



# Spirituality as an antecedent of trust and network commitment: The case of Anatolian Tigers



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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of spirituality in network commitment and trust building through a focus on the specific network context of Anatolian Tigers from Turkey. Despite the previous research employing utilitarian perspectives to explain the antecedents of commitment, the aim here is to understand the role played by spirituality, a higher-order dimension of human life, in commitment at a network level. The study adopts a survey approach. A hundred and twenty questionnaires were conducted through face-to-face meetings with owners/managers of the sample firms. A partial least squares (PLS) path modelling approach is employed to examine relationships through a 'soft-modelling' analysis, using SmartPLS 3. The results empirically confirm that spirituality operates as a significant antecedent of network commitment and trust in the context of networks among Anatolian Tigers. Furthermore, it is found that neither the length of membership nor the firm size has any significant effect on network commitment. The paper contributes to the understanding of antecedents of network commitment by going beyond traditional economic perspectives whose argument, historically, has been that commitment is driven by utilitarian, profit- and utility-maximizing motivations and economic self-interests.

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## 1. Introduction

Turkey, as the first Muslim country to bid for European Union (EU) membership, was officially recognized as an EU candidate in December 1999 (Demirbag, Glaister, & Tatoglu, 2007; Hughes, 2004). Within the Islamic world, Turkey is a unique democratic and secular country whose population is predominantly Muslim (Karakas, Sarigollu, & Kavas, 2015). It acts as a bridge between West and East, combining cultural elements from each, and has historically been an important economic and political ally of the EU. It is also one of the biggest trading partners of the EU, with a liberalizing market characterized by high economic growth and a rapidly growing population (Demirbag et al., 2007; Kirca, 2011). In addition, its strategic position within close proximity to the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe creates exclusive economic and business opportunities (Demirbag et al., 2007). The Turkish context provides

an interesting research setting given its idiosyncratic characteristics as an EU candidate and a Muslim country following a Western-style market economy.

Recently, in Turkey, a rapidly growing number of firms referred to as Anatolian Tigers have exhibited significant success in both their home and foreign market operations. The Anatolian Tigers are a moderate Islamic group of outward-oriented young entrepreneurial Turkish firms. Their name originates from their geographical location in the new industrial cities of inner Anatolia. They are operating in the booming sectors of the post-1980s, such as textiles, furniture, machinery and consumer products (Hosgör, 2011). The vibrant activity of this new and fairly widespread entrepreneurial breed has spurred economic development and modernization in second- and third-tier cities across Turkey. The success of the Anatolian Tigers has primarily been associated with their effective network mechanisms (Baki Adaş, 2009; Buğra, 2002; Hosgör, 2011). The networks among these firms are especially visible in the relatively economically underdeveloped periphery of Turkey, outside major urban areas such as Istanbul. The networks among the Anatolian Tigers are mainly formed through their membership of specific business associations (MUSIAD<sup>4</sup> and TUSKON<sup>5</sup>), which are

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<sup>5</sup> Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists.

characterized, through a common Islamic identity, as representing a binding force fostering cooperation, solidarity and trust among members (Buğra, 1998; Hosgör, 2011) and enabling them to form ‘a “powerful network based upon trust-relations” among Islamic economic actors’ (Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005, p.117). The case of the Anatolian Tigers offers an interesting study context for investigating the underlying elements that have contributed to this success story. Although previous research has emphasized the role of effective network mechanisms as a significant antecedent of their remarkable progress, there is still a need for deeper and more comprehensive research exploring the idiosyncratic characteristics of these networks.

Social, economic and organizational actors are embedded in various dynamic systems of network relations. Whereas some types of networks are naturally created, such as family ties, most are formed under certain intentions and motivations from the actors, and particular antecedent conditions of networks are associated with specific outcomes (Oliver & Ebers, 1998). Commitment, among other factors, has been considered the key determinant of effective network outcomes (Clarke, 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The significant role it plays opens up the question of ‘what motivates individuals to commit themselves into networks’, as different underlying elements of commitment lead to distinct network outcomes. Most of the previous approaches to networks have treated individuals as the perfectly rationale ‘homo-economics’ (economic man), whose involvement in networks is driven by utilitarian, profit- and utility-maximizing motivations and the achievement of their economic self-interests, as networks are accepted as being efficient tools for accessing information, knowledge, resources and other benefits. For instance, Blau (1964, p.91), in his social exchange theory, argued that individuals’ actions are motivated ‘by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others’. It is also argued in the resource-dependence literature that economic actors seek their self-interest and act in opportunist ways, through which they can gain resources and maximize their utility, even if this comes at the expense of other parties (Provan & Milward, 1995; Ring, 1997). As an illustration of the utilitarian perspective on network commitment, Park and Luo (2001, p. 457), in their research focusing on the guanxi networks of China, demonstrated that ‘guanxi is utilitarian...based entirely on the exchange of favours, not an emotional attachment’. Similarly, in their liability-of-outsidership perspective on firm internationalization, Johanson and Vahlne (2009) argued that actors aim to commit to targeted networks in order to build information positions through which they can acquire necessary information and resources for internationalization.

However, as indicated by Rego and Cunha (2008), humans, who are the core element of any network relationship, are not only rational but also spiritual and emotional beings and deeply motivated by higher-order spiritual dimensions of life. Spirituality is likely to motivate humans to a greater extent than material returns, as spiritually motivated individuals tend to devote more effort, time and energy to contribute to, preserve and protect whatever they perceive to be sacred based on their spiritual value systems. Despite the recent, widespread interest in the role of spirituality in commitment, previous empirical research on the relationship has stayed entirely at a unidimensional, organizational level, investigating the commitment of employees to their organizations and revealing that spiritually motivated individuals have greater organizational commitment, loyalty and job satisfaction (Bandsuch & Cavanagh, 2005; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). In today’s networked marketplaces, in which social and economic actors are embedded within various types of networks, it is also important, even necessary, to reveal how and to what extent spirituality

affects commitment at the network level. Also, as stated by Clarke (2006, p. 1185), ‘we still know very little regarding the particular antecedent conditions that give rise to commitment in networks’, and he called for further studies identifying ‘different antecedent conditions that may foster commitment at the inter-organizational level’ (p. 1199). Following Clarke’s research call and by focusing on the networks among Anatolian Tigers, this research extends the boundaries of the existing research, by importing spirituality into the network commitment research context, and contributes to the literature in two ways: Firstly, it proposes spirituality as a significant antecedent condition of network commitment, and secondly, it extends spirituality-commitment research from the organizational to the network level. It also demonstrates to what extent the relationship between spirituality and network commitment is mediated by trust.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The second section reviews the conceptual background on network commitment, spirituality and trust. The conceptual model and hypotheses are developed in the subsequent section. After that, the proposed model is tested through partial least squares (PLS) path modelling. We then present the results of the analysis, followed by a discussion, conclusions, and implications for further research.

## 2. Conceptual background

### 2.1. Understanding the spirituality–commitment relationship at the network level

Networks are shaping the global business environment nowadays (Parkhe, Wasserman, & Ralston, 2006). Previous approaches considering firms as autonomous atomistic actors are becoming increasingly inadequate in today’s world of firms that are embedded in various relationships with other actors, while traditional markets are being replaced by networks of interrelated firms (Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000; Möller & Halinen, 1999). The focus of organizational and management studies has recently shifted ‘away from individualist, essentialist and atomistic explanations toward more relational, contextual and systemic understandings’ (Borgatti & Foster, 2003, p. 991). Besides this, firms are now being considered networks of internal and external relationships, which go beyond the traditional understanding of organizational boundaries (Larson, 1992; Rowley, 1997). In parallel with the shift from an atomistic firm-centric focus to network perspectives, within the management field, we believe that the commitment phenomenon should be studied by means of a similar path – a shift to the network level – in order for firms’ conduct and performance to be fully understood. Previous commitment research primarily focused on organizational commitment as a unidimensional construct dealing with the identification and involvement of an individual within an organization (Clarke, 2006). Commitment was considered an underlying bond or attachment between employee and organization (Clarke, 2006). Most of the studies employing the notion of commitment have mostly investigated the relationship between it and its performance outcomes at both firm and employee levels (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Focusing entirely on the unidimensional commitment of employees at the organizational level within traditional organizational boundaries lacks the potential of commitment research, particularly at the network level. Building on the fact that firms’ performance and behaviours are highly affected by the networks in which they are embedded (Dyer & Singh, 1998), and that commitment significantly affects network outcomes (Clarke, 2006; Holm, Eriksson, & Johanson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), it is important, even necessary, to shift the focus of commitment research to the broader network level. The shift in the

focus of commitment research, from the organizational to the network level, also creates room for further research investigating the particular antecedents of commitment in networks, such as spirituality.

Although this research borrows its concepts mainly from the workplace spirituality literature, which has an organizational and employee-level focus, we believe that the ideal context for investigating spirituality is networks rather than formal organizations. The rationale for this claim arises from the distinct natures of these two types of entity. Whereas organizations are formal structures that are hierarchical and leadership-driven, networks have a more voluntary basis and are actor-driven. Spirituality at the organizational level is more likely to be accepted and bought into by the owner or transformational leaders of the organization initially (Fry, 2003), with employees having to be induced or selected to comply with or embrace it, if only partially. However, in a network context, spirituality binds members in a more 'organic' way, without the necessity for formal leadership or inducement. Spiritual motivations of members can more effectively drive the formation and retention of networks and also foster commitment to the networks. As formal and hierarchical structures are not as visible in network relationships as in organizations and workplaces, spirituality at the network level can presumably operate as a core bonding mechanism fostering commitment. Finally, unlike the unidimensional notion of organizational commitment, which reflects the strength of involvement an individual has in an organization (Clarke, 2006), network commitment is a more reciprocal engagement; hence, some soft factors, such as common spiritual values among network members, can provide significant motivation to the members to commit to the networks, leading in turn to more effective network outcomes.

## 2.2. Network commitment

Network commitment is defined as 'an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely' (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p.23). Similarly, Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992) defined commitment as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. In the extant literature, relationship commitment has been accepted as a fundamental determinant of successful long-term relationships and effective network performance outcomes (Clarke, 2006; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sarkar, Aulakh, & Cavusgil, 1998).

Commitment had initially been studied, mostly in relation to organizational commitment, as a unidimensional construct representing the strength of involvement of an employee in an organization, that is, a relationship internal to the organization (Becker, 1960; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday et al., 1982). This domain of the literature has commitment of two kinds: (i) that driven by employees sharing, internalizing and identifying with the values of the organization and (ii) that driven by a cognitive evaluation of the instrumental value of the relationship with the organization (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and focused mostly on the latter approach. However, commitment has recently been conceptualized more broadly through the inclusion of workgroup, occupational and network commitment (Clarke, 2006).

The network commitment phenomenon has mostly been studied under a utilitarian perspective and explained in line with the instrumental 'value' of networks. Mutual relationship benefits for the involved parties, resource dependence and switching costs are considered the main drivers behind enduring relationships (e.g. Clarke, 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003;

Sharma & Patterson, 2000). As a result of the narrow utilitarian perspectives dominating the network commitment literature, it has been strongly highlighted that 'we still know very little regarding the particular antecedent conditions that give rise to commitment in networks' (Clarke, 2006, p.1185). This creates room for us to go beyond narrow utilitarian perspectives and focus on other dimensions that might also operate as drivers of commitment to networks.

## 2.3. Network commitment as a determinant of network outcomes

Network commitment has been at the centre of the research focusing on the relationship between network and performance outcomes (Clarke, 2006; Holm et al., 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and accepted as an essential ingredient of successful relationships (Clarke, 2006; Dwyer et al., 1987; Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sarkar et al., 1998). The rationale for the relationship between network commitment and network performance outcomes has been explained as follows: 'where network members develop commitment to the network they are more likely to exert greater efforts to work towards the goals of the network and exert greater energies to solve particular relationship problems where they arise' (Clarke, 2006, p. 1186). Previous research has also supported this argument by identifying commitment as a key element of better performance outcomes, such as efficiency, productivity and effectiveness (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sarkar et al., 1998; Wong & Sohal, 2002). Similarly, the positive impact of network commitment on various performance outcomes has been seen in a wide range of both empirical and conceptual studies, such as those focusing on collaborative relationships and cooperation (Moorman et al., 1992; Ohmae, 1989), relationship quality (Wong & Sohal, 2002), relationship maintenance (Aurier & N'Goala, 2010; Gounaris, 2005) and participation and loyalty intentions (Mowday et al., 1982). These findings demonstrate that commitment should be taken into consideration as a potentially important determinant of network outcomes that in turn affect individual and organizational performance.

It is important to note that the relationship between network commitment and network outcomes could be better understood through a focus on the antecedent conditions of network commitment that generate distinct network characteristics and outcomes (Clarke, 2006; Oliver & Ebers, 1998). To date, research has mostly revealed mutual interdependence, relationship termination costs, relationship benefits and power dependence to be the key antecedent conditions for network commitment (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). For instance, commitment is likely to be higher among those actors who believe that they obtain more benefits from networks (Mowday et al., 1982). Ring and Van De Ven (1994) pointed out that an assessment of the economic efficiency of past transactions determines the actors' decision to remain in an interorganizational relationship or not. Factors that increase the compatibility between network actors, such as shared values, norms and goals, have also been considered as potentially important determinants of commitment (Gundlach et al., 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Overall, most of the network commitment research has been guided primarily by utilitarian resource-dependence perspectives. In order to deepen our knowledge of the antecedents of network commitment, this study imports spirituality into the relationship commitment research context and investigates the extent to which it affects network commitment.

## 2.4. Spirituality

An important trend to have emerged in research on

businessmen and management is spirituality in the workplace (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008; Vandenberghe, 2011). Organizational and management science has recently experienced a shift from economic-centric perspectives to a more holistic one covering higher-order dimensions such as spirituality, interconnectedness and social responsibility (Karakas, 2010; Neal, 1997). Spirituality has various definitions and there has not yet been a wide consensus on any single one. The different definitions emphasize some key dimensions, such as inner consciousness, self-enlightenment, accessing the sacred and the inner search for personal development. For instance, Karakas (2010, p. 91) defined spirituality as 'the journey to find a sustainable, authentic, meaningful, holistic, and profound understanding of the existential self and its relationship/interconnectedness with the sacred and the transcendent'. Borrowing from workplace spirituality literature and building on the original definition of Mitroff and Denton (1999), in this paper spirituality is defined as 'the effort to find one's ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to co-workers and other people associated with work, and to have consistency (or alignment) between one's core beliefs and the values of their organization' (Milliman et al., 2003, p. 427).

The connection between religion and spirituality has also been a controversial domain of the spirituality literature (Cavanagh, 1999; Hill et al., 2000; Neck & Milliman, 1994; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Spirituality and religion, as two different multidimensional and complex phenomena, have overlapping meanings (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). However, as indicated by Phipps (2012, p. 179), 'spirituality speaks to a common human condition, while religion refers to the polity, practices, and creeds of a particular denomination or faith body.' Mitroff and Denton (1999) named spirituality as a more appropriate concept than religion in the context of the workplace. Spirituality is accepted as a broader and more comprehensive construct representing the relationship between human beings and the modern pluralist workplace (McGhee & Grant, 2008). In the context of the present study, religion – i.e., Islam – operates as a key repository for spirituality among Muslim businessmen. In other words, among Anatolian Tigers, spirituality has a religious connotation, namely that of the common Islamic identity.

#### 2.4.1. Dimensions

The spirituality construct and its dimensions are borrowed from the literature on spirituality in the workplace and adapted to the network-level research context. Workplace spirituality, which is defined as 'the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community' (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 137), has become a central point among studies aiming to understand the relationship between spirituality, employees and organizations (e.g. Milliman et al., 2003; Mitroff, 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008). In order to measure workplace spirituality, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) developed a scale with seven dimensions that has been employed extensively in the extant literature (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009). For instance, Milliman et al. (2003, p. 428), in one of the first empirical studies testing the relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational commitment, measured the spirituality in the workplace construct through just three dimensions: 'meaningful work', a 'sense of community' and 'alignment with the organization's values', imported from the study of Ashmos and Duchon (2000). Following Milliman et al. (2003), this study also measures spirituality at the network level using three sub-dimensions: meaningful work (membership), a sense of community and alignment of values. Building on Milliman et al. (2003)'s argument, we propose that these three dimensions are primarily associated with individuals' behaviours and attitudes in network relationships.

2.4.1.1. *Meaningful work (membership)*. Meaningful work refers to the 'search for deeper meaning and purpose, living one's dream, expressing one's inner life needs by seeking meaningful work, and contributing to others' (Milliman et al., 2003, p.429). Having a deep sense of meaning and purpose in one's work is named as a fundamental pillar of spirituality in the workplace (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003). As an individual-level dimension of workplace spirituality, this dimension is more about how individuals interact with their work and whether the work possesses a greater meaning for them. As employees are more likely to involve themselves in work that gives meaning to their lives, workers having a sense that they are doing meaningful work has been named one of the key features of a productive work environment (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). From a similar point of view, Vandenberghe (2011) and Moore (1992) see work as a calling or vocation that creates meaning for individuals. Meaningful work can be mind-enriching, heart-fulfilling and spirit-growing for employees, in addition to providing financial rewards (Karakas, 2010). Meaningful work occurs when an employee perceives his/her work as important or worthwhile according to his/her system of values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005).

Each individual has inner motivations, desires and truths regarding certain activities that give greater meaning to his/her life (Milliman et al., 2003). In the workplace spirituality literature, work and the workplace are considered 'purposeful' and 'meaningful' if they give greater meaning to one's life. The core element of this assumption is that certain activities and entities possess a 'sacred' meaning that enables human beings to experience a sense of meaning and purpose. As one of the core activities engaged in by human beings, networking or belonging to specific networks can also carry 'sacred' connotations, giving greater meaning to the participants' lives. Building on Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) meaning-at-work argument, we propose that the expression of spirituality at the network level requires the acceptance of the idea that actors want to be part of the networks that give meaning to their lives. Therefore, considering our research context, we have replaced the meaningful work dimension with 'meaningful membership', as members value their membership of these networks as important and meaningful elements of their lives.

2.4.1.2. *A sense of community*. Another fundamental aspect of workplace spirituality is a group-level dimension, known as a 'sense of community' or interconnectedness. According to this aspect of workplace spirituality, 'people see themselves as connected to each other and that there is some type of relationship between one's inner self and the inner self of other people' (Milliman et al., 2003, p. 429). This is about having deep mental, emotional and spiritual connections with others in the workplace (Neal & Bennett, 2000). It mostly emphasizes spiritual connections between actors, which may result from shared values and belief-type bonding forces. A strong sense of community among the members of an organization can generate more support, effectiveness and genuine caring, which ultimately affect organizational effectiveness. As highlighted by Pfeffer (2003, p. 7), an 'important dimension that people value at work is being able to feel part of a larger community or being interconnected'. As spiritual beings, people live in communities formed from 'high-quality connections' (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Individuals need to have a sense of being part of a group in order for their spirituality to be nourished in the workplace. Once employees see themselves as part of workplace community and share the group's purposes, they are likely to invest more energy in working towards the shared goals of the community. People are more likely to value a workplace in which they feel a part of the community or are interconnected with others there (Pfeffer, 2003). A similar logic is applicable at the

network level. If individuals experience a strong sense of community with other actors in their networks, they are more likely to find their spirit nourished and energized, which will in turn motivate them to work towards the shared goals of the community, resulting in greater benefits to all members.

**2.4.1.3. Alignment of values.** Alignment with organizational values, an organizational-level dimension of spirituality, refers to individuals' strong alignment with those values: 'Alignment with the organization's values is related to the premise that an individual's purpose is larger than one's self and should make a contribution to others or society' (Milliman et al., 2003, p. 429). Connecting strongly with the organization's values and purpose can motivate individuals and increase their commitment, more so than material rewards can. Individuals are mostly more eager to work for institutions that create value not only for their own benefit but also for the larger society (Malphurs, 1996; Milliman et al., 2003). When there is strong alignment between individuals and organizational values and purpose, greater spirituality and commitment can be achieved in the workplace. Following similar logic, we argue that, if members of a network share certain values or have strongly aligned values, they are more likely to experience a higher level of spirituality at the network level, which leads to stronger commitment to the network.

These three dimensions for measuring workplace spirituality have been employed and confirmed for different research contexts in various studies (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009). The relationship between workplace spirituality and its outcomes has also been well documented. Previous empirical research has revealed a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and job satisfaction (Chawla & Guda, 2010; Milliman et al., 2003), organizational performance (Neck & Milliman, 1994) and organizational commitment (Chawla & Guda, 2010; Milliman et al., 2003) and a negative relationship with the intention to quit (Chawla & Guda, 2010).

## 2.5. Trust

Trust has been recognized as a key driver of network commitment in the extant literature (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996; Gounaris, 2005; Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993a; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma & Patterson, 2000; Wong & Sohal, 2002). Moorman et al. (1993a, p.82) defined trust as 'a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence'. Trust '[exists] when one party has confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity' (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). Both definitions highlight confidence as a behavioural component of trust that arises from the belief that the trusted party is reliable and has high integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The confidence component of trust is particularly important as a significant commitment can be achieved when parties have confidence in the reliability and integrity of their exchange partners (Aulakh, Kotabe, & Sahay, 1996). Similarly, Anderson and Narus (1990, p.45) highlighted the confidence element of trust by focusing on the perceived outcomes, defining confidence as a 'firm's belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm as well as not take unexpected actions that result in negative outcomes'. These perceived outcomes are only possible if the exchange partner can be confidently relied upon.

Previous studies have identified trust as a key determinant of network efficiency as it lowers conflict, reduces negotiation costs, fosters information sharing and cooperation among network members and operates as an efficient social control mechanism (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Gulati & Sytch, 2008; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992; Sarkar et al., 1998). Yet, as indicated by Gulati and Sytch (2008), previous research has primarily focused on the outcomes of trust and has mostly overlooked its antecedent conditions, with a

narrow focus on the history of interaction as its main antecedent. Hence, today's research must determine how trust is developed in network relationships, so as to reveal different antecedent factors that foster trust.

## 3. Conceptual model and hypothesis development

The present research extends the boundaries of earlier network commitment work, by bringing spirituality into the research context as a response to the call for further research focusing on the antecedents of network commitment (Clarke, 2006). The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in Fig. 1. It represents the relationships between the three main constructs: spirituality, trust and network commitment. The spirituality construct has three sub-dimensions: a sense of community, meaningful membership and the alignment of values. In the model, spirituality is proposed as the main driver of network commitment and trust, and trust is proposed as a mediator between spirituality and network commitment.

### 3.1. Spirituality and network commitment

Previous research has extensively focused on the relationship between spirituality and organizational commitment and proposed that spirituality drives individuals to feel a bond with their organization and a willingness to maintain their membership (Milliman et al., 2003; Pfeffer & Vega, 1999; Rego & Cunha, 2008; Vandenberghe, 2011). For instance, Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi (1999) found a positive relationship between a sense of community and employee commitment. Kouzes and Posner (1995) revealed increased employee commitment to be an outcome of spiritual values in the workplace. Milliman et al. (2003), in their empirical work, identified that all three dimensions of spirituality (a sense of community, meaningful work and the alignment of values) were significantly related to organizational commitment. Whereas the relationship between spirituality and organizational commitment has been well addressed and studied empirically in the literature, to the best of the author's knowledge there has been no study investigating the role of spirituality in network commitment. Unlike previous studies, this research does not focus on the employees of a focal organization, but on individuals from different organizations, connecting through networks. It proposes that a climate for spirituality among network members can create a set of shared perceptions through which a more effective network mechanism and higher commitment can be achieved.

The relationship between spirituality and network commitment can be better understood through the notion of the 'sacred'. This refers to holy things that are not ordinary and deserve more respect and veneration (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). The relationship between spirituality and the notion of the sacred was identified by Hill et al. (2000, p. 64), stating that 'ideologies, activities and lifestyles are not spiritual...unless they involve considerations of the sacred'. Individuals are more likely to protect, preserve and invest more in what they perceive to be sacred, as such objects invoke in individuals feelings of devotion, reverence, respect and congruence. It has also been highlighted that people can be linked together in communities by their common understanding of the sacred (Pargament, 2008). A transcendental meaning of network membership can be perceived as more valuable for the members. Applying this to our research context, we argue that, as Anatolian Tigers perceive their membership and networks as sacred, they are more likely to commit to their networks.

We replace organizational commitment with network commitment and aim to understand how and to what extent

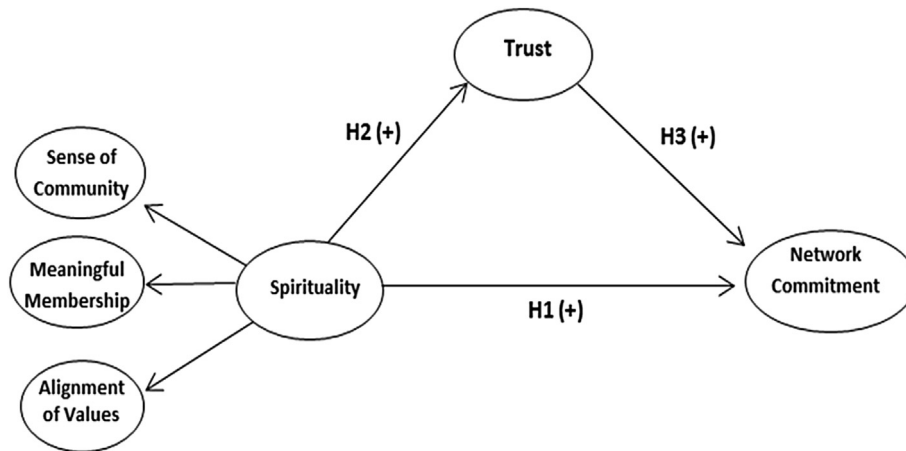


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

spirituality affects individuals' network commitment in a specific network context. Drawing on the existing literature on the link between spirituality and organizational commitment, our hypothesis at the network level is the following:

**H1.** *The greater the experience of spirituality among the network members, the greater is their commitment to the networks.*

### 3.2. Spirituality and trust among network members

Previous research has highlighted the relationship between workplace spirituality and increased honesty and trust within the organization (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999). Spirituality has been proposed to be conducive to trust between employer and employees (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004). Similarly, Biberman and Whitty (1997, p. 133) argued that 'they [persons operating from a spiritual paradigm perspective] would also be more likely to trust others, share information and work in concert with teams and co-workers to accomplish mutual objectives' (highlighted by the authors). Previous research has found that trust is important in developing commitment and that spirituality fosters commitment by establishing a climate of trust in the workplace (Burack, 1999). We also argue that spirituality fosters trust; however, unlike the previous research, we also investigate how trust mediates the relationship between spirituality and network commitment. Whereas the relationship between spirituality and trust has previously been investigated in the context of the workplace and within organizational boundaries, looking at trust between employees or between employer and employees, say, we focus on trust at the network level. In our research context, having common spiritual values is highlighted as one of the main drivers of trust among Anatolian Tigers. One of the respondents stated the following:

'We are together with businessmen who share same spiritual and moral values, which fosters trust and hence creates strong networks.' (KYS3<sup>6</sup>)

Building on the previous research that has accepted spirituality as a significant determinant of trust (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002), we propose that spirituality fosters trust among network members, in the following hypothesis:

**H2.** *The greater the experience of spirituality among the network members, the more trust exists among them.*

### 3.3. Trust and network commitment

Trust exists when one party has confidence in the other's reliability and believes that the other will not exploit his/her vulnerabilities (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sabel, 1993). Trust in another party can be developed through ongoing interactions (networks), as they enable network members to gather superior information and accumulate knowledge about each other, increase identification and reduce informational asymmetries that in turn affect the formation of knowledge-based trust (Gulati, 1995; Gulati et al., 2000). One of the important indicators used in previous research to reflect trust is 'the length of prior interaction' (duration of relationship) between partners, as interaction allows them to get to know each other and creates familiarity (Gulati and Sytch (2008, p.167). For instance, it is argued that cooperation (cooperative networks) is more likely to exist between economic actors who transact with one another if they have a great deal of information about each other (Ring, 1997, p. 115). The knowledge-based trust arguments implicitly suggest there may be a causal relationship from network commitment to trust.

On the other hand, a good deal of the prominent prior research has identified trust as a major determinant of network commitment, with a causal relationship from trust to commitment (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Dwyer et al., 1987; Ganesan & Hess, 1997; Kwon & Suh, 2004; Ganesan, 1994; Moorman, Deshpandé, & Zaltman, 1993b; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Achrol (1991) highlighted trust as the major determinant of network commitment. In their seminal work, Morgan and Hunt (1994) also revealed trust to be a significant antecedent of network commitment. As highlighted by Hrebiniak (1974), the rationale for a causal relationship from trust to commitment is straightforward: If any network is characterized by trust, actors are likely to value that network more and commit to it. Otherwise, 'mistrust breeds mistrust' and actors seek out short-term exchange benefits rather than long-term network commitment (McDonald, 1981, p. 834).

In the context of spirituality, we propose that network members can develop trust in each other by means of spirituality, which creates a benevolent climate among the actors (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). The relevant literature has considered benevolence, which is about genuine concern and care for the partner rather than following a purely egocentric profit motive, as a key underlying pillar of trust (Ganesan & Hess, 1997; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). A high

<sup>6</sup> Interview with MUSIAD member in Kayseri, April 2013.

degree of similarity in world views and mindsets and a shared identity among the actors are considered to foster benevolence-based trust (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003; Yildiz, 2016). It has been argued that the actors whose behaviours are considered benevolent are likely to be perceived as more trustworthy (Ganesan & Hess, 1997, p. 442). Hence, perceived benevolence among network partners (a benevolent climate) provides a fertile ground for the fostering of trust (Johnson, Cullen, Sakano, & Takenouchi, 1996). Besides this, common spiritual values among network members are likely to create particular norms, in terms of actors' behaviours and expectations about 'appropriate actions'. These are shared by the group, which ultimately creates trust among the group members (Dwyer et al., 1987; Heide & John, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). We argue that, in our research context, trust is primarily created as an outcome of a spiritual climate among network members, which in turn fosters commitment. This leads to a causal relationship from trust to network commitment. Our exploratory interviews also supported this relationship as respondents reported that trust was an outcome of having common spiritual values rather than of developing knowledge-based trust. One of the respondents stated the following:

'I have a strong sense of trust in MUSIAD members. If someone now knocks on my door and introduces himself as a MUSIAD member, I will help him even if I do not know him personally. This is because MUSIAD members are honest and trustworthy people in my perception. But I will not do the same thing for other businessmen who are not MUSIAD members.' (BRS2<sup>7</sup>)

Following previous research that has accepted trust as a major determinant of network commitment (Achrol, 1991; Dwyer et al., 1987; Moorman et al., 1992) and drawing on our forgoing arguments on the relationship between spirituality, trust and network commitment, we propose a causal relationship from trust to network commitment, as in the following hypothesis:

**H3.** *The greater the trust built through the spiritual climate among the network members, the greater is their commitment to the networks.*

## 4. Research methods

### 4.1. Exploratory interviews, sampling and data collection

We initially conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve owners/top managers of firms that are members of two business associations (MUSIAD and TUSKON) to inform the subsequent survey-based stage. The data were collected over five weeks during April and May 2013. The respondents were chosen using a non-probability purposive sampling technique from four different cities in which both business associations have a strong presence. There were two predetermined criteria set out for the sampling procedure: the companies had to be (i) members of MUSIAD or TUSKON and (ii) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as most Anatolian Tigers meet both of these criteria.

The respondents were mainly asked about network commitment and its antecedent conditions. The interviews demonstrated that the members were highly committed to the networks, the main drivers being their perceptions of meaningful membership, a sense of community and an alignment of values. These initial exploratory findings contributed significantly to our understanding of the key factors driving network commitment and allowed us to adapt the existing measures to our research context.

In the second phase of the research, we conducted a questionnaire, developed from the existing measures in the light of findings from the initial qualitative stage. Multistage sampling was deemed the most appropriate probability sampling technique, as our target population was geographically dispersed and face-to-face interaction was required. To achieve multistage sampling, first, the sub-locations were randomly sampled and then respondents from each location were chosen at random. To do this, initial contact was made with the business associations' branch offices in the four randomly selected locations (Kayseri, Konya, Bursa and Inegol) and they were asked to introduce the researcher to the possible respondents (randomly chosen) that met the given criteria. Questionnaires were implemented, face to face, with the owners/top managers of 120 SMEs belonging to MUSIAD or TUSKON. The survey data were collected over three months (mid-April and mid-May 2014 and July–September 2014). As the data were collected in Turkey, an EU candidate country, we consider it 'European' data. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample firms.

### 4.2. Measurement

Multi-item scales were used to measure the spirituality, trust and network commitment constructs of our proposed model. All constructs were adapted from key, relevant references from top journals, which support content validity and are in line with previous measurement, operationalized as reflective multi-item scales (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

#### 4.2.1. Spirituality

The spirituality construct was borrowed from the workplace spirituality literature, which deals with the meaning and implications of spirituality in a workplace context. We adapted it to the network context (Milliman et al., 2003). Ashmos and Duchon (2000) developed the initial workplace spirituality measure, which included seven different dimensions. Later studies have reduced it to three dimensions focusing on the individual, group and organizational levels (Hawley, 1993; Milliman et al., 1999, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Neal & Bennett, 2000). The rationale for choosing these three dimensions (meaningful work, a sense of community and the alignment of values) was that 'they are more likely to have closer relationships with our intended study objective, employee work attitudes and behaviors' (Milliman et al., 2003, p.428). Following that rationale, we developed a seven-point Likert scale and adapted these three dimensions to our research context, which similarly deals with the commitment behaviours and attitudes of the network members. The meaningful membership and alignment of value constructs include four items each and the sense of community construct includes five items, as sub-dimensions of the spirituality construct.

Spirituality, as a complex and unobservable abstract construct, is operationalized as superordinate multidimensional construct, which is inferred from its three dimensions (Wong, Law, & Huang, 2008). Multidimensional construct 'refers to several distinct but related dimensions treated as a single theoretical concept' and provides holistic representations of complex phenomena in relatively simple abstractions (Edwards, 2001, p. 144; Polites, Roberts, & Thatcher, 2012). It enabled us to theorize about and also evaluate the influence of the spirituality (higher-order construct), rather than the influence of its three dimensions, on trust and network commitment (Polites et al., 2012). We initially defined the relationships between the spirituality construct and its dimensions and then developed conceptual arguments between spirituality, trust and network commitment (Wong et al., 2008). An individual who experiences spirituality will exhibit all three of these dimensions to some extent. That means the first-order dimensions of

<sup>7</sup> Interview with MUSIAD member in Bursa, April 2013.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics.

|                                    | Range  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | S.D.   |
|------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| Length of Membership (years)       | 22.00  | 1.00    | 23.00   | 10.633 | 5.444  |
| Total Sales (million Turkish Lira) | 138.80 | 1.20    | 140.00  | 17.407 | 20.426 |
| Firm Age (years)                   | 47.00  | 3       | 50.00   | 21.225 | 8.887  |
| Number of Full-time Employees      | 230.00 | 15      | 245.00  | 84.491 | 59.052 |
| <b>N = 120</b>                     |        |         |         |        |        |

spirituality (sense of community, alignment of values and meaningful membership) co-vary (Polites et al., 2012).

#### 4.2.2. Trust

Trust is defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based upon the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or to control that other party.

Trust is conceptualized as 'a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence' (Moorman et al., 1993a, p.82). It was measured here using four items, based on a seven-point Likert scale. Construct items were drawn from Sherer (2003) and adapted to the research context in the light of the findings from the initial exploratory interviews. The respondents were asked to evaluate the trust among the network members on the seven-point Likert scale.

#### 4.2.3. Network commitment

Network commitment is conceptualized as 'an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely' (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p.23). The construct of network commitment was measured using four items on a seven-point Likert scale adapted from the studies of Sherer (2003) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). The aim was to determine the extent to which MUSIAD and TUSKON members are committed to their networks. Thus, networks was rephrased as 'MUSIAD/TUSKON networks' in order to adapt the items to the research context.

#### 4.3. Control variables

We used length of membership and firm size as control variables. Length of membership was defined and operationalized as the number of years since the start of the firm's membership (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995). Firm size was defined and operationalized as the total sales of a company (Cavusgil, Calantone, & Zhao, 2003; Yli-Renko, Autio, & Tontti, 2002).

### 5. Results

We used PLS-SEM to analyse the proposed model using our data, applying SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2014). The following key features made PLS-SEM the most appropriate choice for this study. Firstly, PLS-SEM is considered one of the most suitable techniques for examining predictive research models that focus on the early stages of theory development<sup>8</sup> (Fornell &

Bookstein, 1982; Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012b; Henseler et al., 2009). To the best of our knowledge, the relationship between spirituality, trust and network commitment has not previously been studied. We develop a conceptual framework and explore these previously untested relationships using a 'soft-modelling' approach (Wold, 1980). Based on this understanding, our research objective is not to mimic common factor models and covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) results. Thus, the traditional PLS approach fits our research context very well (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Secondly, PLS-SEM has the advantage of imposing a minimal requirement on sample size for sufficient statistical power to be achieved (Hair et al., 2012b; Lohmöller, 1989). For example, Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler (2009, p. 340) highlight that 'the minimum sample size necessary to achieve a given level of statistical power in PLS is always less than or equal to the size required for ML-based CBSEM'. Our sample size (n = 120) is small according to Reinartz et al. (2009), who indicated that studies should apply PLS when the number of observations is lower than 250. Thirdly, we have a complex research model including both first- and higher-order constructs in the type of variables and also direct and mediated effects in the hypothesized relationships (Albort-Morant, Leal-Millán, & Cepeda, 2016). Finally, PLS enables one to simultaneously assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model (outer model) and the estimation of the relationships of the structural model (inner model) (Barroso, Carrión, & Roldán, 2010; Chin, 1998).

We followed a two-stage approach for the operationalization of the superordinate multidimensional construct – spirituality (Chin, 2010; Wright, Campbell, Thatcher, & Roberts, 2012). We first weighted and combined the items for each dimension and ran the first-order measurement model to create the latent variable scores. In the second stage, the three dimensions became the observed indicators of the spirituality construct, and then we ran the full structural model to evaluate the structural model results (Albort-Morant et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2012). The two-stage approach provided us 'the advantage of estimating a more parsimonious model on the higher level analysis without needing the lower order constructs' (Becker, Klein, & Wetzels, 2012, p. 366). Additionally, we applied PLS Mode A measurement for two reasons. On the theoretical level, we use reflective constructs, suggesting the constructs explain all indicators at the same time (Becker, Rai, & Rigdon, 2013). The PLS literature indicates that reflective measurements are usually associated with Mode A when following the two-stage approach (Becker et al., 2012; Henseler et al., 2009). On the measurement level, this implies that we create proxies for the reflective latent construct that is subjected to analysis in PLS Mode A.

#### 5.1. Measurement model results

Applying the measurement model involves assessing reliability and validity. We examined internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The Cronbach's alpha values of each construct were above 0.7, ranging from 0.782 to 0.913, which suggests a high level of internal reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). We also used CR scores to assess the internal

<sup>8</sup> Since we aim at theorizing rather than theory testing, the nature of this research is exploratory. Arguably, hypothesis testing can be seen as going against the exploratory nature of the work (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Jean, 2013). However, we argue that this study has a quasi-exploratory approach and is positioned in what Weick (1995) calls an 'interim struggle' of theorizing (Sinkovics, 2016) engaged in so as to arrive on more solid ground for making generalizations (Sinkovics et al., 2013). Hence, we deliberately applied the "soft-modelling" capabilities of PLS-SEM (Richter, Sinkovics, Ringle, & Schlaegel, 2016; Ringle et al., 2014; Wold, 1980).



**Table 2**  
Discriminant validity.

| 9 Fornell–Lacker criterion |              |              | Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) |      |       |       |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------------|------|-------|-------|
|                            | SPRT         | NC           | TR                                 |      |       |       |
| SPRT                       | <b>0.834</b> |              |                                    | SPRT |       |       |
| NC                         | 0.522        | <b>0.849</b> |                                    | NC   | 0.608 |       |
| TR                         | 0.375        | 0.428        | <b>0.795</b>                       | TR   | 0.461 | 0.500 |

**Notes:** SPRT: Spirituality; NC: Network Commitment; TR: Trust. Fornell–Lacker Criterion: Bold figures on the diagonal are the square roots of AVE.

reliability of the latent variables (Werts, Linn, & Jöreskog, 1974). The CR scores were all above 0.8, ranging from 0.872 to 0.939, which suggests that the composite measurement items have sufficient reliability (Hair et al., 2017; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The minimum cut-off criterion for the indicator's outer loadings is 0.5 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). The absolute standardized first-order outer loadings ranged from 0.545 to 0.941, with most items exceeding the value of 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All of the above results guarantee the reliability of the measurement in our measurement model.

The validity of the measurement model was assessed based on convergent and discriminant validities. All constructs showed AVE values greater than the 0.5 thresholds, ranging from 0.632 to 0.795, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We assessed discriminant validity with Fornell–Larcker and Heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) criteria. The Fornell–Larcker criterion compares the square root of AVE of each latent variable with the cross-loadings. A square root of AVE higher than the cross-loading value confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The results presented in Table 2 confirm the discriminant validity in our constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A recent alternative approach to the discriminant validity assessment is to check the HTMT ratio of the correlations, developed by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2014b). The HTMT results presented in Table 2 are all below the conservative threshold value of 0.85, which again warrants discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2014b). We also applied bootstrapping procedure to test the distribution of the HTMT statistics (Hair et al., 2017). In order to check whether the HTMT values were significantly different from 1, we computed bootstrap confidence intervals from the 5000 bootstrap samples (Hair et al., 2017). Our findings show that neither of the confidence intervals includes the value of 1, which confirms that the constructs are empirically distinct and indicates that the constructs have discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017).

The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is the only approximate model-fit criterion in PLS path modelling (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016; Henseler et al., 2014a; Hu & Bentler, 1998). An SRMR value of less than 0.08 is considered a good fit for CB-SEM models (Hair et al., 2017; Hu & Bentler, 1998). We found an SRMR value of 0.047, which indicated that we had a good model fit for the PLS-SEM analysis (Henseler et al., 2016).

## 5.2. Structural model results

The reliable and valid measurement model estimations allowed us to proceed with the assessment of the structural model. The predictive power of the model was evaluated with  $R^2$  scores. The  $R^2$  value of network commitment is 0.335, which is a moderate level (Cohen, 1988; Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012). That of trust is 0.140, which is above the acceptable level of 0.1 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Acceptable  $R^2$  values very much depend on the research context; for instance, a  $R^2$  value of 0.2 is accepted as high in some

disciplines, such as consumer behaviour (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012a; Hair et al., 2011). As we are also analysing individuals' behavioural orientations using the spirituality dimension, we believe that our  $R^2$  values are realistic.

The effect size ( $f^2$ , the change in  $R^2$ ) is evaluated in order to examine the impact of an independent latent variable on a dependent latent variable (Chin, 2010). It is calculated as  $f^2 = (R^2_{included} - R^2_{excluded}) / (1 - R^2_{included})$ .  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are used to indicate that a predictor latent variable has a small, medium or large effect size at the structural level (Chin, 2010; Cohen, 1988). The effect size of spirituality on network commitment is found to be at the medium level ( $f^2 = 0.229$ ). Trust has a small effect on network commitment ( $f^2 = 0.094$ ).

We run a blindfolding test to assess the predictive relevance of the path model (Hair et al., 2017). The  $Q^2$  values of network commitment and trust are above zero, which indicates the model's predictive relevance regarding the endogenous latent variables ( $Q^2 = 0.211$ ,  $Q^2 = 0.074$ , respectively). We also calculated the effect size  $q^2$ , which reflects an exogenous construct's contribution to an endogenous latent variable's  $Q^2$  value (Hair et al., 2017). The effect size  $q^2$  values of trust and spirituality on network commitment are found to be at the small level ( $q^2 = 0.051$ ,  $q^2 = 0.125$ , respectively). Table 3 presents the  $R^2$  values and effect sizes of the structural model.

## 5.3. Hypothesis testing

To test the three hypotheses in our model statistically, we used a bootstrapping technique, which allowed us to assess the significance of path coefficients (Henseler et al., 2009). PLS-SEM does not presume a normal data distribution, but applies a non-parametric form of bootstrapping through which standard errors and  $t$ -statistics are obtained to assess the significance statistics of the hypothetical relationships (Hair et al., 2011). We used a resampling bootstrapping (5000 resamples) of 120 observations.

The path coefficient from spirituality to network commitment is 0.421 ( $t = 5.171$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which supports H1. The path coefficient from spirituality to trust is 0.375 ( $t = 3.496$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and that from trust to network commitment is 0.270 ( $t = 3.707$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which support H2 and H3. The results indicate that spirituality is a significant driver of network commitment. Moreover, spirituality also fosters trust, which positively affects the commitment of the members to the networks ( $\beta = 0.375$  and  $\beta = 0.270$ , respectively). The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 4 and also illustrated in Fig. 2.

We controlled for the effects of length of membership and firm size on network commitment. Previous research has found that length of membership affects members' commitment to and participation in their respective networks to a great extent (Cress, McPherson, & Rotolo, 1997). Firm size is also an important attribute, affecting firm behaviours such as cooperation and networking. Arndt and Sternberg (2000) found that small firms are more strongly tied to and embedded within local networks than are large firms. Small firms lack resources and capabilities that large firms possess, which creates recognition of the need for interdependence and networking (Chetty & Agndal, 2007; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Zhou, Wu, & Luo, 2007). As small firms rely more on their external networks to compensate for their liability of smallness, they are likely to demonstrate a higher network commitment than their larger counterparts.

The path coefficients between the control variables and the endogenous variable are provided in Table 4. The findings demonstrate that there are no significant paths from length of membership and firm size to network commitment.

Finally, we conducted a mediation analysis and ran

**Table 3**  
Determination coefficient ( $R^2$ ) and effect sizes  $f^2$ ,  $q^2$ .

|                    | $R^2$ | $f^2$ | Effect size rating | $q^2$ | Effect size rating |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Network Commitment | 0.335 | —     | —                  | —     | —                  |
| Spirituality       | —     | 0.229 | Medium effect      | 0.125 | Small effect       |
| Trust              | —     | 0.094 | Small effect       | 0.051 | Small effect       |
| Trust              | 0.140 | —     | —                  | —     | —                  |

**Table 4**  
Assessment of the structural model and the control variables.

| Hypothesis and Control Variables          | Standardized coefficient | 95% BC confidence interval | Statistically significant? |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| H1: Spirituality → Network Commitment     | 0.405***                 | (0.232, 0.548)             | Yes                        |
| H2: Spirituality → Trust                  | 0.372***                 | (0.157, 0.572)             | Yes                        |
| H3: Trust → Network Commitment            | 0.277***                 | (0.132, 0.419)             | Yes                        |
| Length of Membership → Network Commitment | 0.074                    | (−0.080, 0.217)            | No (0.332)                 |
| Firm Size → Network Commitment            | −0.050                   | (−0.183, 0.065)            | No (0.385)                 |

Note: \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .

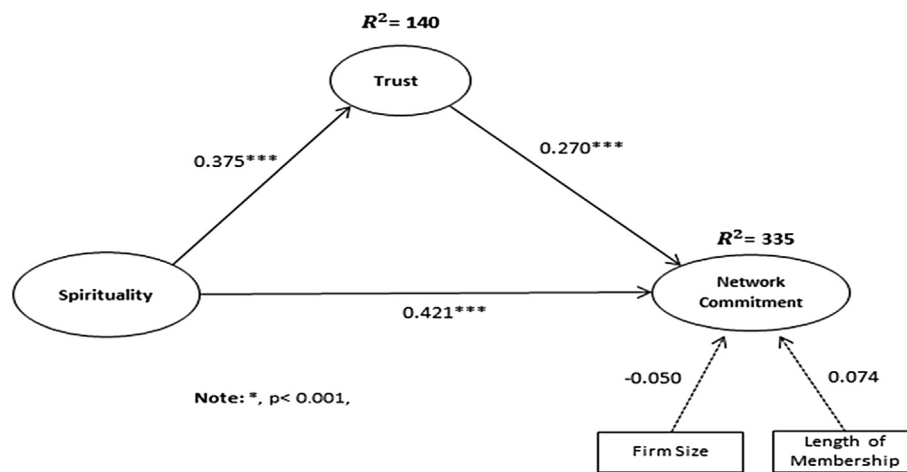


Fig. 2. Assessment of structural model.

bootstrapping with 5000 bootstrap samples, following Hair et al. (2017) and Nitzl, Roldán, and Cepeda (2016). Mediation analysis includes a mediating variable that takes on an intermediate role in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Nitzl et al. (2016) propose two steps for a state-of-the-art mediation analysis in PLS-SEM. The first step is to determine the significance of the indirect effects through application of bootstrap routines. The significant indirect effect in step 1 confirms the mediating effect. In the second step, the type of mediation (full or partial) is determined. We followed the same steps for our mediation analysis.

In our model, trust operates as a mediating variable between spirituality and network commitment. We found a significant indirect effect of the relationship from spirituality to network commitment (0.101), as the 95% confidence interval does not include zero. We also obtained a  $t$ -value of 2.348 and a  $p$ -value of less than 0.05. We then focused on the significance of the direct effect from spirituality to network commitment. Spirituality has a pronounced (0.421) and significant direct effect ( $t = 5.171$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on network commitment. Both the direct and indirect effects from spirituality to network commitment are significant (Table 5), which indicates that trust partially mediates the relationship between them (Hair et al., 2017). Moreover, the product of the direct and indirect effects has a positive sign ( $0.421 * 0.101 = 0.0425$ ) as both effects are positive. Hence, the results reveal that trust represents a complementary partial mediation for

the path from spirituality to network commitment. This complementary mediation suggests that trust explains the relationship between spirituality and network commitment (Nitzl et al., 2016).

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

### 6.1. Theoretical contribution

The results support the three hypothesized relationships between spirituality, trust and network commitment. Firstly, spirituality was found to be a significant driver of both trust and network commitment. Secondly, trust positively affects network commitment and also partially mediates the relationship between spirituality and network commitment. Our findings at the network level show that spirituality positively affects network commitment, which is congruent with the studies that empirically investigated the relationship between spirituality and employees' organizational commitment (Milliman et al., 1999, 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008). Unlike the previous studies, our findings reflect the role of spirituality at the network level, which has previously been overlooked. The finding on the positive impact of spirituality on trust at the network level is consistent with previous research indicating that spirituality leads to trust in organizations (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999). Moreover, our findings indicate that trust fosters network commitment, which is in line with the previous research

**Table 5**  
Significance analysis of direct and indirect effects.

|           | Direct standardized coefficient | 95% BC confidence interval of the direct effect | Significance ( $p < 0.05$ )? | Indirect standardized coefficient | 95% BC confidence interval of the Indirect effect | Significance ( $p < 0.05$ )? |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| SPRT → NC | 0.421                           | (0.231, 0.552)                                  | Yes                          | 0.101                             | (0.028, 0.192)                                    | Yes                          |

**Note:** SPRT: Spirituality; NC: Network Commitment.

(Achrol, 1991; Dwyer et al., 1987; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, unlike the previous studies, this research confirms that both network commitment of and trust among the network members are driven by spirituality. Moreover, it is also found that trust partially mediates the relationship between spirituality and network commitment.

This research contributes to management research in several ways. First and foremost, as emphasized previously, the management literature lacks research addressing ‘particular antecedent conditions that give rise to commitment in networks’ (Clarke, 2006, p.1185). In order to respond to this clearly identified research gap, we imported spirituality into our research context and investigated its relationships with trust and particularly with network commitment, which has not been addressed before. Previous studies investigating the relationship between spirituality and commitment have typically stayed at the organizational level, while research focusing on the antecedents of network commitment has mostly been dominated by utilitarian and instrumental approaches.

Secondly, we significantly contribute to research on trust and network commitment. We used length of membership and firm size as control variables. Whereas previous research has studied the relationship between trust and commitment in both directions, this research proves that, in the spirituality context, trust is the source of network commitment. In particular, our control variables strongly support this argument. As discussed earlier, trust can be developed through networks, as members obtain information on each other and reduce information asymmetry. Parties in an exchange relationship can develop higher trust in each other by learning about their partners’ competence (Gulati & Sytch, 2008; Sako & Helper, 1998), which then leads to higher network commitment. Besides this, Gulati and Sytch (2008) argued that partners tend to accumulate more knowledge about each other as relationships go on over time, and thus knowledge-based trust can be generated. From this point of view, length of membership would be expected to affect network commitment, as members obtained more information on each other through their networks over time, in turn either fostering or impeding the formation of trust, which then affects network commitment. However, we found an insignificant effect of length of membership on network commitment. This finding, in the context of spiritual-based networks, contradicts the aforementioned notion of knowledge-based trust. In our research context, spirituality could be the reason for this. As trust in a network actor is built as a result of the spiritual climate and perceived benevolence among the members, the impact of length of membership, through which information about other actors can be obtained, could be insignificant. Based on this finding, we can conclude that trust among network members is independent of network engagement; it is, instead, spirituality-driven.

Additionally, previous network research employing utilitarian perspectives has mostly indicated that small firms are more likely to rely on their networks to compensate for their lack of resources (Chetty & Agndal, 2007; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Zhou et al., 2007). By contrast with this argument, we found that, in the spirituality context, firm size, which demonstrates a significant variance in our sample, does not have a significant impact on network commitment either. This supports our argument that the network

commitment of the members is driven by spirituality rather than materialistic motivations such as accessing resources through networks. Otherwise, if the commitment were motivated by materialistic and instrumental benefits (instrumental commitment), smaller firms would be expected to register a higher level of commitment to the networks than their larger counterparts, to compensate for their liability of smallness (i.e., lack of resources).

Overall, our empirical findings respond firmly to the call for further research investigating the antecedent conditions of network commitment. We have empirically confirmed that spirituality is a significant antecedent condition for trust and particularly for network commitment in our research context.

## 6.2. Practical implications

This study provides empirical support for the argument that spirituality significantly advances trust among network members and fosters commitment to the networks. Previous research dealing with spirituality in the workplace found similar outcomes at the organizational level and suggested that organizations should foster spirituality in the workplace to achieve better performance outcomes at both employee and firm levels. Based on our findings at the network level, we can also confirm that spirituality should be practised by organizations while they are engaging with other economic and social actors through networks. Organizations are embedded in a wide set of networks, with other social and economic actors, and ‘to be an effective competitor in today’s global marketplace requires one to be an effective cooperator in some network of organizations’ (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p.34). As more effective network mechanisms are more likely to create better network outcomes for organizations, they should encourage pre-requisite conditions, such as spirituality, to foster trust, network commitment and in turn effective network outcomes. Networks should not be considered static systems, but communities of spirits. Humans are not only rationale but also spiritual beings searching for meaning in their work life and communities. Thus, spirituality at the network level should be added into managers’ agendas. Specifically, large shareholding managers have to navigate an economic and non-economic environment, where spiritually-oriented activists and NGOs campaign on issues such as human rights (e.g. Amnesty International), climate change (e.g. Forum for the Future) and labour issues (e.g. Labour behind the Label), particularly in the context of global value chains, which may affect the strategies of such firms. Managers whose operations are affected by such issues will be better able to understand the pressures and adapt their strategies in line with a comprehension of the spiritual issues that may underpin such activist networks and their influence on ethical assessment of consumers and other stakeholders. Therefore, it is particularly important for managers to develop appropriate networking strategies and plan right staffing in different contexts across the Europe, where network partners can be understood by spirituality rather than materialistic orientations.

Additionally, as indicated previously, the vibrant activities engaged in Anatolian Tigers through their effective network mechanisms have spurred economic development and modernization in second- and third-tier cities across Turkey. Connecting that outcome with our findings, we can argue that spirituality-

driven networks among Anatolian Tigers create an effective mechanism through which collective development can be achieved. Therefore, policymakers can exploit this potential in any country whose population mostly shares a common Islamic identity (or the common Christian identity of the European countries), to foster effective network mechanisms among businessmen and other economic and social actors.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research

As with any empirical research, our study has some limitations. Firstly, we are well aware of the fact that the present research focuses on a particular network among Anatolian Tigers, which might limit the generalizability of the findings to other network contexts. Thus, we recommend future research to investigate the role spirituality plays in network commitment in different contexts. We focus on a God-oriented spirituality in the Islamic context of Turkey, considering it a part of Europe. Our findings from Turkey are quite interesting for European-focused research as it is the predominant Muslim context among the EU member and candidate countries. As the European population is predominantly Christian, we call for further research focusing on spirituality in the Christian context of Europe. Future research could also focus on spirituality in other religious contexts (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Judaism) or on other categories of spirituality, such as world-oriented or people-oriented spirituality (Hill et al., 2000). Moreover, a comparative piece of research could be carried out to demonstrate the differences between spiritual-based networks and other types of market networks.

Secondly, we applied a cross-sectional research design and collected the data at a particular point in time, because of time and resource constraints. Acknowledging this limitation, we believe that a longitudinal future study tracking the relationship between spirituality and network commitment and testing the model we

have developed would be ideal.

We strongly call for further research investigating the relationship between the antecedent conditions of network commitment and network outcomes. Future research should particularly focus on spiritually driven networks and investigate the distinctive network characteristics and outcomes of these networks and also their impact on firm performance outcomes.

Lastly, we raise two methodological concerns relevant for future research. Whereas the traditional views on PLS have considered PLS path models recursive (i.e., there are no feedback loops), current modern views argue that they can contain feedback loops (Henseler et al., 2016). If the path models are non-recursive, instrumental variable techniques such as two-stage least squares, which also provides several model assessment criteria, should be employed (Henseler et al., 2016, p. 5). Therefore, we suggest that further research should assess the feedback loops in the path models and apply the appropriate instrumental variable techniques.

Future research could also apply social network analysis (SNA), as an analytical methodological tool, to the research context in order to reveal the structural characteristics of spiritual-based social networks, in line with the call that 'networks need to be investigated with appropriate methodologies' (Zucchella, Palamara, & Denicolai, 2007, p.277). SNA can allow a researcher to better demonstrate and visualize the relationships between actors and to determine whether networks represent different structural and positional attributes (Kurt & Yamin, 2016). This would enable a more comprehensive comparison of networks through the inclusion of their structural characteristics.

## Appendix

**Table A1**

Construct measurement, validity and reliability.

| Construct measures   | Mean  | S.D.  | Outer loadings |
|--|-------|-------|----------------|
| <i>Spirituality</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.782, CR = 0.872, AVE = 0.696) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0)          |       |       |                |
| <i>Sense of Community</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.870, CR = 0.908, AVE = 0.670) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0)    |       |       |                |
| I feel part of a community in MUSIAD (TUSKON)  | 4.808 | 0.781 | 0.884          |
| I believe MUSIAD (TUSKON) members support each other   | 4.216 | 0.801 | 0.545          |
| I feel free to express my opinions in MUSIAD (TUSKON)  | 4.966 | 0.808 | 0.859          |
| I believe MUSIAD (TUSKON) members are linked by a common purpose   | 4.925 | 0.831 | 0.853          |
| I believe MUSIAD (TUSKON) members genuinely care about each other  | 4.541 | 0.887 | 0.898          |
| <i>Meaningful Membership</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.900, CR = 0.930, AVE = 0.769) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0) |       |       |                |
| My spirit is energized by the work we do through/within MUSIAD (TUSKON)  | 5.000 | 0.978 | 0.895          |
| What I do within/through MUSIAD (TUSKON) is connected to what I think is important in life   | 5.025 | 0.965 | 0.895          |
| I always look forward to participating in MUSIAD (TUSKON) events   | 4.791 | 0.897 | 0.858          |
| I see a connection between the work we do within/through MUSIAD (TUSKON) and the larger social good of my community  | 5.141 | 0.802 | 0.860          |
| <i>Alignment of Values</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.913, CR = 0.939, AVE = 0.795) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0)   |       |       |                |
| I feel positive about the values of MUSIAD (TUSKON)  | 4.941 | 0.822 | 0.832          |
| MUSIAD (TUSKON) cares about all its members  | 4.866 | 0.808 | 0.865          |
| I feel connected with MUSIAD (TUSKON)'s goals  | 5.033 | 0.859 | 0.923          |
| I feel connected with MUSIAD (TUSKON)'s mission.   | 5.033 | 0.878 | 0.941          |
| <i>Trust</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.808, CR = 0.873, AVE = 0.632) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0)                 |       |       |                |
| MUSIAD (TUSKON) members are willing to share information with each other   | 4.208 | 0.897 | 0.777          |
| MUSIAD (TUSKON) members believe that NO member firm would behave opportunistically   | 4.191 | 1.379 | 0.827          |
| I believe that MUSIAD (TUSKON) members are honest and trustworthy  | 4.158 | 1.188 | 0.786          |
| I believe that sharing the same spiritual values increases trust   | 4.375 | 0.870 | 0.790          |
| <i>Network Commitment</i> (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.871, CR = 0.912, AVE = 0.720) (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 6, neither agree nor disagree = 0)    |       |       |                |
| We are very committed to our MUSIAD (TUSKON) networks  | 4.675 | 0.768 | 0.827          |
| We exert the maximum effort to maintain our relationship with MUSIAD (TUSKON)  | 4.608 | 0.843 | 0.828          |
| We are proud of belonging to the MUSIAD (TUSKON) networks  | 4.933 | 0.817 | 0.860          |
| We feel a strong sense of belonging to the MUSIAD (TUSKON) networks  | 4.658 | 0.704 | 0.879          |

Note: For each respondent, we used the name of the business association (MUSIAD/TUSKON) to which they belonged).

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