A Taxonomy of Spiritual Motivations For Consumption

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Spirituality plays an important role in motivating consumption. Consumer researchers acknowledge this, yet despite a host of studies that reflect facets of a search for spiritual fulfilment, we still lack a clear understanding of what spirituality is and how it affects consumer choices. This study sets out to advance current understanding of this previously ill-defined and misunderstood motivation for consumption, presenting a taxonomy of both cognitive and affective components of spirituality, with associated propositions for future research.

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Consumer researchers have acknowledged that spirituality is an important factor in motivating consumption (e.g. Baumgartner 2002; Curasi, Price and Arnould 2004; Gould and Stinerock 1992; Hirschman 1985; Holbrook 1999, 2001; Kozinets, 1997, 2001; Murray 2002; Thompson 2004; Twitchell 2004). Considered to be the ‘life force’ by which we act (Golberg 1998), the spirit is a major driver for human behaviour (Dyson, Cobb and Forman 1997; Golberg 1998; Stoll 1989), including consumption. Yet despite this, consumer researchers still lack a clear understanding of what spirituality is and how it affects consumer choices. This study set out to develop a taxonomy by which researchers may understand this previously ill-defined and misunderstood motivation for consumption and presents propositions through which it may be studied.

A review of consumer research reveals a paucity of studies that explicitly focus on spiritual motivations for consumption. This seems surprising given the host of studies that reflect facets of a search for spiritual fulfilment, including river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), skydiving (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993), collecting (Belk 1995; Belk et al. 1988), sporting spectatorship (Holt 1995; Kozinets et al. 2004), ownership of automobiles (Belk 2004) or pets (Hirschman 1994), and engagement in consumption communities (Belk and Costa 1998; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thompson and Troester 2002) or anticonsumption activities (Huneke, 2005; Kozinets 2002.). Furthermore, the few studies that have directly examined spiritually-motivated consumption (SMC) have predominantly focussed on its religious expression (e.g. O’Guinn and Belk 1989; Ozanne 1992; Wright and Larsen 1992), thus excluding the substantial portion of SMC that is not within a religious context (see Durgee 1999, for one exception).

Much needs yet to be learnt about spiritual motivations for consumption. Central to this is the acknowledgment that spirituality is a complex, multifaceted phenomena (Emmons and Paloutzian 2003) that cannot be characterised by a single behaviour or experience. Rather, spirituality represents a series of interrelated constructs that work together to form a cohesive yet intricate whole. Accordingly, this study offers a theoretical framework through which the many facets of spirituality may be understood and further examined.

Method
An extensive multi-disciplinary review of literature from psychology, religion, anthropology, personality, consumption and health care was undertaken. Content analysis revealed eleven potential descriptors of spirituality or spiritual experience which were synthesised into three main categories. The first two (meaning and connection) reflect the cognitive component of spirituality, while the third (emotional transcendence) reflects its affective component (Seidlitz et al. 2002). Testable propositions were then developed to enable future study.

Results

Meaning. Whether sought through literature, art, food, music, ideology, or relationships (Burkhart 2001; Dyson et al. 1997; Golberg 1998), meaning was identified as a primary focus of spirituality (Apikos 1992; Zimbauer et al. 1997), and thus a sense of meaning in life was seen to be central to spiritual wellbeing (Stoll 1989). Closely related to meaning were the concepts of purpose, hope and personhood (Dyson et al. 1997; Golberg 1998; Stoll 1989), each giving a sense of ‘what or who one ought to live for’ (Stoll 1989, 6).

Seen from a consumption standpoint, meaning may be proposed to shape an individual’s SMC choices as follows:

\[ P1: \] Individuals who feel their lives lack meaning are more likely to choose SMC experiences that offer an explicit meaning narrative within a structured context such as a church (e.g. O’Guinn and Belk 1989) or a social activist group (e.g. Kozinets and Handelman 2004).

\[ P2: \] Individuals who feel their lives already have inherent meaning are more likely to choose SMC experiences that enable them to create their own meaning narrative via self-driven behaviours (e.g. the personal fashion discourse of ‘Delores’ in Murray 2002).

Connection. Caring connections with both external ‘others’ (other people, nature or a Higher Power) and with one’s internal selves were frequently cited as key expressions and experiences of spirituality (e.g. Burkhart 2001; Dyson et al. 1997; Hirschman 1985; Holbrook 1999; Moore 1996; Rose 2001; Thompson and Troester 2002; Walton 2002; Zimbauer et al. 1997). A sense of connection to the past, present or future (Badone 1991; Golberg 1998) or to a greater plan (Emmons and Paloutzian 2003) were considered important influences on spirituality. Hope, love, compassion, trust and forgiveness were identified as vital foundations for one’s relationships, thus influencing one’s sense of connection (Dyson et al. 1997; Golberg 1998; Rose 2001; Stoll 1989).

A desire for connection may be proposed to influence SMC choices in the following ways:

\[ P3: \] Individuals seeking outer-directed spiritual connection are more likely to seek SMC experiences that are other-focussed or externally-driven such as antimarket festivals (e.g. Kozinets 2002).

\[ P4: \] Individuals seeking inner-centred spiritual connection are more likely to seek SMC experiences that are internally-focussed and self-generated such as sky diving (e.g. Celsi et al. 1993).

Emotional Transcendence. The final key characteristic of spirituality concerned the ‘feeling level’ (Stoll 1989) of spiritual experience. Desirable affective states ranged from tranquil emotions such as peace, inner harmony, comfort, or a sense of security (Golberg 1998; Moore 1996; Stoll 1989), to more vibrant emotions such as joy (Zimbauer et al. 1997), ecstasy, exaltation or rapture (Holbrook 1999).

The nature of emotional transcendence that is desired may be proposed to influence SMC choices as follows:

\[ P5: \] Individuals who seek tranquil spiritual experiences are more likely to engage in SMC activities that are of a quiet, gentle nature such as collecting (eg. Belk 1995; Belk et al. 1988) or meditative ritual (eg. Badone 1991).
P6: Individuals who seek vibrant spiritual experiences are more likely to engage in SMC activities that are of a vigorous, exciting nature such as river rafting (eg. Arnould and Price 1993) or shamanistic dance (eg. Gould 1991).

Future Directions
This study set out to advance understanding of a dynamic consumer value that has vital implications for consumer motivation. Future research may explore SMC using the taxonomy and propositions presented. Further analysis of extant literature may also be required so as to integrate additional facets of spirituality such as healing (Golberg 1998) into this taxonomy.

References
Childhood Socialization Effects on Adult Ability to Control Impulse
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Extended Abstract

Conceptualization: There has been widespread recognition of the inability of purely cognitive decision models to fully account for important aspects of consumer behavior (Bargh 2002; Luce, Jia et al. 2003). Consequently there has been increasing interest in including “visceral” factors such as impulsive drives in consumer decision-making paradigms (Alba 2000; Loewenstein 1996). The merging of these conceptual models offers great promise for transformative consumer research by improving understanding of how and why consumers often act against their own self-interest, despite their having exquisite knowledge of the negative implications of their behavior. Consumer domains in which this line of inquiry shows great promise include, drug abuse, addictions, impulsive and compulsive buying, and overeating (Hirschman 1992; O’Guinn and Faber 1989). To date, many consumer researchers interested in visceral factors have focused on immediate external circumstances, such as “high pressure” sales tactics, or aversive states such as hunger, or fear (Aaker, Stayman et al. 1996; Cools, Schotte et al. 1992; Keller and Block 1996; Kroeber-Riel 1979; Lang, Greenwald et al. 1993; Pham 1996; Raju 1980; Sanbonmatsu and Kardes 1988; Sterntahl and Craig 1974). However, there is an extensive developmental psychology literature that details how experiences during child development can have longlasting influences on a person’s capacities, sensitivities, and predispositions (Berrntson and Cacioppo 2000; Goldhaber 2000). For example, unloving and overprotective parenting is known to increase risk for emotional disorders, school dropout and impulsive behaviors such as drug use, initiation of sexual behavior, and conduct disorder (Chisholm 1993; Chisholm 1999; Chisholm 1999; DuHamel, Mante et al. 2004; Hall, Peden et al. 2004; Hill, Young et al. 1994; Hojat 1998; Karen, Byron et al. 2002; Mason, Cauce et al. 1994; Meyer and Gillings 2004; Wells and Rankin 1991; Zimmerman, Salem et al. 1995). Long-term effects of childhood socialization may occur via several different varieties of “carry-forward” effects: (1) neural growth effects such as those known from studies of visual deprivation in infancy; (2) neuroendocrine organizational effects; (3) cognitive features such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and cognitive models of relationships; or (4) predisposition of one social adversity to others (Decker 2000; Flinn, Quinlan et al. 1996; Rutter 1994; Worthman 1999). In the case of the first three varieties, emotionally-valenced experiences during childhood, including those resulting from parental care, may alter long-term psychological characters via molecular reorganization of neuropsychological networks involved in the integration of impulsive and reflective psychological states (Bechara 2002; Bechara, Damasio et al. 1997; Damasio 2001; Posner, Rothbart et al. 2001).

Method: We examined the influence of parenting on consumer impulse-control with a go-no-go task, and retrospective ratings of maternal care among 140 healthy women ages to 18 to 83 years. Vulnerability to consumer impulsiveness was examined through performance on an experimental affective-shifting task that requires participants to rapidly distinguish neutral from emotional stimuli (in this case positive or negative valence words), and to either respond by pressing a key or withholding response as directed. Impulsiveness was operationalized as response time to negative and positive targets, numbers of omissions and errors, as well as aggregated disinhibition and discrimination scores. Maternal care was measured using the “Parental Bonding Instrument” (PBI) (Parker, Tupling et al. 1979), which includes two scales, “caringness” and “controllingness.” The PBI has been widely found to have good long-term reliability, and sound validity,