

EFFECT OF SPIRITUALITY ON ETHICAL AND IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOR-A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In the recent past spirituality as a way of life has emerged as a colossal movement which is becoming stronger with every passing day. Millions of people have shown interest in it and its adherents are on the rise. This trend becomes very significant for marketers from the viewpoint that these spiritual enthusiasts are consumers as well and the former would do well to understand the behavior this new group displays when buying things. It is generally believed that increasing spirituality gave rise to ethical consumer who is concerned about the effect their purchasing have on nature and society. This makes a strong case for the development of more ethical and sustainable products. This literature review delves deeply into the existing research on the subject. Several researches have been done exploring the interrelationship between spirituality and ethical consumer behavior and it has been succinctly established that there exists a link between spirituality and ethical buying intention but it is still far from conversion to ethical buying behavior. Although there are profuse researches being done on the subject in western world there is still a dearth of significant and noteworthy studies in Indian context. Whatever miniscule efforts have been done are targeting very narrow segment of respondents demographically and geographically making it insufficient for a truly comprehensive and broad study. So this literature review recommends the need for some pertinent studies taking care of the above lacuna. The literature review on impulsive buying behavior (IBB) revealed that till date no study has been done to explore the relationship between spirituality and IBB. A study on these lines is highly warranted as most of the studies on IBB have established the friction between conscience and immediate gratification at the point of purchase which makes it pertinent to enquire if development of conscience or spirituality will lower the impulsiveness in buying. It is given that the whole of retailer fraternity would be all ears to any insight on this considering that IBB contributes substantially in their total sales. Any research on this would act as spadework and set the tone for future studies on this economically important subject.

KEYWORDS: Spirituality, Religion, Ethical Buying Intention, Ethical Buying Behavior, Impulsive Buying Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, diverse segment of individuals like students, practicing managers, leaders in various fields, senior citizens, etc are following the ways of spirituality. This movement has seen a multifold rise in recent past with more than thirty billion US dollar industry with over 25 million practitioners coming up as a result. Spirituality is being seen as a cure all for a host of common problems like stress, depression, mood swings, lifestyle diseases, lack of concentration, lack of innovation, depleting levels of tolerance and patience in individuals, etc. There is a phenomenal growth in wellness and mind related therapies which have taken spirituality to the next level and now people are realizing it to be much more than some physical activities for augmenting physical health. Now it is being taken in its totality as a tool to overhaul the complete system that is body, mind and the soul.

When the whole world is in the grip of spirituality India could not be an exception to it and is seeing a new interest in and preponderance of spirituality. With opening up of economy India also saw the advent of consumerism, economic growth and its concomitant ills that the fast paced and competitive work environment inevitably brings. It was fortunate to have very rich and ancient systems of spirituality to deliver the populace from the agonizing stress and strain caused by the emerging materialistic society. The newly emerging religious and spiritual channels on television are reporting staggering growth and are reaching to millions through their all pervasive reach. With its immense popularity spiritualism and its constituents like Yoga, visualization techniques, affirmation, meditation, pranic healing, etc are much in vogue. They are considered the in thing and a mark of sophistication and elitism. More and more people are considering it as a style or fashion statement. Alternative medicines, periodicals and therapies are adding to the spiritual arsenal and playing their parts in the revolution. Most ashrams and temples these days have their own shops where one can find all kinds of essential oils, ayurvedic medicines, beauty products, books, cassettes, CDs, accessories and candles.

Impulse buying is a significant constituent of consumer behavior. Impulse buying happens when after an interface with a product the consumer develops a craving to possess and buy it immediately. Usually it is seen that there is no planning as such in impulse buying and the will power or the long term goals come in a friction with desire or the short term satisfaction. Therefore it would be seen that an impulse buyer will show both feelings of pleasure as also feeling of guilt during the process of impulse buying. It is the conscience which is giving the guilt pangs to the consumer as it hurts the spiritual make up of the being and it is the brain with its sensory mechanism craving for immediate gratification that gives the feeling of satisfaction during the process. *In this very context a pertinent question that arises naturally in our mind is whether a spiritual person would be less of an impulsive buyer? In*

the age of rising contemporary spirituality can it be expected that the consumers in general would be more thoughtful in their purchases? More reflective, more introspective?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spirituality

Even as the topic of spirituality is centuries old, it is only in the past two to three decades approximately that it has become an aspect of detailed enquiry in the realm of social sciences. The word *spirituality* derives from the Latin root *spiritus*, meaning breath of life. An evaluation of the various treatises on spirituality suggests that a comprehensive definition of spirituality needs to include four broad ideas: a feeling of inner being, a feeling of purpose, a feeling of interconnectedness, and a belief in the yonder higher power. Based on these notions, spirituality could be defined as “*the engagement to explore—and deeply and meaningfully connect one’s inner self—to the known world and beyond.*”

In the intervening years, there has been a lot of debate on the essence of spirituality among scholars of management, psychology, religion, etc. (Benjamin and Looby 1998; Marquis, Holden, and Warren 2001; Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Uncertainty between the concepts of spirituality and religion is the main source of the problem. (Dialmy 2001; Moberg 2002; Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999). In order to have a fruitful discussion on the topic of spirituality, the connection between spirituality and religion should be straightened.

Ethical Buying Behavior

There has been an increasing alarm and hue and cry on the consumption culture and its bad effect on the environment and society. Media has also become quite sensitive about it and giving full coverage and attention to every news related to it. In its wake we can observe the mushrooming of various activist groups which are drawing the attention of society towards these issues. It has also led to the introduction of various ethical products in the marketplace. Consequently it has paved way for more aware and informed consumer who are increasingly talking about the effects of their consumption behavior (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Connolly and Shaw, 2006; Crane and Matten, 2004). This more informed and aware consumer is being termed as the ethical consumer. They feel more accountable and proactive towards their responsibility to the nature and environment and express this in their shopping (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Shaw and Shui, 2002). The term ethical means different things to different people. Some take it to be environmental/green issues; some equate it with workers’ rights, other think it to be country of origin issue and some others take it to be fair trade and animal welfare.

Green consumerism is a constituent of the more generic term of ethical consumerism. The intermixing of a wide range of issues like sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism makes decisions very difficult for the customer to take (Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008). The catching interest in ethical consumption has resulted in 50% growth in global sales as endorsed by Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (2007).

With the popularity of ethical consumerism the companies also are venturing more and more towards producing ethical products (Shaw et al., 2006; Polonsky, 1995). Marketers are leaving no stone turned in adopting strategies targeting the ethically minded consumers who form a very lucrative segment which no marketer can afford to leave. Products like carbon neutral beer, hybrid car, to Fair Trade tea and chocolate are in vogue.

Spirituality and Ethical Buying Behavior

How far would we act as responsible persons fully conscious of our responsibilities towards others and nature depends a lot on our perception towards the divine, towards spirituality, and towards the higher power (Hulme, 2009). While there are many different possible approaches for investigating worldviews and values in the context of sustainability (see for example O'Brien, 2009, who explores traditional, modern and postmodern worldviews in Norway and their interface with climate adaptation measures), there is a cultural development that may be particularly of interest, as it seems to hold a certain potential for sustainable development (Campbell, 2007; Dryzek, 2005; Hanegraaff, 1996; Heelas, 1996; Ray and Anderson, 2000; Taylor, 2010). This is the rise of the culture and worldview of contemporary spirituality. Several social scientists and philosophers claim that a gradual but profound change in the Western worldview is taking place — a change in the direction of a more re-enchanted, post-material, metaphysical or spiritual worldview (Campbell, 2007; Gibson, 2009; Houtman and Mascini, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Partridge, 2005; Ray and Anderson, 2000; Tarnas, 2007). Some authors speak in this context of a “spiritual revolution” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) or a “spiritual turn” (Houtman and Aupers, 2007).

Impulse Buying Behavior

“Impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences.” Rook (1987, p. 191)

Rook (1987)’s definition delineates the two main constituents of impulse buying; there is a psychological conflict which clashes permanently with the uncontrollable craving for the object of attraction. The buyers going

for an impulse buying feel an urge to buy something which they conscientiously understand should not be bought because of health grounds, financial unfeasibility, existing clutter at home, or others' perception (Chatzidakis et al., 2009; Dholakia, 2000). Although the buyers understand the above realities they find themselves weak to resist the urge or the attraction that the product offers at that present moment (Baumeister, 2002). The emotional strain or the dissonance which an individual goes through during an impulse buying process has been universally recognized by several researches (Faber & Vohs, 2004; Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, 2006; Vohs & Faber, 2007).

In all the dissonance and friction mentioned above it is not doubt that impulse buying is a blessing in disguise for the retailers who get a windfall due to the nature of impulse buying amongst the consumers. The impulse buying's are unplanned which are plain additions to the buying carts and bring in additional or extra income to the sellers. It has been found that companies like IKEA get two third of their sales with the help impulse buying (Hill, 2011).

CONCLUSION

There have been various studies on the relationship between spirituality and ethical buying behavior. Spirituality as a construct has been compared to various variables like sustainable development, green products, workers rights, animal rights, etc. However, most of these studies have been done outside India and in a foreign context. Very few noteworthy studies on the above topics have been done by Indian researchers. And the few which have been done miss out the true research rigor by restricting the participants to a small region and overlooking the diversity component which could be crucial in this kind of research. For example some have taken students of one particular college as respondents. So, what is required urgently is to conduct this research by taking a diverse set of respondents with varying age, education, occupation, salary, geography, etc. Moreover, the existing literature on ethical buying behavior reveals a correlation between spirituality and ethical buying intention but there is a dearth of studies which link spirituality with ethical buying behavior. Until and unless the intention gets converted into actual behavior wherein consumers are seen to be not only intending but actually buying ethical products this would not have the desired effect as far as utility for industry is concerned. Obviously no marketer would be ready to put money on ethical products if he does not see the actual sales coming in or may be increasing with growth of spirituality. So we need more studies focusing on that aspect to contribute further to the industry and economy.

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