explore spirituality and its associated benefits, the commercialisation of spirituality, and its presence in digital spaces. In particular, the following will be discussed: what spirituality is, the debates in attempting to define the

term, the benefits it provides, and how it has been turned into a sellable product with high returns (Basci, 2015). Furthermore, this review will examine how technological advancements have transformed spiritual practices and facilitated their access through digital devices.

The second section of this literature review will provide an overview of digital technology, smartphones, smartphone addiction, and mobile apps. Specifically, it will examine how digital technology has transformed daily life, the advantages and disadvantages associated with it, and the concepts of smartphone addiction and the use of mobile apps.

The third and final section of this literature review will provide an overview of spiritual mobile apps and introduce The Beacon by Soul 33. Specifically, it will discuss the nature and objectives of spiritual mobile apps, as well as the app selected to inform this study and thesis. Prior to concluding the literature review, the current issues within the research area of spiritual mobile apps will be discussed meticulously. Followed by a summary of the key findings presented in this chapter.

### ***Spirituality***

Spirituality is a complex and multifaceted concept that is difficult to define (Niekerk, 2018). Part of this difficulty arises from the fact that the terms religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably (Barolia et al., 2023; Can Oz et al., 2021). The majority of the reviewed literature agreed with the difficulty and challenge that presents itself with attempting to define spirituality (Boatsi & Dwarika, 2025; Can Oz et al., 2021; Kao et al., 2020; Niekerk, 2018). The word *spirit* comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means

“breath”, “courage”, “soul”, and “life”, and from the Latin word *spirare*, which means “to blow” or “breathe” (Ahmad & Razak, 2013; Kale, 2006; Palmer, 2023).

According to Park et al. (2024) religion is typically understood as an organised system of beliefs or set of specific practices that focuses on a higher power, such as that in Christianity. In contrast, spirituality is often considered to be a more complex concept that extends beyond organised religion (Balboni et al., 2022; Barolia et al., 2023; Can Oz et al., 2021). As noted by Scott (2024) while spirituality and religion often overlap, there are distinct differences. For instance, spirituality can be practiced individually, does not attach itself to a set of rules, and often focuses on an individual’s own journey of learning and understanding of what is important in life. In contrast, religion is generally practiced within a community or group, is often based on a set of rules, and tends to focus on the belief in gods, traditions, and religious texts (Kao et al., 2020; Scott, 2024).

Despite the challenges in defining spirituality, it can be conceptualised in two distinct ways: firstly, as a form of religion that is passed down through established religious systems; and secondly, as a belief system that is highly individual (Basci, 2015; Dein et al., 2010). Research emphasises that individuals can identify as being spiritual without necessarily being religious (Barolia et al., 2023; Can Oz et al., 2021; Dein et al., 2010). Spirituality can be used to describe a person’s search for meaning in life. It can also refer to the part of humanity that references how individuals seek and express themselves. As well as their experiences of connectedness to moments in time, the self, other beings, nature, and sacred or significant things (Can Oz et al., 2021).

According to the literature, from a Western perspective, the concept of spirituality remained largely undefined prior to 1980. However, from 1990 onwards spirituality was defined in a number of ways (Ahmad & Razak, 2013). Common definitions include: the

search for purpose and meaning involving transcendence—which is the experience of existence beyond the physical and psychological; the discovery of the transcendence within the physical and psychological; a sense of connectedness or relationship with nature and self; the pursuit of meaning in life; and self-actualisation and connection with the inner self, other people, and the broader universal whole (Ahmad & Razak, 2013; Balboni et al., 2022; Palmer, 2023).

Spirituality is a perspective that suggests that there are dimensions to our life outside of what we experience on the physical level (Scott, 2024). In practice, this may involve cultural or religious practices or beliefs of a higher being, connection to the universe, or the pursuit of self-development. Being highly individual, spirituality is about connecting to something outside of yourself that brings meaning and purpose to life (Dein et al., 2010; Kao et al., 2020; Palmer, 2023). Spirituality can vary between individuals, and how one experiences, benefits from, practices, or even defines it will differ (Scott, 2024).

Characteristics of spirituality may include reflecting on deep questions about life and death, finding happiness beyond material possessions, seeking meaning and purpose in life, experiencing feelings of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness, and cultivating deep connections with others (Scott, 2024). As previously noted, spirituality is highly individual, and therefore, experiences of it can vary greatly between people. Some individuals may feel a stronger sense of spirituality within religious settings such as in churches, while others may experience it by being in nature (Barolia et al., 2023; Scott, 2024).

Ultimately, there are different forms of spirituality, and individuals connect with it in unique ways. Some may engage in practices such as meditation, breathwork, prayer, acts of service, spending time in nature, attending spiritual retreats, or practicing Yoga. Others may express their connection to spirituality through organised religions including Christianity,

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism (Scott, 2024). Additional ways of practicing spirituality can include attending religious services, reading inspirational texts, prayer, walking, or participating in activities such as Tai Chi (White, 2016).

### ***Benefits of Spirituality***

Spirituality has been linked to a range of benefits and positive outcomes, including better quality sleep and mental health in adults (Park et al., 2023). Other benefits include greater life satisfaction, greater happiness, increased resilience, and better social support networks (Barolia et al., 2023; Scott, 2024). Spirituality is also associated with improved mental wellbeing and has been revealed to help lower anxiety and depression in individuals (Boatsi & Dwarika, 2025; Kishan, 2020; Park et al., 2023; Weber & Pargament, 2014).

Spiritual practices such as Yoga have been proven to help reduce stress, decrease body weight, and improve respiratory function (Kishan, 2020). Yoga has also been demonstrated to be beneficial in helping people cope with anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression, as well as supporting individuals affected by war and natural disasters (Kishan, 2020).

A recent study by Algahtani et al. (2022) highlighted the role of spiritual connections in helping individuals cope with the stress and anxiety associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, stress and anxiety were widespread globally due to the high rates of illness and death. The fear of COVID-19 was further exacerbated by the intense media coverage and the spread of misinformation across various social media platforms. The study's findings indicated that relying on spiritual connections helped older adults manage the fear and panic of COVID-19 during its initial stages, and reduced the likelihood of experiencing symptoms of anxiety and stress (Algahtani et al., 2022).

Given the documented benefits of spirituality, some researchers argue that it may play a valuable role in addressing certain societal challenges, including the growing issue of an aging population (Can Oz et al., 2021). With advancements in medicine and healthcare, and a decline in fertility rates, the world is now experiencing a demographic shift towards an aging population. As individuals age, various problems often become intensified, including economic, health-related, social, and psychological challenges (Can Oz et al., 2021).

Circumstances such as the loss of a partner or close friend, retirement, and other age-related life changes can cause stress levels to rise. Leading individuals to experience mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Research indicated that spiritual support can help older adults experience more positive emotions and better manage stress (Can Oz et al., 2021). Spiritual beliefs and practices may also enable older adults to cope more effectively with the challenges associated with ageing, such as physical health issues and increased dependency. Furthermore, the study suggested that spirituality can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and is associated with lower rates of sickness and death (Can Oz et al., 2021).

### ***Profits of Spirituality***

The behaviours and beliefs of consumers worldwide are increasingly influenced by spirituality and businesses are capitalising on this trend and using it as a way to appeal to consumers (Kale, 2006). Additionally, the Western world is now inundated with spiritual information. This is evident in the vast amount of spiritual content found in popular newspapers, magazines, books, programmes, podcasts, and across social media platforms.

Kale (2006) discusses the commercialisation of spirituality and highlights how spiritually associated terms are frequently used for business purposes. For example, talk-

show host Oprah Winfrey often encourages her viewers “to remember their spirit”.

Illustrating how spiritual language can be leveraged to influence consumers. New Age spirituality is also commonly marketed in ways that it adds perceived value to products. For instance, Honda has incorporated the term “Zen” into its marketing strategy to imply that its product offers peaceful simplicity (Basci, 2015). More broadly, many companies are now viewing spirituality as a sellable product with the potential for high financial returns (Basci, 2015).

The term spirituality is considered to be one of the most frequently discussed concepts among today’s generation. It also appears that many individuals are turning to spirituality to seek timeout from the stresses of daily life, or as a pathway to self-discovery and connection with the universe (Mathur, 2019). The journey of discovering one’s self is a perfect opportunity for marketers to make profits. Retail outlets are now flooded with products such as yoga mats, aromatherapy items, self-help books, spiritual teachers or “gurus”. More recently, digital products and mobile apps, all of which claim to assist individuals in connecting with the divine (Mathur, 2019).

Products ranging from spiritual books and candles to crystals and Reiki services are all considered to be major businesses (Basci, 2015). Consequently, spirituality has evolved into a rapidly expanding industry. Practices such as meditation and Yoga are now being offered and taught within some of the world’s biggest corporations, with some of the most modern spiritual teachers being among some of the wealthiest in the United States (Kale, 2006).

Businesses have quickly recognised the influential role that spirituality can play in consumer behaviour, and are capitalising on this by appealing to consumers’ spiritual needs when marketing their products (Kale, 2006). The range of spiritual products being promoted

are highly diverse, consisting of goods, services, events, and even individuals, as reflected in rich lists highlighting some of the world's most spiritually influential figures (Basci, 2015).

The primary consumers of spirituality include Baby Boomers, Generation X, older adults, and professionals. The marketing of New Age spirituality is often structured around the 4P's: product, price, promotion, and place. Products marketed within this framework include tangible goods, such as equipment for meditation; and non-tangible services, such as Reiki; and even individuals regarded as spiritual figures, such as Deepak Chopra (Basci, 2015).

The pricing of spiritual products is often determined or marketed in ways that reflects how unique the item is. For example, the rarity of a crystal or tickets to an exclusive spiritual festival (Basci, 2015). These products are also promoted by emphasising their perceived benefits, such as health improvements or personal growth. Examples include bracelets that bring luck, crystals like rose quartz which are associated with love, or candles that promote relaxation. Finally, spiritual products are commonly marketed and distributed through specialised stores and online platforms, including social media and dedicated websites (Basci, 2015).

### ***Digital Spirituality***

Digital technology has fundamentally reshaped how humans think, work, socialise, and conduct daily activities (Lyu, 2022). Spirituality is no exception, with spiritual beliefs and practices now increasingly present in digital spaces and online platforms. The term *digital spirituality* is commonly used to describe the use of technology to support, develop, enhance, and strengthen spiritual practices (Karmakar, 2025).

In ancient times, spiritual teachings and practices were shared through scriptures in churches, temples, and other sacred structures and gathering sites. Subsequently, with the invention of paper, these teachings were later disseminated through books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. The transition of religion and spirituality into digital spaces is now evident in their increased online presence. For example, there are now websites which offer users access to online memorial halls, virtual seders, opportunities to pray for the deceased, and digital shrines, allowing users to engage in forms of virtual pilgrimage (Ahmad & Razak, 2013).

With the growth and expansion of digital technology, spiritual messages can now be shared in innovative ways, allowing them to reach a broader audience, such as through mobile apps (Rathi & Kumar, 2020). Digital spirituality including the use of apps have transformed spiritual practices. For instance, Muslim devotees can now download apps that help them to synchronise local prayer times or provide daily reminders to pray. Facilitating the maintenance of their spiritual routines (Ahmad & Razak, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in the growth of digital spirituality, with spiritual practices transforming to be accessible online through technology. During 2020, many religious institutions were forced to close their doors to the public. Prompting institutions to transition religious and spiritual practices to online platforms to enable individuals to continue their spiritual routines (Laird et al., 2024).

Research indicated that since 2020, mobile apps have been flooding the market, with increasing numbers of people using digital technology to support their spiritual growth and practices (Laird et al., 2024). One category of mobile apps that reached record levels of downloads during the COVID-19 pandemic was meditation apps (Kellen & Saxena, 2020). Meditation, which is often considered a spiritual practice, has become widely accessible in

digital spaces. Its popularity along with mindfulness practices have grown in many Western countries, this is partially due to the adaptation of traditional meditation techniques into online courses and mobile apps (Kellen & Saxena, 2020).

Accessing, practicing, and supporting spirituality through digital technologies provides the freedom for individuals to choose which spiritual or religious practices they want to engage in, as well as the ability to access content in their preferred language (Rathi & Kumar, 2020). Digital spirituality offers users a variety of tools to support their personal spiritual journeys by providing a diverse range of options and functionalities. As noted by Rathi and Kumar (2020) digital platforms such as spiritual mobile apps can act as a user's own personal spiritual guide. Providing users access to information, guidelines, beliefs, ideas, and even motivational content, all designed to facilitate spiritual and personal growth.

There are significant benefits to using technology to support individuals on their spiritual journeys. For example, digital tools can make accessing spirituality and engaging in spiritual practices more convenient and easier (Karmakar, 2025; Rathi & Kumar, 2020). Kellen and Saxena (2020) found that approximately half of the respondents for a meditation training course preferred the delivery method to be online. Citing reasons such as privacy, convenience, and flexibility in scheduling.

Despite the benefits of digital spirituality, it is important to consider the potential drawbacks of relying on technology for spiritual practices and growth. Karmakar (2025) notes that distractions can occur when using digital tools. For example, an individual may seek spiritual inspiration on social media only to become distracted by unrelated content, which then detracts from the virtue of peace which they are pursuing. Additional concerns include the risk of transformative properties of spirituality being diminished. Particularly

when social media influencers, platforms, or mobile apps prioritise generating profits over providing authentic and meaningful spiritual wisdom (Karmakar, 2025).

In summary, it is essential to recognise that digital technologies and tools for spiritual and personal growth are intended to support one's own journey inwards, and ultimately personal effort with spirituality is what matters the most (Karmakar, 2025).

### ***Digital Technology and Smartphones***

Advancements in technology have progressed rapidly, enabling people to access a vast amount of information almost instantly (Brewer et al., 2013). Society has become increasingly digitalised and we now live in what is often referred to as a digital age. Characterised by extensive internet use and the ability to communicate and obtain information online quickly (Park et al., 2024). Living in a digital age means that our daily life is now firmly connected to smartphones and mobile apps (Rathi & Kumar, 2020). It is estimated that there are over 2 billion smartphone users worldwide, with the majority of adolescents now owning one (Haug et al., 2015; Ting & Chen, 2020).

Smartphones were first introduced in 2007, since then they have become an integral part of everyday life (Ratan et al., 2021). They primarily have touch-screens and the ability to run a wide range of mobile apps. Smartphones provide users with quick access to communications, social media, and the internet (Haug et al., 2015). Essentially, they combine the capabilities of a desktop computer and a phone into a compact device. Allowing users to perform a variety of functions, including playing games, storing photos, reading electronic books, using GPS, taking photos and recordings, checking the time, listening to the radio, using a torchlight, calculating, managing e-wallet, tracking health, and even remotely controlling other electrical devices (Haug et al., 2015; Ting & Chen, 2020).

Technological advancements have fundamentally transformed the way we live. Depending on the generation one belongs to, some may remember a time before the widespread use of the internet and smartphones. Millennials (born between 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born between 1995-2012) have largely grown up with the internet as an integral part of life (Park et al., 2024). In particular, Generation Z has grown up with digital devices embedded in their daily routines from a young age. Reports indicated that 95% of Generation Z have access to a digital device, with more than half reporting to spend over four hours online each day (Park et al., 2024).

As noted by Burr et al. (2020) the quick uptake of digital technologies has transformed the ways individuals relate to their surroundings, to themselves, and to each other. This trend is also evident in the increasing use of technology to support people's daily activities, including their religious and spiritual practices (Zainal et al., 2015).

Living in a digital age offers numerous advantages. For instance, communication has improved significantly, and is now faster and more efficient. Emailing, texting, instant messaging, and video calling can now be conducted from almost anywhere in the world using a digital device such as a smartphone. Additionally, digital technologies have been argued to increase productivity, which may then assist in lowering social inequality by improving access to overburdened services, such as healthcare (Burr et al., 2020).

Despite the benefits of living in a digital age, concerns have been raised about its impact on individual wellbeing, including the global rise in mental health issues (Burr et al., 2020). Additionally, digital technologies have caused disruption to the labour market, disadvantaging some individuals in various sectors of employment, and contributing to job losses through the automation of systems and processes (Burr et al., 2020). Other disadvantages include the increased risk to privacy—as personal information such as

location data, banking details, and other sensitive information is entered online, it becomes increasingly vulnerable (Flair, 2025).

Social isolation is another concerning issue associated with the use of digital technology. In particular, relying on digital tools to complete daily tasks can reduce opportunities for face-to-face interactions. Park et al. (2024) notes that adolescents who spend significant amounts of time on social media, rather than engaging in in-person interactions, are considered to be one of the loneliest populations. This is in comparison with those who use social media less frequently. Another downside of living in a digital age is the potential for negative health outcomes. Constant connectivity can leave individuals in a continual state of “being on”. This can lead to a range of health implications, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z (Park et al., 2023).

Research indicated that Millennials and Generation Z are constantly connected to the internet and experience notable challenges related to sleep, mental health, and overall psychological and physical wellbeing when compared to other generations (Park et al., 2024). Arguments have also been raised regarding the increasing number of adolescents experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and whether these trends can be linked to the use of digital technologies, including smartphones and social media platforms (Burr et al., 2020).

An increase in sleep-related issues has also been attributed to the use of digital devices such as smartphones. Ting and Chen (2020) note that sleep interference occurs from being exposed to blue light at night from mobile phones which can reduce the duration and quality of sleep in individuals. In particular, blue light suppresses the brain from releasing the sleep hormone melatonin, which then interferes with the sleep-wake cycle and ultimately disrupts normal sleep patterns (Ting & Chen, 2020).

Digital technologies can also diminish an individual's ability to focus on tasks and can interfere with their daily activities, such as driving. Gibson (2024) reports a 25% increase in mobile phone driving offenses in Aotearoa New Zealand. The use of hand-held devices while driving is banned, and those caught can face a \$150 fine and receive demerit points. Smartphones are also recognised as a significant source of distraction in particular settings such as workplaces and classrooms. As noted by Mahsud et al. (2020) smartphones can disrupt students' attention in the classroom and may lead to anxiety when students are separated from their devices.

### ***Smartphone Addiction***

Smartphone addiction has been included in this literature review because it highlights a significant downside to the widespread use of digital technologies such as smartphones and mobile apps. Understanding the concept of smartphone addiction is relevant for evaluating users' experiences with spiritual mobile apps, as it can ultimately influence their behaviour and patterns of app usage.

As explained by Ratan et al. (2021) the concept of "addiction" and its use as a term are considered to be somewhat controversial, and it has proven difficult to define. However, one key aspect of addiction is the dependence on a particular substance or activity (Ratan et al., 2021). Goodman (1990) defines addiction as a condition in which a problematic behaviour is characterised by (a) a recurring failure to control the behaviour, and (b) the continuation of the behaviour despite the negative consequences associated with it.

As described by Lin et al. (2016) smartphone addiction is considered a form of technological addiction, defined as a type of addictive behaviour that involves human-machine interactions and is non-chemical by nature. Although there is no consensus on a

definitive definition of smartphone addiction, Lin et al. (2016) notes that it generally comprises of four key components: compulsive behaviours, tolerance, impairment in functioning, and withdrawal.

Similarly, Ratan et al. (2021) explains that smartphone addiction is often categorised as a behavioural addiction. It typically involves mood tolerance, conflict, relapse, and withdrawal. According to Gomez (2025) smartphone addiction involves the obsessive use of a smartphone. It has also been given the nickname “nomophobia” (no mobile phone phobia), a term used to describe the fear of being without a smartphone or mobile device (Gomez, 2025; Mahsud et al., 2020; Ting & Chen, 2020).

Importantly, smartphone addiction has not been formally recognised as an addiction in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (Panova & Carbonell, 2018; Ting & Chen, 2020). Notably, the only behavioural addiction currently acknowledged in the DSM-5 is gambling. Other behavioural addictions such as sex addiction, exercise addiction, or shopping addiction, are instead classified as impulse disorders (Ting & Chen, 2020).

According to Gomez (2025) smartphones have been intentionally designed to be difficult to disengage from and to encourage addictive behaviours. Everything from the colours to the sounds that they use have been meticulously chosen and are designed to keep users engaged. Gomez (2025) also cites that a former employee of Google who specialised in design ethics claimed certain features such as “pull to refresh” were inspired by casino games and slot machines.

Although smartphone addiction has not been officially recognised, and it is commonly viewed and treated as a form of behavioural addiction, its obsessive use can lead to real-life negative consequences for users (Panova & Carbonell, 2018). Many individuals

develop an excessive attachment to their smartphone or become easily distracted by them, indicating that excessive or problematic use remains a pervasive issue. One study found that more than 60% of teens reported experiencing fear when separated from, or unable to access their smartphone (Ting & Chen, 2020).

According to Ratan et al. (2021) females tend to be more susceptible to smartphone addiction and exhibit somewhat higher levels of dependence on smartphones compared to males. Difficulties in interpreting facial expressions and nonverbal communication have also been linked to excessive smartphone use in adolescents, who may rely heavily on their devices to facilitate social connections (Ting & Chen, 2020).

Moreover, studies indicate that excessive smartphone use can lead to changes in the brain, including increased levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). Individuals affected have been shown to be more easily distracted, display reduced attention spans, and rely more heavily on instant rewards (Ting & Chen, 2020). Research also suggested that excessive smartphone use may impact brain regions associated with decision-making, inhibition, emotional regulation, and impulse control (Ting & Chen, 2020).

Other negative consequences associated with uncontrolled smartphone use included an increased risk of accidents. Activities such as texting or listening to music while using a smartphone have been linked to an increase risk in falls and pedestrian collisions (Ting & Chen, 2020). The negative impacts of smartphone addiction have also been compared to those of gambling. Users may experience sleep deficits, increased anxiety, reduced cognitive functioning, heightened stress, impaired relationships, lower academic performance, and other psychological disorders (Gomez, 2025).

Excessive smartphone use has also been linked to mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. Ting and Chen (2020) found that anxiety was common among

adolescents who exhibited excessive and problematic smartphone use. Additionally, compulsively checking notifications on a smartphone can contribute to increased stress. Ratan et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review examining smartphone addiction and associated health outcomes. Their findings indicated a correlation between smartphone addiction and mental health, with depression and anxiety being the most frequently associated conditions.

Another serious issue associated with the use of smartphones is the live streaming of dangerous acts or challenges. Often undertaken to enhance an individual's online presence and gain social acceptance or self-confidence (Ting & Chen, 2020). For instance, some individuals have live streamed themselves engaging in dangerous activities, such as binge eating or drinking cooking oil, which can result in serious injury or even death (Ting & Chen, 2020).

Physical health is also affected by smartphone addiction, particularly with respect to the musculoskeletal system. Additional health issues identified include cervical problems, increased nerve thickness, inflammation in the hand joints, and psoriatic arthritis (Ratan et al., 2021). Patients that reported chronic neck pain were found to have cervical disc degeneration, which is likely associated with prolonged smartphone use (Ratan et al., 2021).

### ***Mobile Applications***

The general functioning of mobile devices relies on operating systems such as iOS or Android. Individual programmes or software applications installed on these devices are referred to as mobile applications or "apps" (Flair, 2025). Mobile apps are typically easy to use, affordable, and compatible with most smartphones, including entry level models. They are specifically designed and optimised for smaller screens and touchscreen interfaces,

making them highly appealing and extremely user friendly (Dehlinger & Dixon, 2011; Team Storyly, 2024).

Mobile apps serve specific purposes and enable users to perform a wide variety of tasks. In particular, apps can be used to make calls, send messages, browse the internet, send emails, check the weather, listen to audio, watch movies, play games, and create documents (Dehlinger & Dixon, 2011; Islam et al., 2010). Their versatility has contributed to their widespread popularity, and developers have also found that mobile apps are extremely profitable (Brewer et al., 2013; Flair, 2025).

Earlier versions of mobile apps originally offered basic functions, such as email or weather forecasts. However, as the quality of mobile devices has improved so have the capabilities of mobile apps (Flair, 2025). From the early 2010s, the growth of apps has skyrocketed as a result of a surge in smartphone use worldwide (Brewer et al., 2013; Donker et al., 2013). Importantly, modern apps are increasingly integrating their technologies, including real-time health monitoring, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence (AI) (Brewer et al., 2013; Flair, 2025).

Mobile apps have become central to the daily lives of individuals. The Google Play Store currently offers access to more than 2.6 million apps, while the Apple App Store provides approximately 1.8 million (Flair, 2025). Some of the most popular apps available for download include TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Spotify, and Facebook. According to Curry (2025) TikTok was the most downloaded mobile app globally in 2024, with a total of 773 million downloads, this was followed closely by Instagram with 759 million.

As of June 2025, there are 49 categories of mobile apps on the Google Play Store and 26 categories in the Apple App Store (42matters, 2025). As noted by Poetker (2019) the large number of app categories can be overwhelming, but they can be broadly grouped into six

main categories: educational, lifestyle, social media, productivity, entertainment, and games. These categories are considered to be flexible, as many mobile apps often cross over into more than one category (Poetker, 2019).

Educational apps are generally straightforward and are designed to educate and inform users. Examples include news, weather, and language learning apps such as Babbel (Poetker, 2019). Lifestyle apps cover a wider variety of apps, including fitness, dating, food, and travel. Social media apps are extremely popular and are designed to connect individuals with others who are either within or outside of their social circle (Poetker, 2019). These apps allow users to post images, share live videos, communicate with others, and enable influencers to build businesses on their chosen platforms.

Productivity apps, also referred to as business apps, enable users to organise and complete tasks such as sending emails and accessing documents online. In contrast, entertainment apps have been designed with one main focus for users, and that is to keep them busy (Poetker, 2019). These apps are essentially used to fill a person's time. They often provide access to a library of content, including videos and audio, for example, Netflix and YouTube. The final category of mobile apps is games, which is self-explanatory. This category is highly saturated offering a wide range of games for different audiences, including solo, online, arcade, puzzle, or plain mindless games such as those involving shooting animals (Poetker, 2019).

With advancements in smartphone technology, mobile apps have become extremely common and have enabled the creation of an entire new industry (Dehlinger & Dixon, 2011; Zainal et al., 2015). One category that has seen rapid growth is wellness apps. Research indicated that the market is currently being flooded with apps designed to promote users' wellbeing (Gorichanaz, 2022). These apps aim to help users monitor and improve various

aspects of their health, including sleep habits, fitness, nutrition, weight management, meditation, and mindfulness.

Millennials and members of Generation Z are reported to be persistent users of wellness mobile apps (Park et al., 2023). The wellness app industry has become highly profitable, with an estimated value of approximately \$12.4 billion, and this figure is predicted to increase by nearly 50% by 2026 (Gorichanaz, 2022). One particular type of wellness app that has experienced significant growth in recent years is meditation apps. While wellness apps are clearly profitable, their effectiveness remains to be fully established. (Gorichanaz, 2022).

### ***Spiritual Mobile Apps***

Spiritual mobile apps are generally considered a subset of wellness apps. They are designed to support personal growth and tend to focus on emotional wellbeing and spiritual aspects of life rather than physical health. These apps can support and guide users in engaging with a range of spiritual practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and prayer. Furthermore, spiritual apps can provide distinctive and structured ways to cultivate and enhance convenient aspects of a person's daily life (Rathi & Kumar, 2020).

Spiritual mobile apps have grown in popularity over the past decade. According to Kellen and Saxena (2020) a record number of meditation apps were released on the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store between 2010 and 2020, with more than 1,500 meditation and mindfulness apps reported as available for download. An earlier study by Buie and Blythe (2013) found that the iTunes App Store contained over 6,000 religious apps as of December 2012. This study is widely cited in the literature on spiritual mobile apps.

The growing popularity of spiritual mobile apps is evident from their high number of downloads and active users. For example, the mobile app *Headspace* was launched in 2010. It is reported to have approximately 35 million users globally that span across 190 countries (Kellen & Saxena, 2020). Similarly, the app *Calm* was launched in 2012, and is reported to have a total of 26 million users worldwide (Kellen & Saxena, 2020).

Despite the growing number and popularity of spiritual mobile apps, research on this subject remains limited. Moreover, the effectiveness of these apps has yet to be fully established. Nevertheless, existing studies on spiritual mobile apps appear promising, suggesting that they could play a valuable role in addressing broader societal challenges.

A study conducted in Malaysia by Zainal et al. (2015) suggested that spiritual mobile apps could help older adults cope with challenges associated with ageing. Specifically, these apps may help improve outcomes for older adults by supporting them to maintain an independent lifestyle. The study also reported that the use of spiritual mobile apps was increasing among older adults, with this population becoming avid users (Zainal et al., 2015).

Spiritual mobile apps offer users a wide range of benefits. These include support with one's spiritual journey and practices, the opportunity to explore different avenues or paths of spirituality, and the ability to adopt and cultivate new spiritual practices. Additionally, many apps provide access to social support networks, such as group chats or online communities. Finally, spiritual mobile apps offer a convenient way for users to engage with and practice spirituality on their own terms.

### ***Spiritual Mobile App: The Beacon by Soul 33***

The Beacon by Soul 33 is a spiritual guidance app available on both the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store. The app was developed by Gaia Chinniah, a New Zealand

based healer and medium who specialises in *Soul Progression Therapy* (Soul 33, 2024a). Soul Progression Therapy, a term trademarked and created by her, combines elements of past life regression, energy work, and spiritual guidance to help individuals address life's challenges (Mangia, 2023). According to Chinniah, this therapy allows her to communicate with the spirit world, explore individuals' past lives, and examine their soul's blueprint (Soul 33, 2024a).

Originally from Malaysia and born into a Hindu family, Chinniah's ancestry traces back to some of the most spiritual regions in the world. She has a corporate background and previously owned a product distribution company in Malaysia. Chinniah also studied at Waikato University, where she earned her Bachelor of Communications, a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Relations, and a Master's degree in Management (Soul 33, 2024a).

Chinniah discovered her healing abilities at the age of 33, after experiencing what she describes as an intense spiritual awakening. Her spiritual journey was guided by an indigenous Māori healer, who recognised the changes she was experiencing and helped her to understand them (Mangia, 2023). Subsequently, she founded her own spiritual healing business known as *Soul 33*, through which she employs Soul Progression Therapy to support others on their healing journeys (Soul 33, 2024a).

Chinniah's popularity has increased in recent years, with her having been featured in several magazines, including *Vogue India*, *Women Magazine*, and *DailyOM* (Mangia, 2023). She has also made guest appearances on a number of international podcasts, such as *Next Level Soul Podcast* with Alex Ferrari, *Ancient Wisdom Today* with Shaman Durek, and *Quite Frankly Podcast* with Frank Elaridi (Soul 33, 2024a).

Chinniah explains that in response to her extensive wait list for one-on-one sessions of Soul Progression Therapy, she designed and created the Soul 33 app to reach and assist a

wider audience. The app was first released in February 2020 and is positioned as being a spiritual guidance tool aimed at awakening users' intuition and supporting them in their journey and understanding of spirituality.

According to Chinniah (Soul 33, 2024b) the app provides users with immediate access to spiritual support to facilitate their personal spiritual growth. The app is available in two versions: a free version, which offers limited access to its features; and a paid version, which provides subscribers with full access. As of July 2025, the annual subscription fee for the Soul 33 app was NZ \$60 (Soul 33, 2024b).

Paid subscribers of the Soul 33 app have access to a wide range of features. These include a library of guided meditations with new content added weekly, spiritual exercises, remote healings, spiritual podcasts, a group chat, digital guidance oracle cards, a lunar calendar, journalling prompts, and teachings designed to help awaken intuition (Soul 33, 2024b). Additionally, users are provided with detailed explanations of the energies currently available to work with, to assist with manifestation and supporting their personal healing practices.

According to Google Play (2025) the Soul 33 app has been downloaded over 5,000 times and is currently marketed as a lifestyle and spiritual guidance app. The app is promoted as a tool to support individuals and assist them to gaining a deeper understanding of life and how to navigate personal challenges. Additionally, the app is in the early stages of becoming multilingual, with meditations currently available in Spanish and Mandarin, with further translations on the way.

### ***Gaps in the Literature and Current Issues***

After conducting a comprehensive review of the literature, it is evident that significant gaps persist in research on spiritual mobile apps. To date, only a limited number of studies have been conducted in this area. Specifically, there remains a notable lack of research that investigates the effectiveness of spiritual mobile apps, patterns of user engagement, and the impact these apps may have on users (Buie & Blythe, 2013).

Buie and Blythe (2013) noted that calls had been made within the human-computer interaction (HCI) research community to investigate the use of technology in spirituality. However, these appeals have been largely overlooked. It appears that research in this area has progressed very little and research exploring digital spirituality has remained largely unchanged.

Buie and Blythe (2013) speculated several reasons why literature addressing the use of technology in spirituality and religion remains limited. The explanations they offer are thought-provoking. For instance, they suggest that the HCI community may regard the topic as irrelevant to its core research interests. Furthermore, they proposed that the disinterest in the topic may be influenced by the academic community's comparatively high proportion of individuals who do not identify as religious or spiritual, which may reduce interest in investigating such topics (Buie & Blythe, 2013).

Further explanations include the inherent difficulty of studying spirituality, largely because it is considered to be a deeply subjective experience. This subjectivity poses challenges for traditional research methods, which often prioritise objectivity and outcomes that are measurable. Investigating such topics therefore requires research methodologies that are capable of capturing individuals' personal experiences and taking them seriously.

Although methodologies have been developed to address subjective topics, it still remains a challenge for researchers. Spiritual experiences are often deeply personal and may be difficult for individuals to articulate, let alone feel comfortable enough to share these experiences with a researcher (Buie & Blythe, 2013). Additionally, spirituality is frequently regarded as a sensitive topic, which can further reduce participants willingness to share their experiences.

According to Buie and Blythe (2013) an old saying suggests that polite company steers clear from discussing three topics: politics, sex, and religion. As religion is considered profoundly sensitive in countless places worldwide, the topic of spirituality can also be considered a sensitive topic. As a result, research in this area may be perceived as a personally risky topic to present research in, as it may be done in ways that others may disagree with (Buie & Blythe, 2013).

Further explanations for the limited research on digital spirituality, is that some researchers may view this area as professionally risky. Researchers may hesitate to investigate spirituality out of fear of having their work and themselves disregarded (Buie & Blythe, 2013). Additionally, some argue that the HCI community should not engage with spirituality, as it is disregarded as being scientific, and scientists who study it would then be giving it acceptance by the vastly act of researching it. This argument is considered to be relatively weak, as topics can be studied without a position being stated. Given that spirituality plays a significant role in many individuals' lives and that technology is increasingly intertwined with spiritual practices, it can be regarded as a crucial subject to be investigated (Buie & Blythe, 2013).

A final explanation offered is that it is simply an area of research that lacks dedicated funding. Research requires both time and financial resources, and the topics that are studied

are largely dependent on funding. As noted by Buie and Blythe (2013) research priorities in the United Kingdom are largely determined by the government, with research goals primarily shaped by the political party that is in power at the time. However, they also highlight that funding can originate from alternative sources, including businesses, individual donors, and charitable organisations.

It can be argued that the speculative reasons and explanations proposed for the limited research on technology and spirituality are, in fact, contributing factors. It is essentially a combination of these factors that has collectively led to the current scarcity of research in this area. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, there appears to be an increasing recognition that more research is needed in the area. Particularly given the rapid growth of mobile apps and the rising popularity of wellness apps, including those with spiritual content. Understanding how users perceive spiritual mobile apps can provide valuable insights to inform future developments of such apps. Moreover, these insights may guide the creation of more effective approaches to using mobile apps in ways that support and enhance individuals' spiritual growth and overall wellbeing.

In conclusion, a notable gap in the literature is the lack of studies examining users' personal lived experiences with spiritual mobile apps. Existing research on this topic is extremely limited, often on a small-scale, and typically focuses on specific populations, such as older adults living in Malaysia (Zainal et al., 2015). Given the rapid growth of the wellness app industry, the expanding market of spiritual mobile apps, the limited research on their effectiveness, and the scarcity of studies exploring users' lived experiences. It is essential to conduct further research to better understand the impact, benefits, and drawbacks of spiritual mobile apps.

## Research Aims

The purpose of this study is to explore individuals' lived experiences of using a spiritual mobile app. The research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on digital technology and spirituality. Through semi-structured interviews and the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the study aims to generate rich and detailed insights into users' experiences. It is also my intention that this research will encourage further studies in the area of digital spirituality. This study addresses the following research question: **What are people's experiences of using a spiritual mobile application such as "The Beacon by Soul 33"?**

## Chapter Two: Methodology and Method

### Qualitative Research

Mainstream psychology has historically relied on quantitative research methods as its primary means of gathering data (Boyatzis, 2024). This dominant research method consists of testing theories derived from hypotheses and then examining them through experiments or systematic observations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Quantitative methods based on this model aim to falsify theories to eliminate claims that are not true, thereby allowing the researcher to move closer towards the truth (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In contrast, qualitative methods of inquiry are primarily concerned with understanding human experiences and the meanings individuals give to them (Bearman, 2019; Willig, 2008). For example, how an individual experiences a certain event, makes sense of the world around them, or the meaning they give to a particular phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2008). The primary purpose of qualitative methods is to provide a rich and detailed account of the phenomenon being studied.

More importantly, qualitative research aims to describe, and where possible, explain an event or experience, rather than predict one (Bearman, 2019; Willig, 2008). It is typically conducted in natural settings, such as homes, hospitals, and schools (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2008). Over time, qualitative methods of inquiry have grown in popularity, and their focus remains on exploring quality rather than quantity (Boyatzis, 2024).

Qualitative methodologies also take into account both the research participants' and the researchers' interpretations during data analysis, and generally involve a form of reflexivity (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2008). The emphasis placed on reflexivity varies among qualitative researchers, with some making it central to their study while others

may only briefly acknowledge its importance and choose to exclude it from their write-up (Willig, 2008).

Willig (2008) identifies two types of reflexivity: personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. Both types acknowledge the researcher's contribution to the construction of meaning in the data. Reflexivity requires an awareness on behalf of the researcher that it is impossible to remain neutral or entirely outside of the subject being studied (Willig, 2008). Therefore, reflexivity involves examining how the researcher is influenced by, responds to, and informs their own research.

Personal reflexivity requires researchers to examine how their own values, experiences, beliefs, interests, and social identities shape their research, as well as how the research process can impact and potentially change them as individuals (Willig, 2008).

Epistemological reflexivity involves engaging with questions that critically reflect on the assumptions made about the world and knowledge throughout the research process.

Examples include: "How could I have investigated the research question differently?" and "How has the research question limited what can be known?" (Willig, 2008).

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Given the qualitative nature of this study, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach. The main goal of IPA is to investigate and make sense of individuals' lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

It is an established method of inquiry that examines, in depth, the personal lived experiences of participants, with a particular focus on meaning-making (Nizza et al., 2021).

IPA was first introduced in the United Kingdom in the mid-1990s and was initially used to

explore the psychology of individuals' experiences in health and clinical counselling psychology (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA is now considered to be one of the top established qualitative approaches to research in the UK, and its popularity continues to grow among researchers internationally (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Since its initial conceptualisation, IPA has expanded beyond solely examining experiences in health and clinical counselling settings. It has since been applied across a wide range of research areas, including organisational studies, education, sports science, and the humanities (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA often appeals to qualitative researchers because of its commitment to understanding phenomena from the perspective of the participant, as well as its recognition of the value of knowledge derived from subjective experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Generally, IPA falls under the broader umbrella of phenomenological approaches to psychology, all of which vary but ultimately share a common focus on understanding the lived and subjective experiences of individuals.

The primary focus of IPA is on the individuals' experiences of the phenomenon being studied and the meaning they derive from it, rather than on the phenomenon itself (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA is a method that can be applied to a single case study or to multiple case studies. As noted by Smith (2011) the best IPA studies strike a balance between analysing each case individually and identifying shared themes across cases. This process requires the researcher to analyse each account in detail before identifying patterns of convergence and divergence across the accounts of other participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The most common method of data collection in IPA is through using semi-structured interviews (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured interviews guide the interview process and allow the researcher and participant to engage in a real-time conversation (Karatsareas, 2022). Interviews are typically audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim before being analysed, and because each task involves a great deal of rigour, IPA research is generally conducted on smaller samples (J. A. Smith, 2011). IPA can be used to study a wide range of topics, and although there is no fixed rule regarding sample size, it generally depends on several factors including the depth of analysis, richness of data, the researcher's approach to comparing and contrasting cases, any practical constraints, and time limitations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Notably, IPA has often been described as an "easy" method, largely because it does not require researchers to engage with complex theoretical issues (Larkin et al., 2006; Shinebourne, 2011). A common misconception is that IPA is a "simple descriptive" methodology, implying that it is not at all demanding, requires minimal supervision, and is broadly accessible, flexible, and easily applied (Larkin et al., 2006). In reality, analysing qualitative data using IPA is complex and often time-consuming, as researchers are required to immerse themselves fully into the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Claims that IPA is an "easy" option should therefore be treated with caution, as it is easy to do poorly and challenging to do well (Larkin et al., 2006).

### **Theoretical Principles of IPA**

IPA draws upon three theoretical principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (J. A. Smith, 2011). Phenomenology is the study of phenomena that is concerned with lived experiences, aiming to examine and describe them in detail (Lawthom & Tindall,

2011; J. A. Smith, 2011). It is a philosophy best described as attending to how the world is created and experienced through consciousness (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). The aim of phenomenology is to strip away preconceptions, biases, and taken-for-granted knowledge in order to uncover the core of the phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Through a series of reductions, the experience being studied can be examined clearly without the weight and messiness of prejudices that are acquired through everyday life (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA research is committed to explaining the phenomenon under investigation and shedding light on people's experiences as they are lived and understood by the individual (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). This emphasis on capturing lived experience and exploring how individuals make sense of it reflect IPA's strong grounding in phenomenology (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA also recognises the complication that arises when attempting to analyse someone else's experience rather than your own, and that people's experiences cannot simply be extracted from their minds. Therefore, to analyse another person's experience, a process of engagement and interpretation is required from the researcher (J. A. Smith, 2011). This interpretative process links IPA to hermeneutics, which is the science of interpretation, as it involves the researcher attempting to make sense of the participants' lived experience (J. A. Smith, 2011). Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek words *hermēneuein* and *hermēneia*, meaning "to interpret" and "interpretation" (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Hermeneutics originally began as the interpretation of biblical texts and scriptures, and has since evolved to be more broadly concerned with the process of interpreting and understanding (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The final theoretical principle that underpins IPA is idiography. IPA is idiographic in nature as it is dedicated to the detailed examination of each individual case or experience in

its own right (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). As noted by Eatough and Smith (2017) idiography is concerned with understanding the real, specific, and the individual, while maintaining the integrity of the person. Historically, psychology has neglected the individual experience and often lacks research which focuses on individual cases. IPA is firmly grounded in idiography, as it always begins with a detailed examination of an individual case before attempting to identify patterns or draw generalisations across cases (J. A. Smith, 2011; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). This commitment to analysing cases individually ensures that IPA remains firmly situated within an idiographic framework (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Collectively, the theoretical foundations of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography underpin IPA research, providing researchers with a framework for exploring individuals' lived experiences, the meanings they associate with those experiences, and the ways in which they make sense of them (J. A. Smith, 2011; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015).

### **Markers of Quality IPA Research**

As previously mentioned, IPA is now considered to be a well-established qualitative method of inquiry. Consequently, it is important to consider the specific qualities that contribute to a high-quality research paper. Nizza et al. (2021) presents four key qualities that define these standards: (a) constructing a compelling unfolding narrative; (b) developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account; (c) close analytic reading of participants' words; and (d) attending to convergence and divergence.

#### ***Constructing a Compelling Unfolding Narrative***

Quality IPA research should essentially deliver a story through a notion of events. Specifically, the narrative should progress and be developed providing the reader with a sense of coherence of participants data (Nizza et al., 2021). This coherence is achieved on

two levels: first, through the development of themes on the individual level; and second, across themes from multiple cases. The research narrative is constructed by carefully selecting quotes from participants and providing an interpretation of them to inform each theme (Nizza et al., 2021). Each individual quote helps develop the narrative and assists in illustrating specific points, with supplementary quotes used to extend the narrative by providing new information or offering a contrasting perspective (Nizza et al., 2021).

A sense of coherence across the data can be achieved by ensuring that each theme contributes meaningfully to the unfolding narrative. By selecting appropriate quotes, placing them thoughtfully, and providing an analysis that interweaves them, the researcher can develop a narrative that is compelling, rich in detail, cohesive, and powerful (Nizza et al., 2021). Moreover, this quality indicator connects to the hermeneutic theoretical principle underlying IPA research. Constructing a compelling unfolding narrative requires the researcher to develop an interpretative account of the meanings participants have constructed.

### ***Developing a Vigorous Experiential and/or Existential Account***

Quality IPA research typically focuses on topics that are significant to the participant, where they are coached to reflect on an experience in a bid to make sense of its meaning (Nizza et al., 2021). Events are turned into experiences through the level of significance that is given to it by the participant, who has made sense of the event, this inspires meaning at different levels that are existential or experiential (Nizza et al., 2021). High-quality IPA research will generate strong existential and experiential themes. Analysis that engages with these themes by attentively listening to participants and considers their meaning-making will be of a higher quality (Nizza et al., 2021). Developing a vigorous experiential and/or

existential account reflects the phenomenological principle underpinning IPA research. This is achieved through the researcher's commitment to exploring the participant's subjective lived experience.

### ***Close Analytic Reading of Participants' Words***

Quality IPA requires the researcher to engage deeply with participants' words. This engagement must be analytic, with quotes interpreted by the researcher to explore their significance rather than being left to speak for themselves (Nizza et al., 2021). Through careful analysis and interpretation of quotes, the researcher can uncover the comprehensive meaning of the data and understand how participants make sense of the experience being studied. This is achieved by focusing on individual quotes while also examining them in the context of the transcript as a whole (Nizza et al., 2021).

Through the researcher's commitment to the close analytic reading of participants' words, IPA research connects back to the hermeneutic principle that underpins it. This commitment illustrates the researcher's effort to make sense of participants' experiences. By closely reading participants' words, researchers can uncover meanings that might otherwise remain hidden. This is achieved by carefully attending to the participants' words, verbal expressions, and tone (Nizza et al., 2021).

### ***Attending to Convergence and Divergence***

IPA can be used to study an individual case; however, it is predominantly employed to examine multiple participants. Consequently, convergence and divergence are used to highlight similarities and differences across participants' accounts (Nizza et al., 2021). These concepts help illustrate patterns of connection, as well as the factors that make each participant's experience unique (Nizza et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher can

demonstrate both the prevalence and variability of the data. High-quality IPA research strives to balance the shared characteristics with the individuality of participants' accounts, preserving each participant's unique experience (Nizza et al., 2021). Convergence and divergence are identified during the analysis stage and subsequently presented in the results section, adding a sense of quality and richness to the study's themes (Nizza et al., 2021).

By attending to convergence and divergence across cases, IPA's connection to the idiographic principle underpinning its methodology is highlighted. Its commitment to idiography is evident in the careful experiential analysis of each participant's case before attempting to draw generalisations from comparisons with other cases (Nizza et al., 2021). In addition to the four established quality markers, three further criteria have been proposed to indicate quality IPA research: (a) keeping focused and offering depth; (b) presenting strong data and interpretation; and (c) engaging and enlightening the reader (Nizza et al., 2021).

## **Ethics**

Ethical approval for this research project was obtained from the *Massey University Human Ethics Committee*. The project underwent peer review and was assessed as low risk, as a result, it did not require a full review. The initial ethics application was submitted on 17 May 2025. Following a request for further information, a revised application was resubmitted on 24 May 2025. Final ethical approval was issued on 8 June 2025 (Application ID: 4000030554).

Ethical approval was obtained prior to recruiting and interviewing participants. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Potential participants received an information sheet outlining the terms and conditions of the study before agreeing to take

part. Transparency was identified as a key ethical consideration. To address this, the information sheet clearly explained the study's purpose, procedures, aims, associated risks and benefits, and how the data would be stored, used, and shared. Prior to the commencement of interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, each of whom was required to sign and return a consent form.

An important ethical issue that required consideration throughout the study was participants' rights to confidentiality and anonymity. This was addressed by protecting identities through the use of pseudonyms and by removing identifying information from the transcripts, as well as from the results and discussion sections of this thesis. Participants' rights to privacy were also respected by honouring their boundaries regarding what they felt comfortable disclosing during the interviews. Additionally, participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions they did not wish to respond to.

Avoidance of harm was also a key ethical consideration. This was managed by pausing or stopping the interview if a participant showed signs of distress. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time or request a break as needed. Likewise, a list of support services was kept readily available in case a participant experienced emotional discomfort during the interview and required further assistance.

The researcher-participant relationship was also recognised as an important ethical consideration. This was managed by maintaining professionalism throughout the recruitment process, the interviews, and any post-interview communications. Additionally, data storage was also identified as an ethical concern. This was addressed by securely storing all collected data on the researcher's personal computer and on a password protected Massey OneDrive account.

Finally, ethical considerations were addressed with regards to cultural differences. All participants were treated with respect for their cultural values, traditions, and practices. The researcher ensured that interactions were conducted mindfully, with an awareness of the diversity of cultural perspectives, values, and understandings.

### **Personal Reflexivity**

As a Māori/Pākehā researcher, my understanding of spirituality and holistic wellbeing informs my interest in this study. My personal use and familiarity with The Beacon by Soul 33 app have provided me with firsthand insight into how mobile apps can support spiritual growth and development. I am also aware that this positionality introduces the potential for unconscious bias.

Throughout this process, I remained aware that I risked interpreting participants' experiences of using the Soul 33 app in ways that could be similar to my own. To address this, I engaged in ongoing reflective practices throughout the research process. This included maintaining a reflective journal and critically examining my own assumptions in relation to participant interviews and emerging data. These strategies supported a systematic approach to acknowledging and mitigating the influence of my own life experiences on data collection and interpretation.

Although my connection to spirituality and the Soul 33 app cannot be entirely separated from this study, it informed my ability to navigate and interpret participants' experiences with the app. Interviews were facilitated with greater clarity as a result of my standpoint. I offer this reflexive statement to ensure transparency regarding the strengths and limitations my positionality brings to this study, and to demonstrate my commitment to methodological rigor.

## **Indigenous Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Although the researcher identifies as Māori, this study did not implement or incorporate any Māori perspectives or approaches as none of the participants self-identified as Māori. As a result, the research was conducted using approaches which were culturally appropriate to participants backgrounds.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The intended sample size for this study was six participants, which is considered appropriate for qualitative research employing IPA. A total of seven participants were recruited through Facebook posts and word of mouth. A participant recruitment advertisement (Appendix A) was created using the free version of Canva and uploaded to the researcher's personal Facebook page. The advertisement was also shared on several other Facebook pages, including Massey Distance, Conscious Wellington, and the NZ Spiritual Promotional Network Group. Participants were required to be over 18 years of age and actively using the spiritual mobile app The Beacon by Soul 33, with a minimum usage of 6 months.

A total of 10 individuals responded via email to the Facebook posts. After corresponding with potential participants and providing the participant information sheet (Appendix B) seven were recruited for this study. All seven provided informed consent via email, returning a signed consent form (Appendix C) agreeing to the terms outlined in the information sheet.

Interviews were scheduled and conducted over two days in the first week of July 2025. Of the seven scheduled interviews, five were completed. One participant needed to reschedule due to a family emergency, and another did not attend their scheduled interview. Attempts to reschedule with both participants were unsuccessful. Participant details, including demographic characteristics, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participants Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Full App User</b>	<b>Time Using App (months)</b>
Gemma	22	Female	Tasman	Yes	24
Preston	24	Male	Auckland	No	7
Brody	24	Male	Auckland	Yes	12
Sadie	27	Female	Gisborne	No	8
Dallas	29	Male	Otago	Yes	12

**Materials**

As this research employed a qualitative design, data was collected using semi-structured interviews. A set of questions (Appendix D) was developed in advance to guide the interview process. The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to share

their experiences using the Soul 33 app. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom and lasted between 45-50 minutes.

### **Procedure**

After potential participants expressed interest in the research, they were emailed the participant information sheet outlining the study's aims and conditions. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions about the study. Those who wished to be interviewed were emailed a consent form, which they were required to sign and return prior to the interview. Once consent forms were received, participants were provided with a selection of interview dates and times in the first week of July 2025. After a time was agreed upon, the interview was scheduled and a Zoom link was sent to the participant. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, as none of the participants lived locally.

The day before interviews, participants were emailed to confirm the scheduled time and to ensure they had received the Zoom link. They were also given an additional opportunity to ask questions and were reminded that they could raise questions at any point during the interview. During the interview, participants were greeted and thanked for volunteering to share their experiences using the Soul 33 app. Once any remaining questions were answered and informed consent was confirmed, the interview commenced and recording began.

Once all interview questions were answered and the participant indicated they had nothing further to add, the recording was stopped. Participants were thanked for their time and informed that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript within one week, allowing them the opportunity to review and make any necessary changes. In recognition of

their participation, and as a koha of appreciation, a \$40 online Prezzy card was emailed to each participant within a few days.

Zoom recordings were downloaded and saved to both the researcher's personal computer and their Massey OneDrive account. All interviews were transcribed verbatim within one week. Audio files were initially transcribed using ScribeSound.com, a transcription software developed in the Manawatū region as part of a research project by the School of Engineering at Massey University. ScribeSound was recommended as part of the researcher's funding application as an alternative to Otter.ai, following reports from other students of issues with Otter.ai. In addition to using software, transcripts were manually checked and corrected. Transcripts were emailed to participants within one week of the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis commenced in late July 2025 and continued until early September 2025. NVivo, a software programme designed to support the organisation and analysis of qualitative data, was initially considered for use. However, after two weeks of attempting to learn the software, the decision was made to analyse data manually. Following the guidance and examples provided in *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022) and *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (J. A. Smith et al., 2022) the data analysis was conducted and involved the following steps:

1. Starting with the first case: Reading and re-reading.
2. Exploratory Noting.
3. Constructing Experiential Statements.
4. Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements.

5. Naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) and Consolidating and Organising them in a Table.
6. Continuing the Individual Analysis of Other Cases.
7. Working with Personal Experiential Themes to Develop Group Experiential Themes Across Cases.

Each transcript was read three times, during which exploratory notes were jotted down the side of the transcript. From these exploratory notes, experiential statements were then constructed. Once experiential statements had been identified for the entire interview transcript, a long list of statements was produced. As suggested by Smith and Nizza (2022) the list of experiential statements was printed, and each statement cut out individually and placed randomly on a large table. This approach allowed for all statements to be viewed simultaneously and repositioned as needed.

I searched for connections across the experiential statements and worked to group them into clusters, continually asking myself, “What statement goes with what?” For each participant, I ultimately identified five clusters of statements. Once I was satisfied with the clusters, I compiled a table of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). Each cluster was named as a PET through carefully acknowledging and reflecting on all statements within that cluster. After completing this process for the first transcript, I proceeded to analyse the next one, repeating all of the above steps until five tables of PETs (one for each participant) had been produced.

Once all transcripts had been analysed individually, the final step was to conduct a cross-case analysis. This involved examining all five cases and identifying both similarities and differences. The first stage consisted of an initial review and reordering of each table of

PETs to help facilitate this process. Next, all tables were printed and laid out on a large surface so that they could be viewed collectively. The final stages involved carefully reviewing the material and identifying connections, differences, and similarities across the individual tables of PETs. This process resulted in the development of a new table of Group Experiential Themes (GETs), which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

### Chapter Three: Results

This chapter presents the overall findings derived from the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of participants' data. As suggested by Smith and Nizza (2022) the results are presented in a narrative form to convey the participants' world and to illustrate how I as the researcher, have interpreted the ways in which each participant makes sense of their experiences. The results section begins with a brief summary of the key findings, followed by a comprehensive presentation of the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and their corresponding subthemes. Each theme and subtheme is described in depth, with particular attention given to how these were experienced and articulated by each individual.

All five participants provided rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences using the spiritual mobile app *The Beacon by Soul 33* (Soul 33 app). Through the iterative process of IPA three GETs were identified: (1) spiritual mentorship, (2) achieving remarkable growth, and (3) attitudes towards spirituality. In addition, nine subthemes emerged from the participants' experiences. A summary of the GETs and corresponding subthemes is presented below in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Subthemes*

<b>Group Experiential Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
1. Spiritual mentorship	1a. Using the app for guidance and support
	1b. Belonging and reassurance
	1c. Sharing spiritual knowledge
2. Achieving remarkable growth	2a. Advancing emotionally

- 2b. Developing spiritually
  - 2c. Improved relationships
  - 3. Attitudes towards spirituality
    - 3a. Positive feelings about meditations, affirmations, and journaling
    - 3b. Spirituality an important aspect of life
    - 3c. Spirituality and mental health
- 

The first superordinate theme, Spiritual Mentorship, comprises three subthemes: (1a) using the app for guidance and support, (1b) belonging and reassurance, and (1c) sharing spiritual knowledge. The app delivered structured guidance and learning that historically would have been provided by human mentors. Responses contributing to this theme suggest that participants found their interactions with the Soul 33 app both meaningful and transformative, offering them a sense of mentorship within their spiritual journeys.

The second superordinate theme, Achieving Remarkable Growth, comprises three subthemes: (2a) advancing emotionally, (2b) developing spiritually, and (2c) improved relationships. Responses illustrated that participants had experienced transformative change, demonstrating growth in specific areas of their lives. They described improvements in their emotional wellbeing, spiritual development, and interpersonal relationships. Two participants also reported that family and friends had noticed these positive changes and growth.

The third and final superordinate theme that emerged from the data analysis was Attitudes Towards Spirituality. This theme comprises three subthemes: (3a) positive feelings

about meditations, affirmations, and journaling; (3b) spirituality an important aspect of life; and (3c) spirituality and mental health. Participants' responses reflected a diverse range of perspectives on spiritual practices, the perceived importance of spirituality in their daily lives, and the ways in which spirituality is connected to mental health and wellbeing.

### **Spiritual Mentorship**

The theme Spiritual Mentorship emerged strongly from the data analysis, with all five participants contributing to this theme. Each participant reflected on the ways in which they felt supported and guided in their spiritual journeys. Spiritual mentorship was facilitated through engagement with the app and its various features. The app provided mentorship through a range of resources, including a library of guided meditations, weekly homework activities, podcasts, daily affirmations and messages, mindfulness practices, texts, daily check-ins, group chats, meditation tracking, and journaling prompts.

#### ***Using the App for Guidance and Support***

All five participants who used the Soul 33 app reported experiencing a sense of guidance and support. Participants described their interactions with the app as consistently positive. Their reasons for initially downloading and engaging with the app varied. Three participants, Gemma, Preston, and Brody, were introduced to the app through recommendations from friends, while Sadie and Dallas, independently searched online and discovered it themselves.

Sadie explained that she first discovered the Soul 33 app during a search on social media. She shared that she had been looking for ways to better manage her daily struggles and expressed that she was trying to reconnect with herself. Sadie also emphasised the importance of being able to do this from the comfort and privacy of her own home.

*“I was trying to reconnect with myself in certain ways and I like technology – I love using my phone, laptop – I love using all of that. So, I really don't like going out for in-person meetings or you know, maybe seeing a therapist or a spiritual counsellor. I was searching for something online or an app, or just something that I could you know, that I could just do from the comfort of my home – even if it was like something like a Zoom interview like this. I was just kind of searching for something remote that I could work with that I could fit into my schedule and all of that”.*  
*(Sadie).*

During the interview, Sadie disclosed that she experiences anxiety and that her medication often leaves her feeling numb and disconnected. As a result, she sought guidance and support from an online source, a format that felt most comfortable to her. She also described her affinity for technology, explaining that this helped her find a form of support she believed would work best for her.

Similar to Sadie, who used her affinity for technology to find an online resource, Dallas had a comparable experience. At the time of the interview, he had been using the Soul 33 app for approximately 12 months. He described having a strong passion for knowledge, which motivated him to search on social media for an app that could guide and support him in learning more about spirituality.

*“I was actually looking for an app that would, I'd actually be able to – like a master teacher – that like I'd actually be able to teach me some more things about like, the spiritual, like connections”.* *(Dallas).*

Dallas explained that although he grew up in a spiritual home, he still felt that there was much more for him to learn spiritually. His use of the words “master teacher” is

particularly interesting, and illustrates his desire to learn from the most knowledgeable sources. Consequently, he sought a spiritual mobile app that could offer the level of knowledge, guidance, and support he felt he needed to advance his spiritual development.

As noted earlier, several participants discovered the Soul 33 app through friends' recommendations. Brody, in particular, was looking for an app to support the growth of his spiritual life and to provide guidance in meditation and mindfulness. He explained that he had asked a friend if they knew of any suitable apps that could help him achieve these goals.

*"I get to understand that the app is very mindful – the app is something that you could use in recovering your mindset, your spiritual apps. For me, I was actually looking for an app where I could use it in building my spiritual life and also my mindfulness". (Brody).*

Brody's use of the phrase "recovering your mindset" is notable, and reflects his belief that the mind can become lost or disrupted, yet it can also be restored to a balanced and healthy state. Brody also described his desire to build mindfulness into his life, which suggests that he may have been previously operating from a state of unawareness or automatic behaviour. During the interview, he disclosed that prior to using the Soul 33 app, he often experienced intense feelings of anger and struggled with self-control.

*"I would say before now, I am the kind of person that usually gets easily angered, and I was actually looking for a way out – a way whereby I could just go through. I was actually looking for some kind of instrumental tools that could help me improve my spiritual life and make me think more about spirituality than emotional or physical works of life. So, I felt like I needed something to change". (Brody).*

Brody recognised the need to make positive changes in his life but felt that he required assistance, guidance, and support to do so. Engaging with the Soul 33 app provided him with a variety of tools that he could use to achieve the changes he sought. Brody's experience of growth and transformation will be explored further in theme two.

As for Gemma, she did not actively seek out a spiritual mobile app. She explained that she first heard about the app from a close friend and decided to download it and give it a try.

*"I heard about it and I felt like it's very important because a friend of mine had actually been using the app. I'd seen and heard about it from different persons, and so I just decided to give it a try". (Gemma).*

Since downloading the Soul 33 app, Gemma reported that it has provided her with a sense of direction through her engagement with the daily affirmations and guided meditations. She described her personal beliefs regarding energy, explaining that her internal energy should flow in a particular direction. She noted that using the app supports her personal energy work, including practices such as aligning chakras and maintaining the flow of energy within.

*"One of the reasons I'm actually using the app is to guide my personal energy and work – yeah, like chakra alignments and all of that. I feel like it's just to guide my personal energy, like my personal energy should all be centered in a particular direction – they should all be positive energy". (Gemma).*

Using the app for guidance and support allows Gemma to nurture her internal energy and her spiritual wellbeing. The Soul 33 app acts as a spiritual self-care tool that is

accessible at any time. Gemma also emphasised the importance of spirituality, explaining that she views it as requiring ongoing care and attention.

*“I feel like I'm actually the type that needs my spirituality to be taken care of. I need my spirituality to not go down or not to be slacked down. I feel like my spirituality – like my spiritual life should actually be encouraged. I feel like my spiritual life should actually be strengthened and not be weak. So, with the help of the app I get to do more for myself in terms of spirituality”. (Gemma).*

Gemma further noted that she feels caring for one's spirituality is not widely encouraged in Aotearoa New Zealand. Using the Soul 33 app for guidance and support motivates her to prioritise her spiritual wellbeing. Importantly, Gemma describes the app as playing a key role in her life as a form of spiritual self-care.

In contrast to Gemma's perception that spirituality is not widely encouraged in Aotearoa New Zealand, Preston described feeling confused about his own spirituality. He explained that the many different ideas and concepts related to spirituality can sometimes feel overwhelming. Preston further noted that his spiritual confusion often leads him to question whether he is on the right path.

*“I feel like when it comes to spirituality and religion people tend to have so many different ideas and you can't even feel to what's right and what's not right. But then when I use this app, I find out that 80% of what I find there is quite right – you know, it's okay for me. I don't know if you get what I'm saying but I feel like I'm guided more. Unlike with human beings – they tend to deceive you and not see what's right – but the app is quite accurate all the time”. (Preston).*

By engaging with the Soul 33 app Preston experiences guidance and support, particularly through feeling that his beliefs are reflected and supported within the app's content. He also demonstrates a notable level of trust with the app, as it aligns with his internal beliefs. His statement "I feel like I'm guided more unlike human beings" is particularly significant, suggesting that he experiences a degree of mistrust towards people.

Throughout the interview, Preston demonstrated a lack of trust in others and a need to protect himself. This was evident in our conversation prior to the interview commencing, when he requested to keep the camera off. His trust-related issues were further reflected during the interview itself, when he declined to answer a particular question, explaining that he did not feel it was something he should share.

*"That's quite a dicey question, and I feel like I shouldn't really share what I do with you". (Preston).*

For Preston, discovering the Soul 33 app through a friend was a particularly meaningful experience. Because he admired and trusted his friend who was already using the app, Preston perceived that the app itself was trustworthy.

*"I mean my friend uses it and I talk to him all along. See he's on the right path and his spirituality is quite improved – his spiritual life has improved. So, I want to also be on that path, and so that's why I make use of it". (Preston).*

Because Preston trusted his friend's recommendation, he was able to place trust in the app itself and experience a form of spiritual mentorship. He received guidance and support in ways that might have been more challenging had the information been delivered

by a human mentor. Preston experienced a meaningful form of online spiritual mentorship and benefited from the apps' content in a positive and impactful way.

In summary, all five participants engaged with the Soul 33 app for guidance and support, each experiencing spiritual mentorship in distinct ways. Some intentionally sought spiritual guidance and had a clear sense of what they were looking for, while others were introduced to the app through friends. Nonetheless, the experiences of all five participants contributed to the superordinate theme of Spiritual Mentorship and the subtheme of Using an App for Guidance and Support.

### ***Belonging and Reassurance***

Three participants reported experiencing a newfound sense of belonging and/or reassurance from using the Soul 33 app. A sense of belonging is an essential aspect of human life; without it, individuals may experience feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or insignificance. Belonging also plays a crucial role in shaping one's sense of identity. People can experience belonging in various contexts, including with friends, family, groups, clubs, and even within online communities. Similarly, reassurance plays an important role in people's lives, offering comfort and support that help individuals feel secure and safe.

As previously noted, one feature of the Soul 33 app is the online group chat, which is accessible to users of both the free and paid versions. For Dallas, this feature was particularly significant, as it helped him experience a sense of belonging. He explained that the group chat was his favourite aspect of the app.

*"The feature that I actually love most in the app is the community interaction, because it actually gives you an advantage or, let's say, opinion to be able to learn from others, to be able to interact with others, to be able to chat with seekers, to be*

*able to get more knowledge from people that are actually of the same, let's say, of the same spiritual growth as you are, of the same level of spiritual intelligence".*  
*(Dallas).*

Dallas emphasised the importance of being able to connect and chat with others who are also exploring spirituality. For him, being surrounded by like-minded individuals who share similar knowledge, goals, and levels of understanding provides a strong sense of belonging. This is evident in his repeated use of the word "same", which highlights his identification with the group and reinforces his sense of connection. He also expressed that being part of a group helps ensure that no one is excluded or left behind.

*"It's actually kind of when you guys are sharing the same knowledge, the same education, it's actually kind of very nice because you won't be left alone". (Dallas).*

Dallas's reference to not being left behind illustrates his experience of, and sense of, belonging within an online community. Through his participation in the Soul 33 group chat, he is able to build and maintain a meaningful sense of connection and inclusion.

Sadie's responses also contributed to the subtheme of Belonging and Reassurance. She explained that when she first discovered the Soul 33 app, she was both surprised and comforted. She described being initially stunned to learn that spiritual mobile apps even existed.

*"I was surprised when I found an app. I was like, oh, so something like this exists... So, I don't know, this was like a big revelation, like very shocking and very enticing to me. So, I kind of hopped on it as fast as I could". (Sadie).*

Sadie took great comfort in discovering the Soul 33 app and quickly downloaded and explored it. She described experiencing a sense of belonging through this discovery, as it reminded her that she is not alone and that others share similar beliefs. She was also surprised to learn that the app offers a comprehensive free version which she could access. At the time of the interview, she had been using the free version for approximately seven months. Sadie expressed a further sense of belonging in knowing that people had invested effort into creating a resource that is both available and accessible to others.

*“So, knowing that there are people who really care about this kind of stuff and they are ready to let you access it for free, I think it really helps. It makes me feel kind of wanted and that I belong to a kind of community. And also knowing that this app was created because there are a lot of people facing the same issues I was facing, that means that I'm not alone. So, there is a community of us that needs this kind of app. So, knowing that there are people there, yeah that really helps”. (Sadie).*

Sadie highlighted the significance of having access to a resource like this for free. She contrasted it with the world of social media influencers, noting how spirituality is often marketed and sold online. She explained that many influencers provide very little information upfront and then push users to pay for additional content, which makes the app's accessibility especially meaningful and valuable.

*“They give so little information and they just want you to buy their courses, read their books, book a one-on-one session with them. When most of us, okay, why would I book a one-on-one session when I don't know if you even have what I want? So, I wouldn't just spend money when I don't know your content, because they talk about*

*so little on their social media just to have you wanting more so you could buy their courses and all". (Sadie).*

For Sadie, discovering the Soul 33 app and its free version was a meaningful experience, providing her with a strong sense of belonging and reassurance. She felt comforted by the ability to access such a resource at no financial cost, and reported a sense of connection knowing that others had genuinely invested effort in creating a tool aimed at supporting users' wellbeing.

Preston's responses also contributed to the subtheme Belonging and Reassurance. This theme was particularly significant for him, as he described having experienced difficulty trusting others. He explained that he had previously considered himself an introverted person; however, since learning to meditate, he felt he had gained a newfound sense of freedom.

*"I'm no longer an introverted person. I sort of relate with people better and I think it's because of this app, because I found myself more – like I have something to give to the community. I can belong somewhere, and I'm supposed to be contributing massively to something and somewhere, and so this app has helped me on that all the time". (Preston).*

Preston's statement "I can belong somewhere" suggests that prior to discovering the Soul 33 app he had felt lost or out of place. His response indicates that he now feels more comfortable and able to connect to others. Through engaging with the app, Preston experienced a shift in his self-perception, moving away from identifying as an "introverted person". He attributed these changes to his use of the Soul 33 app, which appears to have provided him with a newfound sense of purpose and direction.

In summary, the responses of three participants contributed to the subtheme Belonging and Reassurance. Each experienced a sense of belonging and reassurance through discovering and using the Soul 33 app. For Dallas, this arose from participating in the group chat and connecting with an online community. For Sadie, it came from discovering the app and accessing its comprehensive free version. For Preston, it emerged through learning to meditate, which helped him feel more confident, extroverted, and able to relate to others.

### ***Sharing Spiritual Knowledge***

The act of sharing knowledge with others is often deeply meaningful and personal. People share knowledge for various reasons, such as creating connection, providing guidance and support, uplifting others, or simply passing on what they have learned. Three participants discussed their experiences of sharing insight gained from the Soul 33 app, reflecting on both how and with whom they shared this knowledge. For instance, Gemma described using what she had learned from the app to initiate and engage in meaningful conversations with her friends and family.

*“I’ve actually shared daily affirmations or insight from the app with friends and family, which has actually helped to paint our conversation and spiritual discussions”.*  
*(Gemma).*

For Gemma, engaging in spiritual discussions with family and friends was a positive experience that fostered a sense of connection with others. Her use of the phrase “paint our conversation” is particularly interesting, as it suggests that these interactions were rich, detailed, and meaningful. Gemma also described sharing affirmations from the Soul 33 app with a friend, further highlighting how the app encouraged and supported meaningful connections in her life.

*“I have actually shared words of affirmation from the app from a friend of mine that I feel like is actually into all of this, and the friend of mine do talk about the spiritual app, and I just get to tell them more about it”. (Gemma).*

Gemma’s choice of words “I feel like is actually into all of this” is intriguing, as it suggests that she is exploring and making sense of a newfound connection with her friend. Additionally, her comment “I just get to tell them more” is significant, as it indicates that she feels comfortable and safe with her friend’s responses, which in turn encourages her to continue sharing.

Dallas’s experience of sharing spiritual knowledge was similar to Gemma’s, in that he also found comfort and a sense of connection through the process. However, unlike Gemma, Dallas shared his insights within the Soul 33 group chat rather than with existing friends, suggesting that he feels supported and connected within the app’s online community.

*“You can actually go to the group and share to the people there because you’ll be feeling like your family. You feel like you’re safe around them because you guys have the same spiritual growth. I think it’s actually kind of what makes it a – should I say – a safe space for me, actually makes it a kind of a unique way for me to be able to interact there”. (Dallas).*

Dallas feels safe sharing knowledge with others in the group chat as he perceives that everyone there is on the same spiritual level as him. This is reflected in his choice of words “same spiritual growth”. Unlike Gemma, Dallas does not need to navigate existing friendships or anticipate how others will respond when sharing spiritual knowledge. Instead, by engaging with like-minded individuals in the group chat he is able to experience both comfort and safety in doing so. Dallas also described another experience of sharing spiritual

knowledge, this time with his family, with whom he still lives. He explained that he had encouraged them to download and start using the Soul 33 app.

*“In my family, in my household I was the first. But I’m someone that actually loves to grow and to share my knowledge with everybody. So, I think when I actually discovered the app I was like oh, I’m the one that actually discovered the app. I was actually taking the accolades. I was actually the one that was actually thinking oh, I will be able to introduce the app to my family”. (Dallas).*

Dallas experienced great joy in being the first to discover and engage with the Soul 33 app, and then share it with his family. As noted previously, he has a strong passion for learning, which is reflected in his choice of words. Additionally, his use of the word “accolades” suggests a deep sense of achievement and pride in being the one to introduce the app to his family.

Like Gemma and Dallas, Preston’s responses also contributed to the subtheme Sharing Spiritual Knowledge, but in a notably different way. He described how the insights he had gained from the Soul 33 app empowered him to teach and guide others.

*“And, you know I now teach people. Like I said I teach people. It’s not something that you consider to be a very easy task, but you know now I sort of teach people. And that’s something that’s quite amazing for me I’d say”. (Preston).*

Preston’s experience of learning about spirituality through the Soul 33 app paved the way for him to begin sharing his knowledge with others. In doing so, he assumed a new role in his life as a spiritual teacher. His repeated use of the word “teach” is particularly notable, as it conveys the enthusiasm he feels in his new role. At the same time, his

acknowledgement that teaching is not an easy task highlights the challenges involved in sharing spiritual knowledge. Overall, Preston's responses contribute to the subtheme in a meaningful and individualised way.

In summary, the responses of three participants contributed to the subtheme Sharing Spiritual Knowledge, each in a distinctive way. For Gemma, this involved connecting with a friend in a meaningful and personal way. For Dallas, it occurred through sharing insights with his family and other like-minded individuals; and for Preston, it was expressed through his emerging role as a spiritual teacher. Each participant's experience of sharing spiritual knowledge also aligns with the superordinate theme Spiritual Mentorship, which encompasses guidance, wisdom, and meaningful connection with others.

### **Achieving Remarkable Growth**

The theme Achieving Remarkable Growth emerged from the analysis of participants' experiences using the Soul 33 app. All five participants contributed to this theme in various ways, discussing in depth the personal development and changes they had experienced since engaging with the app. This theme was further divided into three subthemes to capture their individual experiences. Participants characterised their growth in relation to their emotional wellbeing, their spirituality, and their interpersonal relationships.

### ***Advancing Emotionally***

The theme Advancing Emotionally transpired strongly from the data analysis, with all five participants contributing to this theme. Across the interviews, each participant described experiencing growth in their emotional wellbeing. This emotional advancement was facilitated through engagement with the app's guided meditations and journaling

prompts. For example, Gemma explained that participating in guided meditations helped her to calm her mind, particularly during times of stress.

*“Like in terms of guided meditation, like they helped me calm my mind and stay centered, especially during stressful times. So, whenever I feel like I'm actually stressed out, whenever I feel like I'm actually emotionally down casted, then I just get to my phone or get to my nearby system or a nearby gadget that I currently have the app on, then I just go there, understand some certain things about this, and also get myself meditating and have a direction in terms of meditation”. (Gemma).*

Gemma’s response illustrates a strong sense of self-awareness regarding both her emotional state and her internal dialogue. Her use of the phrase “calm my mind” is particularly noteworthy, as it implies that she often experiences feelings of restlessness or being unsettled. Additionally, her use of the term “emotionally down casted” – although not a commonly used expression, conveys a sense of emotional intensity and suggests that she may experience periods of sadness or other low moods.

Gemma’s response reflects a clear degree of introspection and demonstrates her ability to recognise when she needs to meditate to restore emotional balance. Having access to and actively engaging with the guided meditations within the Soul 33 app appears to support her emotionally by providing a sense of direction and fostering feelings of inner calmness and balance.

Brody’s experience was somewhat similar to Gemma’s. As previously noted, he explained that prior to using the Soul 33 app, he considered himself to be easily stressed and quick to anger. He described being highly reactive to both his surroundings and his

interactions with others. Brody also expressed a belief that he needed to improve himself by developing and mastering certain skills, particularly self-control and self-awareness.

*“I feel like I need self-control, I need self-awareness, I need self-improvement, and it has actually helped me control my thoughts about some certain things.... In terms of my friends, my family members, and those persons, I usually anger out to it, I would say that it has helped me in terms of controlling my anger”. (Brody).*

Brody’s response is particularly insightful, as it indicates a tendency to act from an emotionally driven state. His use of the term “self-control” suggests that he perceives himself as somewhat impulsive, which helps explain his motivation to develop particular skills and pursue self-improvement. His reflections also imply that he can become consumed by his thoughts. Nonetheless, his choice of words demonstrates a notable degree of self-awareness regarding his behaviour and the potential impact it may have on others, particularly those closest to him.

Brody’s experience of using the Soul 33 app has been largely positive, supporting him in making meaningful changes in his life, such as becoming calmer and more in control. Through regular engagement with the app’s guided meditations, his self-awareness and self-control appear to have increased, enabling him to manage negative thoughts and emotions more effectively.

*“Since I've actually been using it, it's helped me spiritually and also it has helped me mentally. I am now stable; I am now mentally stable. I don't need to overthink myself; I don't need to stress myself in terms of worrying about life and all of that”. (Brody).*

Brody's response suggests that he may experience symptoms of anxiety, this is indicated by his use of the phrases "overthink myself" and "worrying about life". Additionally, his use of the word "stable" implies that he now experiences a greater sense of internal balance and calmness. Brody also explained that he tends to become overly attached to people, particularly within his personal relationships, which often results in him experiencing heartbreak.

*"So, I felt like, okay I do get more heartbreak. I'm the kind of person that is more heartbroken. I'm the kind of person that is more emotionally attached to some person. So, I decided to look for an improvement. I decided to look for ways whereby I could get rid of all of that". (Brody).*

Brody's choice of words such as "heartbreak" and "heartbroken", reinforces the idea that he experiences a range of strong—and at times—overwhelming emotions. Since engaging with the Soul 33 app, he appears to have experienced significant improvement in his emotional wellbeing, gaining greater control over his feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. Importantly, Brody's reflection suggests that he now feels better equipped to navigate life's challenges, having developed increased self-control and effective strategies for managing his emotional states.

In contrast to Gemma's and Brody's experiences of advancing emotionally through engaging with the Soul 33 app, Dallas's account presents a different perspective. During his interview, he explained that he had relied on and used the app in a manner that resembled having a supportive partner, helping to lift him out of his low mood.

*"I was actually a bit down. I was like kind of emotionally down and I was just looking for motivation. I think the app was actually something I grew on to. I'm trying to get*

*the word out correctly. It was something like – it was like a partner for me. So, something I actually look forward to in helping me in the kind of situation that I was in". (Dallas).*

Dallas's response suggests that he intentionally developed an attachment to the app, with his feelings towards it evolving over time. He described using the app to improve his mood during a particularly challenging period in his life. His description "it was like a partner for me" is especially revealing, indicating that he perceives the app as a source of comfort and support similar to that provided by a significant other. Viewing the app in this way seems to have encouraged Dallas to maintain a consistent practice of using its features, which contributed to his overall improved emotional wellbeing. His positive perception of the app appears to have motivated him to continue engaging with it during times of low mood.

*"It's just kind of something I wake up to and I'll be like, okay, you're actually going to be the one that will actually change me from this situation. It's actually good to be the one that's actually turned my mood around.... That was my belief. I actually had to believe in the app". (Dallas).*

Dallas's response contributes to the theme Advancing Emotionally in a distinct way. His reflections demonstrate that he was able to cultivate a positive mindset and form a meaningful attachment to the app, using it as a source of support during a challenging period. Through his engagement with the Soul 33 app, Dallas was able to improve his mood and employ it as a resource to support his emotional wellbeing.

Both Preston and Sadie's responses contributed to the subtheme in similar ways. They not only experienced emotional growth, but also reported changes that were

noticeable to others. Preston explained that since using the Soul 33 app, he had developed the ability to shift his mindset and outlook on life from negative to positive. This increased positivity fostered greater confidence and self-trust, which in turn encouraged him to become more outgoing.

*“My mum, my friends also, they can see that I'm no longer this boring person, someone who is sort of always on his own. They see that I'm outgoing, see that I'm being more positive. I use more positivity all the time instead of negativity”. (Preston).*

Preston's engagement with the guided meditations and journalling prompts within the Soul 33 app helped him shift his mindset from negative to positive. This experience is particularly significant, illustrating notable growth in both his emotional wellbeing and self-confidence. Instead of resorting to negative thought patterns like he previously had, Preston was able to replace them with more constructive and positive thoughts, which ultimately enhanced his overall wellbeing.

Sadie also experienced emotional growth that was noticeable to others. She attributed much of this development to practicing the guided meditations and reported being able to incorporate elements of them into her daily life. This practice helped her manage anxiety and foster a sense of calm, which her mother had noticed.

*“Actually, my mum, she said I've been kind of happier and calmer lately... I no longer act out of anxiety or uncertainty anymore, because I'm able to, you know, because there are some meditations, there are some steps in the meditation, in the app, that I kind of like, apply to my everyday life, like, you know taking some kind of deep breaths, like feeling my body flow, like everything”. (Sadie).*

The growth Sadie experienced through applying the skills gained from the guided meditations is particularly noteworthy. She has been able to use these skills to navigate challenges in her everyday life, such as performing effectively during sales pitches in her job role. The broader benefits of applying what Sadie has learned will be explored further in subtheme three Improved Relationships. Overall, her emotional growth has been remarkable; she now feels better equipped to manage her anxiety, and the positive changes she has experienced are also evident to those around her.

In conclusion, all five participants described experiences that contributed to the subtheme Advancing Emotionally. Participants were able to make sense of the personal growth they had experienced through engaging with the guided meditations and journaling prompts within the app. Emotional advancement was achieved through several processes, including increased self-awareness, improving emotional regulation, the cultivation of a positive outlook on life, and the ability to shift one's mindset and perspective.

### ***Developing Spiritually***

All five participants contributed to the subtheme Developing Spiritually. They described using the Soul 33 app to support their spiritual growth and establish consistency in their spiritual practices. The ways in which spiritual development manifested varied between participants, which is to be expected. For example, Gemma explained that she viewed her spirituality as something that needed to be nurtured and cared for, and reported using the app as a tool to help her maintain a consistent practice.

*"I'm actually using the app... just to develop a consistent spiritual practice. So, for me to be able to give all to my spiritual life, then I just need to develop more spiritual practice with it". (Gemma).*

Gemma's response illustrates that she uses the app to support her commitment to her spiritual life. She explained that to feel fully engaged with her spirituality, she needs to establish consistency in her practices. Additionally, Gemma described how the guided meditations facilitate her spiritual development by providing space to pause and reflect on her thoughts. This reflective practice also allows her to receive spiritual messages, which she perceives as personally meaningful.

*"In terms of spiritual messages that deeply resonate, okay, especially when a message feels like it was meant just for me, so it resonates, it gives me more orb, I feel more touch, and I feel more strengthening and all of that". (Gemma).*

Gemma's response confirms that the app supports her in developing consistency in her spiritual practices. This consistency, in turn, strengthens her spiritual connection, while receiving messages that feel deeply personal, reaffirms her spiritual life. Her choice of the words "I feel more touch" is particularly insightful, suggesting that she experiences a sense of direct contact with the spiritual realm through these messages. Overall, Gemma's reflections make a meaningful contribution to the subtheme.

Preston contributed to the subtheme in a manner similar to Gemma, as he also used the Soul 33 app to establish consistency in his spiritual practices and to learn how to meditate. During the interview, he explained that he finds meditation challenging, but that the app has made it easier through its guided meditations. As previously noted, Preston described himself as someone who struggles with managing his thoughts, emotions, and behaviour.

*"I find it difficult to meditate and also channel my energy and control my energy, but with this app it was quite simpler for me". (Preston).*

For Preston, using the Soul 33 app to learn meditation has been both beneficial and positive. By developing a meditation practice, he has acquired a new skill that has cultivated greater self-awareness and self-control. His choice of words “channel my energy and control my energy” is particularly revealing, suggesting that he may be referring to managing his anger, which he previously identified as a challenge. Overall, Preston’s response illustrates that he has experienced spiritual development through engaging with the app’s guided meditations, gaining increased control over his thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Brody’s experience of using the app was similar, and his responses contributed to the subtheme in a meaningful way. He explained that he tends to engage with the app during his free time to support his spiritual growth and development.

*“Whenever I find myself wanting to build up my spiritual life, then I just get to pop up the app and I start using it. So, in a nutshell I would say I get to use the app whenever I am free”. (Brody).*

Brody’s use of the phrase “wanting to build up my spiritual life” is noteworthy, suggesting that he recognises the need to be in the right mindset or mental space to focus on his spiritual development. Additionally, his comment “whenever I am free” indicates that he approaches the app with flexibility, rather than incorporating it rigidly into his daily routine. Brody also explained that he prefers engaging with the app in the comfort of his own home, as he requires a distraction-free environment for his spiritual practice to be effective.

*“It does help me feel spiritually connected, well especially when I am free, whenever I am less busy and I need to connect with my spiritual self. I do most of the spiritual*

*connection at home, where I don't get any distraction.... so, I get to use the spiritual mode more often at home". (Brody).*

Brody's mention of entering "spiritual mode" is noteworthy, as it reflects his perception of spirituality as a state that can be intentionally activated or deactivated. This is perhaps influenced by his home environment, which provides a quiet and safe space, free from the distractions of everyday life. Importantly, Brody demonstrates a deep understanding of what spirituality means to him and what it entails to live a spiritual life. His responses reflect a high level of self-awareness regarding his spirituality and understanding of how to actively develop and strengthen this connection.

*"I understand very well that spirituality is more than a physical aspect of life, so I feel like I just need to connect more. I feel like I just need to have more time for myself and try to build up my spiritual life, and make sure that I'm actually balanced in terms of the spiritual aspect and also the physical aspect". (Brody).*

Sadie's experience of developing spiritually was similar to that of Gemma and Preston, as she also used the Soul 33 app to guide her and support the establishment of consistency in her meditation practice. Although she was using the free version of the app, Sadie incorporated it into her routine by repeatedly engaging with the same meditations, which enabled her to develop a more consistent practice.

*"I think my relationship with the app has changed in the sense that I have made it a part of my schedule, the meditations, even if it's like three days in the night, three days a week, or three nights a week". (Sadie).*

Sadie explained how her relationship with the app had evolved from when she first began using it. She noted that initially, her use of the app was inconsistent, but over time it became a regular part of her weekly schedule. Sadie also mentioned that she was currently working on integrating meditation into her nightly routine before going to sleep. Through her practice of repeating the same meditations and setting goals, she has been able to foster her spiritual development. Sadie further explained that engaging with the meditations helps calm her anxiety. As a result, she feels more relaxed and better able to deepen and strengthen her spiritual connection.

*“Well, for one it's kind of like it helps with my anxiety. The meditations, yeah, they help with my anxiety, and that helps me to kind of relax. Once I'm able to relax I'm able to, like, feel well and be calm. So, I think it helps in helping me feel more connected spiritually”. (Sadie).*

Sadie's response illustrates that she experiences spiritual development through her meditation practice, with her spiritual connection also strengthening as a result. Her engagement with the Soul 33 app contributes meaningfully and significantly to the superordinate theme Achieving Remarkable Growth, as well as the subtheme of Developing Spiritually.

Finally, Dallas's contribution to the subtheme is reflected in his love of learning and his intentional approach to both spiritual growth and development. As previously noted, he proactively sought a spiritual mobile app to support and guide his learning.

*“I think I'm someone that growing up, I think I actually grew up in a spiritual way, in a spiritual family. I think I'm actually kind of someone that is actually very intentional about growing in my spiritual life”. (Dallas).*

During the interview, Dallas discussed his enthusiasm for the Soul 33 app, noting that he was impressed by its wide range of features. He particularly appreciated that the app was visually appealing, and that it allowed him to listen to podcasts while engaging in other activities, such as walking. Dallas explained that because he was intentional about his spiritual growth and recognised the app would support this development, he felt motivated to continue using it.

*“I love to be intentional about my growth. So, I think when I actually get some services that actually kind of boost the spiritual growth, it's actually something that I'll actually be looking forward to do over and over again”. (Dallas).*

With the help of the Soul 33 app, Dallas was able to access spiritual content that supported his ongoing learning and growth. His appreciation of the app, including its visual appeal and wide range of features, enabled him to foster a meaningful relationship with it and use it as a tool to further develop spiritually.

Overall, the responses of all five participants contributed to the subtheme Developing Spiritually and the superordinate theme Achieving Remarkable Growth. Each participant experienced spiritual development in their own unique way. Gemma, Preston, and Brody cultivated their spirituality by using the Soul 33 app to learn, establish, and maintain consistency in their meditation practices, whereas Sadie and Dallas focused on deepening and strengthening their broader spiritual connection.

### ***Improved Relationships***

Four participants' responses contributed to the subtheme Improved Relationships. Each reported experiencing enhanced connections and noticeable improvements in their relationships with friends, family, or co-workers. They attributed these positive changes to

the Soul 33 app, particularly through engaging with its guided meditations and journaling prompts. Participants indicated that these practices helped them cultivate greater self-awareness, patience, and empathy. As a result, participants reported experiencing more positive and meaningful interactions with others.

Gemma reported that her relationships with both her friends and her spouse had improved since she began using the Soul 33 app. She attributed these improvements to increased emotional stability and to the development of greater empathy towards others, which she experienced as a result of engaging with the app's guided meditations.

*“It has helped me emotionally, it has actually helped me mentally, and also my relationship with my friends, my spouse, and then socially. So, I get to understand how I communicate with others..... I get to improve my communication and empathy towards others”. (Gemma).*

Gemma's phrase “I get to understand how I communicate with others” is particularly insightful, suggesting that she has developed an increased level of self-awareness regarding how she responds to and interacts with others. This heightened self-awareness would likely have contributed to her improved relationships, enabling her to be more present and communicate more effectively. Additionally, her statement “I get to improve my communication”, indicates that she was not only reflecting on her own behaviour but also intentionally implementing changes in how she communicates, ultimately enhancing the quality of her relationships.

Gemma's awareness and acknowledgement of her increased empathy towards others is noteworthy and likely had a positive impact on her relationships, especially with her spouse, with whom she lives. Developing greater empathy would have enabled Gemma

to respond to others with increased awareness, respect, and compassion. Consequently, she would have fostered deeper and stronger connections with those around her. By placing herself in another person's position attuning to their emotions, Gemma was able to strengthen her interpersonal relationships.

Brody's experience was similar to Gemma's, as he also reported improvements in his relationships. He attributed these changes to addressing his personal challenges, such as learning to manage his anger. As previously noted, Brody explained he had felt out of control and recognised the need to make significant changes in his life. Through engaging with the app's guided meditations, he developed the ability to respond to others more thoughtfully, rather than reacting impulsively.

*"I was the kind of person that usually gets easily annoyed. I felt like the app has changed me a whole lot and I'm not the kind of person I was then. So, I just get to understand before reacting. I get to listen and consider and then break down before reacting". (Brody).*

Brody's response illustrates he previously struggled with regulating emotions and had a relatively low tolerance towards others. His comment "I just get to understand before reacting", reflects a notable level of self-awareness and recognition in managing his behaviour. He described experiencing a positive shift in his relationships, which he attributes to becoming a better listener and developing the ability to pause before responding. Brody also noted that the app had shaped the way he now views life and his spiritual connection with others. This shift in perspective would likely have enabled him to cultivate more harmonious and fulfilling relationships.

*“It has also helped me in terms of understanding how it is to be more connected spiritually in the aspect of life with other persons”. (Brody).*

Preston’s account of using the Soul 33 app also contributed to the subtheme Improved Relationships. As previously noted, he expressed a general distrust in others and described himself as having been an introverted person. However, since engaging with the app, Preston reported that he had developed greater confidence, which enabled him to become more outgoing. This newfound extraversion appears to have enhanced his relationships, particularly through his emerging role as a spiritual teacher.

*“I’ve built a better relationship with people because I’ve helped them in the spiritual life. Also, that has helped me relate with people better and then be productive with life”. (Preston).*

Preston’s overall response suggests that he experienced improvements in his relationships by being of service to others, particularly through supporting them in their spiritual growth. By engaging with and assisting others on a spiritual level, he appears to have strengthened and cultivated more meaningful connections. His choice of words “then be productive with life”, is insightful, as it implies that he views maintaining positive relationships as a key component of living a productive and fulfilling life.

The final participant who contributed to the subtheme Improved Relationships was Sadie. Her experience shared similarities with Preston’s, as she also described improvements in her professional relationships. As noted, Sadie experiences anxiety, which she felt had at times negatively impacted her workplace performance. She explained that her role requires her to deliver sales pitches in front of co-workers and supervisors—a task that she finds particularly challenging due to her anxiety.

*“I’m obligated to make sales pitches most of the time. And most of the time I mess them up because of my anxiety. Like I said, I could have prepared a very good sales pitch for months or weeks before. But then, you know, when you’re having a sales pitch you have to put in life to bring the idea to life. But when I get there and the board of directors are there and I’m looking at all my colleagues and my boss, I kind of get cold feet and I’m not able to pitch well”. (Sadie).*

Sadie’s response highlights the pressure she experiences in delivering sales pitches as part of her job. Given her struggles with anxiety, this likely created considerable stress and may have strained her relationships with co-workers and supervisors. However, as previously noted, Sadie reported a reduction in her anxiety levels and described generally feeling calmer, explaining that this sense of calm had extended to her workplace interactions.

*“I’m going to trace it all back to the app because, as I said, the app helped me with my anxiety. So, I’ve been calmer and I’ve been able to deliver well at work, like with my bosses and having those sales pitches, because I noticed that I’m now more confident and the anxiety has reduced”. (Sadie).*

Sadie’s response indicates that she now feels more confident and composed in the workplace, which likely reduces the pressure she experiences when delivering sales pitches. Her account further suggests that she has established a clear connection between her use of the app’s meditations and her reduced anxiety, enabling her to function and cope more effectively under workplace stress. Consequently, this increased confidence appears to have had a positive influence on her professional relationships with both co-workers and supervisors.

The responses of four participants contributed to the subtheme Improved Relationships. Each participant reflected on how their interpersonal connections had strengthened as a result of using the Soul 33 app. Gemma described developing greater self-awareness in her communication and increased empathy towards others. Brody reported enhanced emotional regulation, which allowed him to pause before responding rather than reacting impulsively. Preston gained confidence and a sense of purpose in helping others, which reinforced his interpersonal connections. Similarly, Sadie experienced reduced workplace anxiety, enabling her to deliver more effective sales pitches and cultivate stronger professional relationships. Overall, these experiences also contributed to the superordinate theme Achieving Remarkable Growth.

### **Attitudes Towards Spirituality**

The final theme to emerge from the data analysis was Attitudes Towards Spirituality. All five participants contributed to this theme in various ways, discussing in depth their feelings and thoughts about spirituality and connected topics. Participants' attitudes varied and were shaped by their personal life experiences, belief systems, and family upbringing. This theme was further divided into three subthemes to best represent participants overall experiences and attitudes towards spirituality and the Soul 33 app.

### ***Positive Feelings About Meditations, Affirmations, and Journalling***

Responses from four participants contributed to the subtheme Positive Feelings About Meditations, Affirmations, and Journalling. Participants spoke favourably about engaging with the Soul 33 app and utilising its spiritual and reflective practices. During interviews, they offered rich descriptions and thoughtful insights into their experiences with

guided meditations, affirmations, and journalling, emphasising the beneficial impact these practices had on their wellbeing.

Gemma's attitude towards guided meditations, affirmations, and journalling was distinctly positive. She was the only participant to speak highly of all three practices, describing how she used them in a combination to support her overall wellbeing. Gemma noted that prior to using the Soul 33 app she had been unfamiliar with affirmations. Through the app she learned about their purpose and how to incorporate them into her daily routine as a source of support and encouragement in her spiritual self-care.

*"I get to understand affirmations. I get to talk to myself, give myself words that would actually encourage me to stay grounded and spiritually centered". (Gemma).*

Gemma also praised the journalling prompts within the Soul 33 app. She explained that journalling encouraged her to reflect on her thoughts, particularly the ones that emerged during guided meditations. For her, journalling appeared to function as a key tool in fostering emotional balance and supporting the maintenance of a calm mental state.

*"I currently use the app because of journalling sections, like it gives me a space to reflect and release a thought, especially after meditation". (Gemma).*

A notable term in Gemma's response is "release". Its use is significant, as it suggests she experiences a need to let go of thoughts that feel trapped or overwhelming. The notion of "release" also conveys a sense of allowing thoughts to flow more freely. Considering that Gemma used the Soul 33 app to support and calm her mental state, it is understandable that this term resonated strongly with her.

As previously noted, Gemma preferred to use a combination of spiritual and reflective practices together. She spoke highly of journaling immediately after completing a guided meditation. For Gemma, engaging in these practices was beneficial, helping her to self-reflect and release the thoughts and emotions occupying her mind. She found that journaling directly after meditating was the most effective way to support her emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

*“Journaling deep emotions or realisations I would say, is like putting inner torture into words. So, whenever I’m actually meditating and whenever I am actually deep down in my thoughts, I just get to write down some things so I could reflect back on it”. (Gemma).*

Gemma’s use of the phrase “inner torture” is particularly striking, and offers significant insight into her emotional and psychological state. This term conveys a sense of distress and suffering, helping to contextualise why she perceives spiritual and reflective practices as beneficial. Her engagement with the practices offered in the Soul 33 app appears to provide her with a positive and meaningful way to express her thoughts and emotions, which in turn contributes to her positive attitude towards meditations, affirmations, and journaling.

Brody’s experience was in some ways similar to Gemma’s. He explained that he had also been unfamiliar with affirmations prior to discovering the Soul 33 app and learned about them through engaging with its content. He spoke positively about using affirmations, noting that he relied on them to help improve his mood, particularly during times when he was feeling low.

*“I just get to use it for affirmations. So, whenever I am down, I just pop out the world of affirmations, and it does work out for me”. (Brody).*

Brody further explained that he often personalised affirmations from the Soul 33 app to make them feel more meaningful and relevant to him. He found that personalising them enhanced their impact, providing him with the greatest benefit. Brody also reflected on the broader significance of affirmations, describing how they offered him a sense of inner strength. Given that he frequently struggled with feeling unable to control his thoughts and behaviour, it is understandable that he would find comfort and empowerment in engaging with words of affirmation.

*“I try reviving myself more by using some features there, and definitely it strengthens my spiritual inner man. It helps me stay back up and move on. Also, the words of affirmation – it's very important that those words of affirmation are there”. (Brody).*

Brody's response illustrates that he places significant value on affirmations, viewing them as a source of energy that helps him feel more alive. His use of the word “reviving” implies that he gains renewal and strength from them. Additionally, his phrase “spiritual inner man” is particularly interesting, suggesting that he is referring to his true self or inner spirit. Collectively, Brody's reflections highlight his positive feelings towards affirmations and the central role they play in helping him cultivate inner strength.

Similar to Brody's positive experience with affirmations, Sadie expressed positive feelings towards guided meditations. She explained that despite repeating the same meditations, she felt compelled to incorporate them into her nightly routine. This motivation was influenced in part by a dream she experienced after completing a guided meditation. Sadie noted that she rarely remembers her dreams, and those she does recall are typically

fearful. However, she described this particular dream as profound, explaining that she felt as though she were floating.

*“I don't really remember most of my dreams, but there was one time during the meditation I was doing the night before bed, and I slipped off mid-meditation and had the weirdest dream. I felt like I was floating somewhere. I can't remember all details because like I said, I don't remember my dreams, but I remember this one because it was unusual. I just felt light, like I was a feather or a bird floating somewhere. And when I woke up, I was so happy. I had such a good day”. (Sadie).*

The words Sadie used to describe her dream suggest that she experienced a sense of lightness and peacefulness that carried into the following day. The fact that she had such a profound dream—rather than a fearful one—and connected it to completing a guided meditation before sleep is significant. For Sadie, this positive experience reinforced the value of meditation practices and contributed to her overall positive attitude towards them.

*“But after the first experience with doing the meditations before I slipped off, I started making it a routine to meditate more before I sleep”. (Sadie).*

Sadie has used this profound and positive experience to help establish guided meditations as a regular part of her night routine. Incorporating meditations into her evenings is likely to improve the quality of her sleep, which in turn benefits her functioning the following day. Waking up with a sense of calm and peacefulness appears to help her feel better prepared for daily challenges and may contribute to her ability to manage anxiety more effectively.

Similar to Sadie, Dallas also expressed positive feelings towards the guided meditations in the Soul 33 app. For him, the appeal was less about the experience of using the meditations themselves and more about feeling privileged to have access to such a wide variety. Dallas spoke enthusiastically about the app's extensive meditation library and emphasised that everyone, including users of the free version should have the opportunity to access them.

*"I think everybody is actually not okay to get the paid version. I think some people are actually trying. I think some people are still using the free version. I think if the library access can actually be available for the free version, it actually makes it kind of a bit better, for it to be a lot less segregation between the paid and the free". (Dallas).*

Dallas explained that he feels privileged to be able to afford the Soul 33 app, which gives him full access to the meditations. His response suggests that his positive feelings arise not only from the meditations themselves but from having access to them. His use of the word "segregation" highlights his awareness of the divide between those who can access the full library and those who cannot. Overall, his reflections indicate that he experiences positive feelings towards the meditations because of their quality, variety, and the sense of privilege associated with accessing them.

In summary, four participants contributed to the subtheme Positive Feelings About Meditations, Affirmations, and Journalling, each providing rich detail and insight into their experiences with the spiritual and reflective practices found within the app. For Gemma and Brody, using affirmations and journalling was a particularly positive experience. For Sadie, a profound dream reinforced the value of meditation and motivated her to include it in her night routine. Meanwhile, Dallas appreciated being in a position to have access to a library

of guided meditations. Collectively, these responses also contributed to the superordinate theme Attitudes Towards Spirituality, reflecting participants' positive views on these practices.

### ***Spirituality an Important Aspect of Life***

All five participants contributed to the subtheme Spirituality an Important Aspect of Life. They provided rich detail and thoughtful insight into their spiritual journeys and conveyed what spirituality means to them. Their responses highlighted both similarities and differences in the role spirituality plays in their lives. Importantly, they illustrated that spirituality is not a one-size-fits-all concept, but rather an individual journey shaped by each person's experiences, beliefs, and values.

For instance, Gemma felt strongly about caring for herself and attending to her spiritual wellbeing, so she decided to try a mobile app. Upon discovering the Soul 33 app, she immediately committed to it by becoming a paid user. Gemma emphasised that prioritising her spiritual needs made engaging with the app feel like the right choice.

*"I felt like okay, this is what I need to do. This is what the app has actually helped me improve in terms of my emotional and spiritual wellbeing". (Gemma).*

Similar to Gemma, Brody described feeling the need to commit to his spiritual growth and journey. During his interview, he explained that after trying the free version of the Soul 33 app, he realised he needed to commit fully by becoming a paid user. Brody characterised this decision as a clear sense of knowing what he needed to do in order to make positive changes in his life and support his spiritual growth.

*“I decided to step forward with the app because I feel like this is what I need. I felt like it's actually what would help increase my spiritual life and my mindfulness”. (Brody).*

The responses of both Gemma and Brody are particularly noteworthy, as they convey a strong sense of urgency in developing and nurturing their spiritual growth. Both participants used the word “need”, highlighting the central role that spirituality plays in their lives. Their responses suggest that they view spirituality as essential rather than optional. Brody’s repeated use of the word “need”, further emphasises the significance he places on maintaining his connection with his spiritual self.

*“I feel like I just need to connect more. I feel like I just need to have more time for myself and try to build up my spiritual life”. (Brody).*

Gemma and Brody’s attitudes towards spirituality and their perception of it as a necessity, are likely connected to their need for emotional balance and wellbeing. As previously noted, Gemma described using the Soul 33 app to cultivate a sense of emotional balance, while Brody highlighted how the app helped him develop greater self-control, enabling him to better manage his anger. Collectively, their responses illustrate that spirituality is an important aspect of their lives.

Preston’s responses also contribute to the subtheme through his emerging role as a spiritual teacher. As previously noted, he felt that he had gained deep insight and knowledge from the Soul 33 app, which he feels compelled to share by teaching and guiding others on their spiritual journeys. Preston also reflected on how engaging with spirituality has significantly improved his life, underscoring its personal value to him.

*“Spiritually my life has never been the same. So, spiritually, I've had lots of improvements... like I said, I teach people... yeah, how life works, how spiritual it is, how the universe works for people”. (Preston).*

Preston's response suggests that spirituality has helped him find meaning in life, which is particularly significant given his previously expressed mistrust in others. Importantly, his reflections indicate that he now experiences a profound sense of purpose derived from teaching and connecting with others on a spiritual level. Sharing the knowledge he has gained from the Soul 33 app is a positive experience that helps him cultivate more meaningful relationships, highlighting spirituality as an important aspect of his life.

Sadie's responses also illustrated that she holds a positive attitude towards spirituality, viewing it as an important part of her life. For Sadie, focusing on spirituality is key to improving her wellbeing and plays a crucial role in her self-care practices. She expressed the belief that more people should explore spirituality as a way of maintaining wellness, emphasising its role in helping individuals cope more effectively with life's challenges.

*“I feel more people should just look into spiritualism. You know most people see people that believe in anything out of the ordinary as weird.... more therapists should look into that, because I think they have a wide range of people that have issues like this. They meet people with issues like this all the time”. (Sadie).*

Her choice of the word “weird” is particularly significant, as it suggests that she may have previously felt a lack of acceptance for her spiritual beliefs. As noted earlier, Sadie was

extremely surprised when she discovered the Soul 33 app, explaining that finding it brought her great comfort, knowing that others share similar beliefs.

Overall, Sadie's responses highlight the importance of spirituality in her life and suggest that she believes others could benefit from exploring similar beliefs. This perspective is likely shaped by the positive changes she has experienced, such as improved coping with workplace anxiety. She also shared that she grew up in a spiritual family and expressed the view that spirituality is often overlooked. Importantly, Sadie believes that spirituality is central to addressing many of the challenges people face today. This perspective is supported by her suggestion that therapists should integrate spirituality into their practice. Her consistently positive attitude towards spirituality underscores its importance in her life.

Dallas's responses contributed meaningfully to the subtheme Spirituality an Important Aspect of Life. As previously mentioned, he described growing up in a spiritual family and emphasised that he had been intentional about his spiritual growth. His upbringing most likely played a significant role in fostering his desire to learn, grow, and improve himself on a spiritual level.

*"Spirituality it's part of my main important things in life because I actually grew up in a spiritual home. So, I think spirituality is kind of a top priority for me". (Dallas).*

Dallas's response clearly illustrates his perspective on spirituality. He emphasised that it is one of his top priorities in life, reflecting both his passion for learning and his deep appreciation for the Soul 33 app. As noted earlier, he expressed a desire to deepen his understanding of spirituality and connect with others whom he perceives to be on a similar level. Throughout the interview, Dallas spoke highly of the app, often highlighting that he loves all aspects of it.

*“The app is wonderful. So, I would just say the app is actually a perfect match for me. And it's actually very wonderful and I would love to use it again and again and again and again. And I will still continue my paid version”. (Dallas).*

Dallas’s response is persuasive and demonstrates his passion for learning, spirituality, and the Soul 33 app. His repeated use of the word “again” highlights this enthusiasm, while his description of the app as a “perfect match for me” reveals a strong emotional connection. This attachment is understandable, given that he had previously compared the app to a partner. This likely stems from his ability to connect with like-minded individuals through the group chat which he identified as his favourite feature.

*“Being able to go through my day, listening to meditation, listening to podcasts, connecting with others, and also not affecting my daily life, not feeling like it’s kind of taking extra charge, as I say, extra cost out of my daily life.... I think that’s kind of an advantage for me”. (Dallas).*

Dallas’s reflection is engaging and further illustrates that he feels a sense of privilege and advantage from focusing on his spiritual growth through the app. His response suggests that the app enhances his quality of life rather than detracting from it, as demonstrated by his phrase “extra cost out of my daily life”. Overall, his responses regarding spirituality, his passion for learning, and his engagement with the Soul 33 app are highly positive and make a meaningful contribution to the subtheme.

In summary, all five participants contributed to the subtheme Spirituality an Important Aspect of Life, each providing unique insights into the role of spirituality in their lives. For Gemma and Brody, this was reflected in their perceived “need” to focus on spiritual growth and wellbeing. Preston highlighted it through his sense of purpose in

teaching and supporting others spiritually. Sadie emphasised the role of spirituality in addressing personal challenges and advocated that more people should explore it. Dallas contributed by demonstrating his love of learning, appreciation for the app, and commitment to making spirituality a central priority in his life.

### ***Spirituality and Mental Health***

Four participants contributed to the subtheme Spirituality and Mental Health. They shared their personal views on spirituality and mental wellbeing, describing how engaging with the Soul 33 app led to a greater sense of emotional balance and mental stability. Several participants also discussed their experiences with mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety, noting that their symptoms improved as a result of focusing on spirituality through the app.

As noted previously, prior to discovering the app, Brody felt that he lacked self-control and self-awareness. He also described experiencing intense emotions, such as heartbreak and anger. In response to these challenges, Brody consciously focused on his spiritual growth by learning and incorporating spiritual and reflective practices into his life. As a result, he reported growth and positive changes across multiple areas, including his mental health. Brody stated that he was now “mentally stable” and described himself as a “new person”.

*“I am now a new person. I'm kind of now different from what I was before now”.*

*(Brody).*

Considering how Brody felt prior to using the Soul 33 app, it is likely that he experienced difficulties related to self-worth and self-image alongside his mental health. His reflections are particularly insightful, as they illustrate his perception of transformation and

personal growth. After using the app and implementing positive changes in his life, Brody expressed that he now feels like a different person. He also shared that he intends to focus more on his physical appearance, a motivation likely influenced by the positive changes he had experienced within.

*“I’m planning on moving to something else, like trying to improve my physical appearance in terms of understanding what is more necessary in the aspects of putting on attire in regards to spirituality”. (Brody).*

Brody’s comment is thought-provoking, as it suggests that he perceives a misalignment between his inner self and his outward appearance due to the internal changes he has experienced. His choice of the word “attire” is particularly noteworthy, as it implies that his spiritual growth and newfound mental stability require him to present himself differently, perhaps by dressing in a more formal or intentional manner.

Since Brody described feeling like a new person and becoming more mentally stable, it is understandable that he now feels motivated to make changes to his outward appearance. Given his focus on internal growth, his mental health likely improved as a result. By concentrating on spirituality and engaging with the app’s features such as affirmations and meditations, Brody reported positive changes across multiple aspects of his life, including his mental health and overall wellbeing. His responses strongly contribute to the subtheme Spirituality and Mental Health, highlighting the benefits of spiritual practices on mental and emotional wellbeing.

Gemma’s attitude towards spirituality and mental health was somewhat similar to Brody’s. She explained that since using the Soul 33 app, she had noticed an overall improvement in her mental wellbeing. She identified her mental health as the primary

reason for consistently engaging with the app. As noted previously, she described how she used the guided meditations to help “calm her mind” and become more emotionally stable.

*“For my mental health.... and also, to calm myself down”. (Gemma).*

As noted earlier, Gemma emphasised the importance of caring for her spiritual wellbeing and expressed that this should be encouraged more broadly. Towards the end of the interview, she expanded on her belief that spirituality and mental health are closely connected, proposing that our healthcare system should incorporate spirituality to support emotional wellbeing and address mental health challenges. Gemma concluded by stating that more healthcare professionals should recommend spiritual mobile apps. This suggestion is significant, as it could empower people to take greater responsibility for their own wellbeing and promote improvements in emotional and mental balance.

*“The app should be advertised to persons that are emotionally down and persons that... I feel like the app should also be recommended by psychiatrists or some persons or health care providers in terms of emotional wellbeing, that they should get to refer a lot of persons to use the app”. (Gemma).*

In terms of Gemma’s response and attitude towards spirituality and mental health, she raised a noteworthy point. Rather than relying solely on a healthcare system that primarily treats mental health disorders, she suggested adopting an approach that recognises and embraces the benefits of spirituality as an alternative or complementary way of supporting individuals in achieving mental and emotional wellbeing.

Sadie’s views were somewhat similar to Gemma’s, as she also believes that spirituality is closely connected to mental health and plays a vital role in maintaining mental

and emotional stability. During our interview, Sadie shared a story she had encountered online about a young boy being treated for schizophrenia within the Western medical system. According to the story, the boy's parents decided to take him to Africa to receive treatment from a spiritualist. The spiritualist informed the parents that their child did not have schizophrenia, but that he was spiritually gifted. The spiritualist worked with the child to help him learn to control his abilities and maintain a balance between living in the physical world and perceiving things beyond it. Eventually, the boy and his parents returned home, and the child was no longer considered mentally unstable or treated as having schizophrenia.

*“So, when the spiritualist helped the child hone in on his abilities, you know, he was no longer seen as mentally unstable, because he was able to differentiate what was real from what wasn't”. (Sadie).*

The story Sadie shared is powerful and aligns with the perspectives of many Indigenous people worldwide who view mental wellbeing through a holistic lens, recognising that wellbeing is connected to both the physical and the non-physical. After sharing this story, Sadie discussed her own beliefs regarding spirituality, explaining that she thinks most mental health challenges can be traced back to spiritual issues that require deeper exploration.

*“I think spiritualism is kind of like at the core of everything. People might just think, ‘Oh, you've got mental health issues’, but I think the core of it will be spiritualism. And if it's kind of looked into deeper you would find that, okay, there's something spiritual about this”. (Sadie).*

Sadie's strong views on spirituality are central to her perspective, and her responses indicate that she believes in a clear connection between spirituality and mental health. For Sadie, this connection is likely shaped by her upbringing in a spiritual home and her experiences with anxiety. Since focusing on her spirituality, engaging with the Soul 33 app, and incorporating guided meditations into her routine, she has noticed improvements in her anxiety. This positive change is significant, as it likely reinforces and strengthens her belief in the link between spirituality and mental health.

Sadie also shared that she did not like the way anxiety medication made her feel. She expressed difficulty in understanding how medication can address mental health challenges, which she views as non-physical, for example, comparing feelings of sadness to a broken leg, drawing a clear distinction between emotional and physical pain.

*"If you have anxiety or depression, they give you drugs to suppress those hormones. So, you have to be on those drugs. But that isn't actually curing the situation. This is not like a sickness.... this is like something that has to do with you mentally and emotionally. So, I don't get how drugs can cure my sadness. I feel those drugs are kind of blocking out major... they're not only blocking out the sadness; they're blocking out other aspects of you emotionally". (Sadie).*

Sadie's comments regarding the use of medication for mental health issues are insightful. She noted that doctors in Aotearoa New Zealand are often quick to prescribe medication for a range of mental health concerns. Her observations also reflect broader global trends, in which increasing numbers of people are being diagnosed with and medicated for mental health conditions each year. Although Sadie's views on spirituality and mental health may not be widely accepted in mainstream contexts, they align closely with

the perspectives of many Indigenous cultures worldwide. Overall, Sadie's attitude and insights are compelling, and her responses make a valuable contribution to the subtheme.

Preston's responses also contributed to the subtheme, in a manner similar to Sadie's. He reported using guided meditations within the app to help alleviate his depression. He explained that during a particularly difficult period in his life, he turned to the app and focused on his spiritual journey rather than dwelling on the challenges he was facing.

*"During this time, I was sort of going through some depression. I was nearly going through a depression, not a terrible sort of depression, but was going to lead to a very serious depression. So, I sort of used the app to you know, help my energy and be in spiritual concentration. And I found that the depression faded away and it was no longer there". (Preston).*

Preston's response is particularly interesting, as it suggests that he has experienced depression previously, indicated by his repeated use of the word "depression". Additionally, his reflections describe varying levels of it, implying that he has most likely experienced multiple depressive episodes throughout his life. He also noted that using the Soul 33 app had provided him with greater mental stability.

*"This app has helped me with that all the time... but yeah, it's given me mental stability". (Preston).*

Preston's responses indicate that he perceives an increase in his mental stability from using the Soul 33 app. He reported being able to alleviate his depression before it became severe by focusing on his spiritual journey. Overall, his reflections demonstrate a high level of self-awareness regarding his mental health and highlight how the app helped him

navigate a challenging period in his life. This experience appears to have had a significant impact on Preston, providing him with encouragement and confidence to support his emerging role as a spiritual teacher.

In summary, the responses of four participants contributed to the subtheme Spirituality and Mental Health, each in a meaningful and unique way. They shared personal views and experiences with mental health challenges, notably reporting improvements in their mental and emotional wellbeing through focusing on spirituality and engaging with the app. Their accounts highlight the benefits of spirituality, which may be further supported through mobile apps. The responses also contributed to the superordinate theme Attitudes Towards Spirituality, particularly through participants' perspectives on the perceived relationship between spirituality and mental health.

## Chapter Four: Discussion

This study aimed to explore the use of digital technology in spirituality by investigating individual lived experiences of using the spiritual mobile application *The Beacon by Soul 33*. The research design was qualitative, and participants provided rich detail and insight into their experiences of using the app. Five participants were interviewed, and their data was analysed using the theoretical framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The study aimed to answer the following research question: What are people's experiences of using a spiritual mobile application such as "The Beacon by Soul 33"?

Through the iterative process of IPA and the in-depth interpretation of participants' experiences, three Group Experiential Themes (GETs) emerged: (1) spiritual mentorship; (2) achieving remarkable growth; and (3) attitudes towards spirituality. These GETs represent the ways in which the Soul 33 app shaped participants' experiences of spirituality. In addition, nine subthemes were generated from these GETs, each reflecting participants' accounts and highlighting the idiographic and interpretative nature of IPA.

The superordinate theme, *Spiritual Mentorship*, represents the ways in which participants experienced the Soul 33 app as a valuable source of guidance, support, community, and connection. The first subtheme, *Using the App for Guidance and Support*, highlights a need for spiritual support that is accessible, provides assistance, resources, and knowledge, to help foster spiritual connection, promote personal growth, and enhance mental and emotional wellbeing.

This subtheme aligns with the literature of Burr et al. (2020) in which he discusses digital wellbeing and how digital technologies can potentially improve people's quality of life. Through the use of mobile apps individuals are able to experience the empowering

effects that digital technology can offer. As explained by Gan (2018) mobile apps are impacting people's lives, one benefit is they empower individuals to better manage aspects of themselves such as their own health conditions.

The findings from this study suggest spiritual mobile apps can be beneficial to users, by serving as a spiritual mentor that helps guide an individual to navigate their own journey with spirituality. As mentioned by Rathi and Kumar (2020) digital spirituality and spiritual mobile apps can act as the users own spiritual guru by providing them access to knowledge and resources.

The second subtheme, *Belonging and Reassurance*, underscores participants need for connection, purpose, acceptance, and emotional safety, through alleviating feelings of doubt and fear. This subtheme highlights that belonging and reassurance can be achieved through a mobile app, by cultivating a sense of community where participants feel spiritually connected to themselves and others.

This subtheme aligns with literature that examined how individuals experience online communities and social support. A recent study by Haber et al. (2025) explored individuals' experiences with online support within the Fragile X community. Participants emphasised the importance of connecting with others who share similar experiences, as it allowed them to exchange information and socialise informally. Findings showed social anxiety was able to be reduced through engaging in online activities, furthermore, online support was perceived as beneficial and helped facilitate social connection (Haber et al., 2025).

The third subtheme, *Sharing Spiritual Knowledge*, underscores the importance of connection and sharing valuable insight with others. Participants experienced the sharing of

knowledge as a way of communicating and strengthening their bonds and relationships, and through being of service to others.

This subtheme is similar to the findings of a recent study by Suarez et al (2024) in which they review how online communities provide support to breast cancer survivors. Key findings showed individuals who access and use online communities do so to share and obtain informational, emotional, and social support. Additionally, these online communities provide users with reassurance, empowerment, and a sense of belonging (Suarez et al., 2024).

The second superordinate theme, *Achieving Remarkable Growth*, identifies the ways in which participants experienced significant transformation as a result of using the Soul 33 app. The first subtheme, *Advancing Emotionally*, highlights personal growth that comes from spiritual and reflective practices that encourage, develop, and increase self-awareness and emotional regulation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that personal growth can be facilitated through the use of a mobile app, and that a range of benefits can be achieved.

Achieving growth through spirituality and spiritual practices is supported by a body of literature that illustrates the associated benefits, including positive health outcomes and enhanced mental wellbeing (Park et al., 2024). A recent study by Boatsi and Dwarika (2025) examined practitioners' experiences of Transcendental Meditation, findings indicated that it fuels spiritual growth, increases spiritual discernment, awakens clairvoyance, expands consciousness, promotes a deeper understanding, and enhances individuals' purpose and meaning.

The second subtheme, *Developing Spiritually*, underscores the ways in which spiritual growth and development can be fostered through the use of a mobile app. Participants

described how setting personal goals, accessing resources that resonated with them, learning spiritual practices, connecting with others, and integrating the app into their routine helped facilitate and enhance their spiritual development.

These findings highlight how the growth and expansion of digital spirituality enable spiritual messages to be shared easily and allow users to learn spiritual practices such as meditation. These findings underscore the benefits of digital technology in supporting people on their spiritual journeys by removing barriers and making spiritual teachings and practices more accessible. As explained by Rathi and Kumar (2020) mobile apps can make spirituality more attainable for users, and spiritual mobile apps offer a clearer path for individuals seeking to develop this aspect of their lives.

Lastly, the third subtheme, *Improved Relationships*, emphasises the ways in which interpersonal relationships can be enhanced and strengthened through the use of a spiritual mobile app and a focus on spiritual growth. Moreover, the ripple effects of spirituality and personal development can benefit relationships by reducing stress and fostering skills such as empathy, patience, and effective communication.

As explained by Lucas (2010) meditation can help improve interpersonal relationships by reducing stress and increasing individuals' awareness of their own thoughts. Meditation has been widely associated with a reduction in stress, and this benefit often extends beyond the period of meditation. Reduced stress and improved relationships are often achieved when individuals develop a consistent meditation routine. Through regular practice, individuals can enhance their ability to respond to their own thoughts and emotions, as well as to those of others (Lucas, 2010).

The final superordinate theme, *Attitudes Towards Spirituality*, characterises the ways in which participants viewed the Soul 33 app, spirituality, and related concepts. The first subtheme, *Positive Feelings About Meditations, Affirmations, and Journalling*, highlights the positive ways these spiritual and reflective practices were perceived, as well as the benefits they can offer individuals. Specifically, such practices can provide structure, tools for self-reflection, emotional stability, and enhanced mental wellbeing.

This subtheme aligns with a range of literature illustrating the positive benefits associated with meditation, affirmations, and journalling. As explained by Cascio et al. (2016) affirmations can help individuals decrease stress, improve academic performance, enhance wellbeing, restore self-competence, and reflect on their self-worth. In addition, journalling has been shown to enhance mental clarity, support the processing of emotions, reduce stress, boost self-esteem, encourage personal growth and reflection, facilitate goal setting, and increase overall wellbeing (Sutton, 2018).

The second subtheme, *Spirituality an Important Aspect of Life*, underscores the significance of spirituality in relation to culture and upbringing, the purpose of life and its meaning, connection and belonging, and its benefits to mental and emotional wellbeing. Importantly, spirituality provides individuals a sense of meaning and purpose and cultivates inner peace and calmness. Spirituality has long played a central role in people's lives across a wide range of cultures.

The findings of this subtheme align with the work of van Dierendonck (2012) who suggests that spirituality is associated with living a good life in terms of desirability and moral goodness, and that individuals with strong spiritual resources are often perceived as leading more fulfilling lives. These findings also support the idea that spirituality is a deeply

personal journey, consistent with the views of Scott (2024) in that spirituality is highly individualised, with each person experiencing, practicing, and defining it in a unique way. Despite its significance, spirituality has been largely neglected within psychological needs theories (van Dierendonck, 2012).

The third and final subtheme, *Spirituality and Mental Health*, highlights participants' personal views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of mental health, and emphasises the benefits of spirituality for both mental and emotional wellbeing. The connection between spirituality and mental health was evident in participants' reports of alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as enhancing their overall sense of wellbeing.

The findings of this subtheme align with a body of literature examining the connection between spirituality and mental health (Koenig, 2009; Lee et al., 2019). Historically, emotional and mental disorders were linked to religious or spiritual contexts, with religious organisations traditionally serving as the primary providers of mental health care (Kao et al., 2020; Koenig, 2009). A wide range of research demonstrates that spirituality is associated with enhanced mental health, reductions in anxiety and depression, and can help support individuals to experience more positive emotions (Can Oz et al., 2021; Kishan, 2020; Lee et al., 2019; Park et al., 2024).

Overall, the GETs and their associated subthemes highlight the deeply personal, transformative, and beneficial role that The Beacon by Soul 33 app played in shaping participants' experiences of spirituality. The app functioned as a personal spiritual guide and a transformative tool, supporting each participant on their individual journey with spirituality. The findings of this study align with a growing body of literature on digital

technology and spirituality, and reinforces the positive outcomes associated with spirituality and spiritual practices.

However, despite the perceived benefits for users of spiritual mobile apps, it is important to acknowledge potential risks associated with their use. One notable risk is the possibility of developing or reinforcing smartphone addiction, which may manifest as constantly checking the app rather than engaging in authentic spiritual reflection, connection, and growth. Although participants' responses did not reflect any issues related to smartphone addiction or excessive app use, one should still be cautious of interpreting this absence as though such risks and behaviours were non-existent.

A second risk to consider is as spiritual mobile apps become increasingly integrated into people's lives, some users may develop an over-reliance on the app and its features, which could inadvertently diminish spiritual development and growth. In such cases, users' spirituality may be shaped more by the app's structure and content rather than supported by it, potentially limiting their ability to cultivate their own spiritual practices that are independent of mobile devices and technology. Consequently, the potential for over-reliance on digital technology and spiritual mobile apps is a risk that needs to be considered. The integration of digital tools for spiritual development and connection requires careful attention to ensure they serve as supportive aids rather than replacements for meaningful spiritual practice and growth.

Moreover, while mobile apps aim to make engagement with spirituality and spiritual practices more accessible, the structure of apps can inadvertently transform spiritual engagement into a transactional process through mechanisms such as subscriptions and premium paid content. As a result, this may lead users to perceive spiritual growth as

something that can be purchased rather than cultivated through sustained practice. These drawbacks reflect broader concerns associated with digital spirituality, including a potential loss of depth in practice, increased distraction, reduced face-to-face interaction, and ethical considerations.

One notable downside identified through data analysis was the commodification of spirituality. One participant described observing social media influencers marketing spirituality through the sale of private sessions, books, and courses. She found this particularly troubling given her experience as a sales representative, which allowed her to recognise the sales tactics being used. Having grown up in a spiritual family she had also witnessed firsthand how spirituality was increasingly being transformed into a commodity. This finding highlights the commercialisation of spirituality and aligns with a growing body of literature examining this occurrence (Basci, 2015; Kale, 2006).

While spiritual mobile apps offer meaningful benefits to users, it is crucial to remain mindful of the potential risks associated with their use. These apps can help support individuals on their spiritual journeys. However, they can also contribute to issues such as over-reliance, commodification, smartphone addiction, and the restriction of authentic spiritual growth. Ultimately, recognising both the advantages and limitations of spiritual mobile apps is essential for understanding the role they play in individuals' lives, and for ensuring that they function as tools that enhance spiritual experiences and practices rather than diminish them.

### **Cultural Reflection**

Reflecting on participants' experiences with the Soul 33 app, it was evident several themes recurred. Although participants used different words and interpretations to describe

their experiences, collectively their accounts revealed commonalities, including receiving guidance and support, enhanced mental wellbeing, greater emotional stability, personal growth, inner peace, and strengthened relationships. These patterns suggest shared structures of meaning and transformation, pointing to a universal spiritual language expressed through common emotions, connections, growth, and human experiences, rather than through the identical use of language.

As a Māori/Pākehā researcher, the patterns, outcomes, and emotional effects observed across users' experiences resonate strongly with the values and understandings embedded in my own cultural identity. Concepts such as *wairuatanga* (spirituality), *whanaungatanga* (relationships), and *mauri* (life force) reflect a holistic worldview whereby people, nature, and the spirit realm are inseparable. Observing similar dynamics in participants' experiences, regardless of their individual background or cultural upbringing, aligns with Māori perspectives that emphasise holistic wellbeing and the interconnectedness of life. Ultimately, users' experiences of the Soul 33 app suggest a universal spiritual language through participants shared emotional, relational, and personal growth.

### **Potential Implications**

Overall, the findings of this research highlight the significance of spirituality and demonstrate that spiritual mobile apps can provide meaningful guidance and support for individuals on their spiritual journeys. This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on spiritual mobile apps by suggesting that such tools can be effective and can positively impact users. As noted by Gorichanaz (2022) further research is needed to examine how these apps are used and the effects they have on individuals' spiritual wellness.

Given the positive findings from this study, the well-established benefits associated with spirituality, and the accessibility of mobile apps, these factors collectively can inform future research and development in the area of spiritual mobile apps. Furthermore, such developments could be used to design apps that specialise in delivering resources aimed at fostering spiritual and holistic wellbeing, as well as supporting mental health and wellness. As noted by Goodwin (2016) the use of technology in mental health care is often more cost-effective than traditional treatment, can reduce wait times, and enables service users to access support and treatment at times that best suit them.

The potential implications of this study suggest that spirituality, combined with the use of mobile apps, could help reduce the number of individuals requiring access to mental health services, particularly when used as a preventative measure or as a self-care tool to support emotional and mental wellbeing. Additionally, the findings highlight the opportunity for health professionals to incorporate spirituality into their practice and to consider developing, integrating, or recommending spiritual mobile apps as a source of guidance, support, and tools for enhancing mental and emotional wellbeing.

On a small scale, the findings of this study contribute to the limited body of research on user experiences with spiritual mobile apps, particularly regarding their effectiveness and the impact of using such apps. As noted by Gorichanaz (2022) spiritual wellness remains one of the least researched and discussed aspects of wellness. Furthermore, the findings support the notion that individuals are increasingly turning to spirituality and spiritual practices within digital spaces, especially among Generation Z (Park et al., 2024).

## Limitations

This study initially aimed to recruit and interview six participants; however, seven participants were recruited. Due to personal reasons, two participants did not follow through with the interview process. Nonetheless, given the nature of IPA, five participants provided an adequate and appropriate sample for this study, as IPA focuses on exploring and making sense of the lived experiences of individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Given the design of this study and the time constraints associated with completing this thesis, only user experiences of a single spiritual mobile app were explored. Therefore, it is not the intention of this research to generalise findings to all spiritual mobile apps, but rather to focus on how individuals personally experienced using their chosen app, in this case, The Beacon by Soul 33.

This study also intended to include participants from a diverse range of ages; however, inadvertently all participants fell into the age bracket of being under 30 years. This may be attributed to participants being part of Generation Z, who have grown up with the internet and have smartphones woven into their daily lives. As previously noted, Generation Z are noted to experience higher rates of mental health challenges and sleep issues, and are reported to be persistent users of wellness mobile apps (Park et al., 2024)

Lastly, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom, which presents its own set of limitations such as connectivity issues, reduced non-verbal communication, and challenges in establishing and building rapport with participants. These limitations were mitigated as much as possible through using techniques such as preparing the interview space, checking camera and audio settings in advance, minimising distractions, and starting with small talk.

However, in hindsight, it may have been beneficial to meet with participants online prior to the interview to help establish rapport more easily.

### **Future Research**

Future research should include longitudinal studies that investigate the long-term effects of using a spiritual mobile app. This type of research could be beneficial and provide a deeper insight into the effectiveness and impact of such apps over an extended period. As noted by Gorichanaz (2022) further research is needed to examine how long-term use of these apps may affect individuals. However, due to the high cost and time commitment that these types of studies involve, this may not be viable, therefore, I would suggest conducting follow up interviews over a shorter period.

This study also provides an opportunity for future research to examine a larger or more diverse sample of participants. As previously noted, all participants in this study were inadvertently around the same age. Research that includes a broader range of participants could be beneficial. In addition, it might be valuable to examine specific demographic groups to assess how populations such as older adults, different genders, or various ethnic groups experience the use of spiritual mobile apps. Particularly given the increasing number of people turning to technologies to support their spirituality (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Research that explores how mental health workers or therapists incorporate spirituality into their practice, alongside whether they integrate or recommend spiritual mobile apps to clients could be beneficial. As noted by Park et al. (2024) there is limited research that examines digital technologies that combine both mental health and spirituality. Such research could potentially be valuable and may help pave the way for a more holistic approach to delivering therapeutic services in healthcare in Aotearoa New

Zealand. Existing research suggests that spiritual health is strongly connected to quality of life, mental health, reduced burnout, and healthier bodies and life styles (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018).

Finally, research examining user experiences with AI-generated spiritual mobile apps could be beneficial, as understanding people's attitudes towards and experiences of AI-generated spirituality may provide valuable insight. Although participants in this study did not mention AI, its increasing integration into technology suggests it should be explored further. A study by Smith et al. (2021) in online spiritual support found that participants were aware of the growing presence of AI, and although some were worried about it replacing human support, they were simultaneously curious as to how it could assist them.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study explored users' experiences of a spiritual mobile application. Research aims were to specifically explore individuals lived experience of using the spiritual mobile app The Beacon by Soul 33. The aim of the study was to gain deeper insight and contribute to existing literature regarding the use of digital technology and spirituality. Key findings from this research illustrated that users of a spiritual mobile app experienced a range of benefits, including feeling supported and guided with their spiritual journeys, experiencing growth and personal development, improving their emotional and mental wellbeing, and alleviating symptoms of mental health issues.

This research contributes to the field by examining user experiences of spirituality through the use of digital technology. Specifically, it offers deep insight into the personal experiences of using a spiritual mobile app, and explored how individuals made sense of their experiences. Overall, findings suggest that spiritual mobile apps can be beneficial to

users, and that they have the potential to be incorporated into more holistic approaches to wellbeing. Furthermore, spiritual mobile apps could be integrated into the delivery of health and wellbeing services in Aotearoa New Zealand, or recommended by therapists or mental health workers.

Above all, more research needs to be carried out in this area in order to gain further insight into the effectiveness and impact of spiritual mobile apps. Future studies should include a more diverse range of participants, encompassing different ages, ethnic groups, and cultures. Research should also explore the use of AI-generated spirituality. Finally, longitudinal studies would be ideal for examining the long-term effects of using spiritual mobile apps.

### **Final Reflection**

On a more personal note, conducting this research and working on my thesis has been both rewarding and challenging. Over the last 12 months, I have been pushed academically while also facing several personal difficulties. There have been many moments when I wondered how I would reach the point of nearly completing this thesis. Being the only person in my immediate family to attend university has often left me feeling isolated and questioning my own academic ability.

However, now that I can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, I feel extremely grateful to have been blessed with this opportunity and experience. I am thankful that I was able to conduct research in an area that I feel deeply passionate about and connected to. I am also grateful for the wisdom shared with me by the individuals I interviewed. I feel truly blessed and now have a newfound appreciation for the value and importance of qualitative research.

Throughout this journey I have learned to trust the process of interpretative phenomenological analysis. I would be doing myself a disservice if I were not completely honest in admitting that there were times when I struggled to see how everything would come together. On a final note, I hope this study has emphasised the importance of spirituality and highlighted the benefits and potential of spiritual mobile apps. Most importantly, I hope it encourages and inspires others to conduct further research into the area of spirituality and digital technology.

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## Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Advertisement

# A STUDY ABOUT SPIRITUAL MOBILE APPS

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - LOOKING FOR PEOPLE  
TO INTERVIEW ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE IN  
USING THE APP "THE BEACON BY SOUL33"



## Do you use the app The Beacon by Soul33?

If so I would love to hear from you!

I am looking for 6 people to be interviewed as part  
of a study about spiritual mobile apps. If you are  
keen to participate and are over the age of 18  
please get in contact.

All participants will receive a \$40 koha in the form  
of an online voucher as a thank you for  
participating.



Contact Kristina - [REDACTED]@massey.ac.nz

## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

***Digital Spirituality: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of User Experiences of Spiritual  
Mobile Application “The Beacon by Soul 33”.***

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to take part in a study on your experience of using spiritual mobile application “The Beacon by Soul 33”. Before you decide to participate in this research it is important that you understand the purpose and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and consider my request. If you have any questions or if there is anything that is unclear please get in touch.

#### **Introduction**

Kia ora, my name is Kristina. I live in Lower Hutt, Wellington. Five years ago, I decided to pursue a different career path after spending many years working in accounts in the construction industry. I am currently completing my Master of Arts (psychology) with the goal of becoming a registered psychologist.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

For my thesis I am required to carry out my own independent research and have chosen to conduct qualitative research into the experiences of using a spiritual mobile app. The purpose of this research is to gather data to help me complete and submit my thesis for my Master of Arts degree.

#### **Eligibility**

To be eligible to participate in this research you must be over the age of 18 and use the app “The Beacon by Soul 33”. You will need to have used the app for a minimum of 6 months. I am aiming to recruit 6 participants.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part you can change your mind at any time up until two weeks post interview without needing to provide a reason. After this stage the interview would have been transcribed and would be entering the data analysis stage and it will no longer be possible to withdraw from the research as it would be difficult to separate your data from the data pool.

**What happens if I decide to take part?**

If you decide to take part you will be required to sign a consent form and you agree to being interviewed by me. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom or face to face (if applicable) at a time and place that works for the both of us. I anticipate interviews to last between 45-60 minutes. The interview will be voice recorded in order for it to be transcribed. If the interview is conducted over Zoom it will also be video recorded but once I have the voice recording the video recording will be deleted. The interview will consist of questions about your experience using The Beacon by Soul 33. If there are any questions that you don't want to answer you can skip them. Participants can also ask for the recording to be turned off at any time during the interview. After the interview is done you will have the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research. I will then transcribe the interview word for word and send you a copy in order for you to approve or make any changes.

**Are there any benefits or risks in taking part?**

There are no immediate benefits associated with participating in this research. However, some participants may enjoy the opportunity to share their experience with someone who is interested in listening to them. As recognition and appreciation for your time each participant will be gifted a \$40 online voucher. While I anticipate there to be minimal risk associated with taking part in my research sometimes when talking about experiences or everyday situations emotional memories can be triggered. If this occurs the interview can be paused or stopped at any time. Overall, I would hope that you would find the interview process and being part of my research an enjoyable experience.

**Will me taking part in this research be kept confidential?**

Yes, all personal and identifying information relating to you (e.g., name, age, email address) will be kept confidential and in a password protected file stored on my computer. Your privacy and confidentiality will be respected. The transcript from our interview will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified in my research in any way. All audio and video recordings will be transferred to my personal computer and to my Massey OneDrive account. Once transcribed any video recordings will be deleted. Once my research is completed and my thesis is marked all files will be permanently deleted.

**Project Contacts**

If you have any questions about this research or you wish to participate please contact me using the information below. If you have any concerns or you wish to ask any questions about this research with someone other than myself please contact my supervisor using the information provided.

**Researcher**

Kristina Jenkins

Email: [REDACTED]@massey.ac.nz

### **Supervisor**

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### **Compulsory Statement**

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Director, Research Ethics, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)”.

## Appendix C: Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

***Digital Spirituality: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of User Experiences of Spiritual  
Mobile Application “The Beacon by Soul 33”.***

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL**

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print full name) \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What inspired you to download and start using the Soul 33 app?
2. Can you describe the type of situation where you are most likely to open and use the app?
3. What are the main reasons for opting to use a spiritual mobile app?
4. What features of the app resonate with you the most and why?
5. What role does using the Soul 33 app play in your wider spiritual practices?
6. In what ways, if any, has using the app guided your sense of belonging and wellbeing?
7. Have you experienced any profound moments while using the app? If so, can you tell me about a particular one?
8. In what ways, if any, has using a spiritual app helped improve your life?
9. Thinking about the app, have you ever had a negative experience with it? If so, could you tell me about a particular time?
10. Looking back to when you first started using the app, has your experience with the app changed since then?
11. Based on your own experience of using a spiritual mobile app would you recommend using one to others?
12. Reflecting on everything we have discussed today is there anything else you would like to add that you think might be valuable?