Exploring the Influence of Spirituality: a New Perspective on Senior Consumers' Behavior

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The interest in spirituality in consumer behaviour is growing. Previous research suggests that consumers’ behaviour is influenced by their level of spiritual development and commitment, and that it can be spiritually motivated. This paper explores the influence of spirituality on the consumer behaviour of older adults, as they reach spiritual maturity or undergo intensive spiritual growth toward the end of their life. Responding to a call for conceptual clarification, we define spirituality and differentiate it from religion and religiosity. Spiritual development is explained and the spiritual needs of older adults are described. Research propositions on the influence of spirituality on the consumer behaviour of older adults are presented.

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References

Extended Service Encounters and Customer Emotion Management
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The aim of this study is to understand customers’ full emotional involvement in service encounters and reveal the emotional nature of their ongoing self-presentation in extended service encounters. This paper presents an exploratory study into customer emotion management in extended service encounters and argues that customers’ co-production of the service experience may also include active monitoring and management of their emotions. Such emotion control and resultant display affect the service outcome not only for those customers themselves but also for service providers and other patrons present. Thus, it is important for service marketers to understand and manage their customers’ participation in the service experience also through their emotion management in order to provide satisfactory outcomes.

Commercial Construction of Extraordinary Experiences
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The urge for extraordinary experiences is a dominant theme in modern social thought. Although we came to learn a lot about such experiences from various phenomenological accounts that stand in opposition to mundane daily lives, we know very little about how such experiences are strategically constructed and marketed to consumers. In other words, we have a pretty good understanding of such experiences from the consumers’ perspective but production side lack such focus with few exceptions and therefore needs more attention. The aim of this research is thus to tackle this particular gap. This research addresses the following questions: How do extraordinary experiences in the marketplace are promoted? What are the strategies used by marketers? How do consumers expectations are shaped by marketers’ representations?

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Abstract
The interest in spirituality in consumer behaviour is growing. Previous research suggests that consumers’ behaviour is influenced by their level of spiritual development and commitment and that it can be spiritually motivated. This paper explores the influence of spirituality on the consumer behaviour of older adults, as they reach spiritual maturity or undergo intensive spiritual growth toward the end of their life. Responding to a call for conceptual clarification, we define spirituality and differentiate it from religion and religiosity. Spiritual development is explained and the spiritual needs of older adults are described. Research propositions on the influence of spirituality on the consumer behaviour of older adults are presented.

Although spirituality has been a central concept in psychology and sociology for the past ten years, little research has explored its influence on consumer behaviour. The paucity of available research results lies in part from a lack of consensus regarding the definition of spirituality and some confusion between the concepts of spirituality, religion and religiosity (Zinnbauer et Pargament, 2005, McGinn, 1993). Therefore, our study aims at establishing a clear conceptual framework for the study of the influence of spirituality on consumer behaviour, involving a definition of the concept, an explanation of the differences with religion and religiosity and a description of spiritual development.

As the chronological and sequential theory of spiritual development (Fowler, 1981) identifies the last part of life as favourable to increased spiritual development and the achievement of spiritual maturity, thus leading to the display of more salient spiritual characteristics, our second objective is to understand the spirituality of older adults and to identify their spiritual needs.

Our overall objective, therefore, is to draw from the extant literature a research agenda to examine the influence of spirituality on the behaviour of senior consumers. In order to do so, we undertook an extensive inter-disciplinary literature review in the fields of psychology, sociology, psychiatry, gerontology and consumer behaviour, over the last three decades.
Conceptual framework for the study of spirituality in consumer behaviour:
The identification of the characteristics of spirituality (Ulvoas, 2009) leads to the following definition of the concept: “Spirituality is the construction of the meaning of one’s life. It appeals to one’s ability for transcendence\(^1\) and its objects are the inner self, alterity\(^2\) and the sacred\(^3\).” Spirituality involves a spiritual identity, which can be religious or non religious, and a level of spiritual commitment. Religion, as “a unified system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred” (Delener, 1990), is the most common form of spirituality. It has two dimensions: religious identity (the tradition within which the members of a specific religious group practice their religion, for example Christianity) and religiousity, which is one’s level of religious commitment.

The spirituality of older adults:
The spirituality of older adults stems from their cognitive maturity and their ability for gerotranscendence, which Tornstam (1994, 1999) describes as a “shift from a rational and materialist perspective to an increasingly cosmic and transcendent one”. Spiritual development is a mechanism which enables older adults to cope with the losses associated with old age (in physical and intellectual capabilities, in body image, of the usual place of residence) and to defend themselves against age related aggressions such as ageism (Mattes, 2005; McFadden, 1996).

Their increasing consciousness of their own mortality can generate strong anxiety (Urien, 2008), which spiritual growth can help reduce, as it involves finding the meaning of one’s life and death and a reflection on after life (Ita, 1995). Spiritual needs of older adults involve: restoring personal dignity and transcending the losses and handicaps of old age; reducing death anxiety, accepting to die and preparing for dying; finding the global meaning of one’s life, believing in the continuity of life and caring about future generations; establishing positive relationships with others, reducing guilt and reconciling; and establishing an intimate relationship with the sacred (McKinley, 2001; Fry, 2000).

Influences of spirituality on consumer behaviour:
The literature review in the field of consumer behaviour reveals four general types of influence of spirituality. First, spiritual identity and related spiritual values influence the formation of attitude, and erect consumption limits and taboos; the stronger the level of spiritual commitment, the stronger this influence (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Mokhlis, 2006). Spiritual values shape consumption ethics while prescribing the rejection of non compatible consumption behaviours such as the illicit purchase of products, and the adoption of those in line with spiritual values such as purchasing from fair trade distribution channels, or religious prescriptions such as the consumption of Halal food for religious Muslims (Shaw and al., 2005; Mokhlis, 2006). Research propositions directly derived from this, which can be shared by all consumers no matter their age, would be that:

\( P1a: \) Spiritually committed consumers, including seniors, have a favourable attitude toward the consumption of products and services in line with their spiritual values.

\( P1b: \) Spiritually committed consumers, including seniors, have an unfavourable attitude toward the consumption of products and services opposed to their spiritual values.

Second, spiritual development modifies consumers’ identity, which leads to a shift in the orientation of their consumption, from ego satisfaction in early stages of spiritual development to an increasing sensitivity to the impact of their consumption on others in later stages (Ball et al., 2001; Hampton et al., 2002). Hence, as senior consumers have been identified as either spiritually mature or intensively spiritually developing, a research proposition could be stated as follows:

\( P2a: \) Spiritually mature senior consumers are more aware of the impact of their consumption on their environment and try to use it to create a positive impact.

\( P2b: \) Spiritually developing senior consumers use consumption to fuel their spiritual growth.

Third, a market offering can be entrusted with a spiritual value which contributes to the overall consumption value as perceived by the consumer (Holbrook, 1999).

\( P3: \) Senior consumers perceive a market offering including a significant spiritual value as superior to a market offering which includes none.

Finally, spiritual needs generate spiritual motives for consumption (Skousgaard, 2006), which can be intrinsic and aimed at satisfying the spiritual values of the consumer, and extrinsic and aimed at enhancing the comfort level and social prestige of their beholder. Both motivations can coexist (Weaver and Agle, 2002). We formulate our two final propositions as:

\( P4a: \) Intrinsically spiritually motivated consumption of seniors is geared at satisfying spiritual needs.

\( P4b: \) Extrinsically motivated consumption of seniors is geared at increasing their comfort level and enhancing the way their environment perceives them.

\(^1\)Transcendence corresponds to “an individual’s capability to step out of his/her immediate perception of time and space and to see life from a wider, more detached angle” (Piedmont, 1999).

\(^2\)Alterity should be understood in a broad sense and includes other human beings, nature and the universe. It is the interconnection of these objects that enables the holistic perspective on life and provides its meaning (Ulvoas, 2009).

\(^3\)The sacred is “a perception of either a divine being or a sense of ultimate reality or truth” (Larson et al., 1998): God, gods, a divine being, the supreme energy, the wholeness of life.
Conclusion and further research

This paper provides a conceptual framework for the study of the influence of spirituality on consumer behaviour. It identifies seniors as consumers with salient spiritual characteristics, including spiritual maturity or intensive spiritual growth, and potentially strong spiritual motivations for consumption. Further research is necessary to examine our research propositions. Given the importance of these growing demographics in most developed economies and the size of certain age-related sectors, including tourism, a better understanding of the influence of spirituality on consumption would appear essential and long overdue.

References


Older Adults’ Use of New Media

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The study of older adults’ use of technology has mainly focused on barriers like learning new skills, sensory or cognitive abilities that keep older adults from adopting technological innovations. However, research has shown that some older adults are looking for creative and challenging offers and are active, innovative customers (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2001). The purpose of this research is to investigate which variables determine negative or positive intentions to use new media like the internet and digital TV. The central question