

Call for Papers: Special Issue of Marketing Theory

“Theoretical Advances on the Contemporary Consumption of Religion”

Deadline: November 01, 2022

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Religion is a symbolic social system that has bearing over all aspects of life (Geertz, 1973, 90). As such, we understand religion to encompass institutional religion as well as more individualized forms of spirituality. Secularization theories that predicted the demise of religion with modernity have been debunked in previous literature (Edgell, 2012). While institutional religion is declining in some Western societies, we can surmise from research that religiosity has simply been remodeled as individual spirituality, which is now accessible in the market. In many non-Western countries, like those in the Global South, religion is growing even with increasing modernization (Ozanne & Appau, 2019). Hence, far from being irrelevant, religion continues to have a penetrating impact on the experiences of myriad consumers in many ways directly and indirectly, publicly and privately (Baker et al., 2020; Belk et al., 1989).

The interest in understanding religion’s influence on consumption is evidenced by a growing body of consumer research literature examining the consumption of religion, consumer spirituality, religion in the market, and the marketization of religion (Botez et al., 2020; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019; McAlexander et al., 2014; Rinallo et al., 2012). At a basic level, Cosgel and Minkler (2004) note that followers of religion often ascribe to certain types of clothing, food, and accompanying products. Essoo and Dibb (2004) found religious influence on shopping behavior. Consumption can also be a means to achieving religious goals. Traditional religious consumers are bound by the values of the hierarchical institutions they ascribe to and continue to be guided by in mundane ways (Khan, 2016; Rauf et al., 2018; Rauf & Prasad, 2020; Sandikci, 2020). At the other end of the spectrum, consumers are at liberty, in liquid modernity, to opt for more individualized forms of religion or spirituality (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Etzioni, 2010; Smith, 2003). Regardless of the interface between consumers and religion, whether it is the sacralization of the secular or the secularization of the sacred (Belk et al., 1989), religion and the marketplace remain entangled in a variety of ways.

Religion also gives meaning to many consumer lives, especially in modern times of heightened uncertainty (Beck, 1992; Rinallo et al., 2012). Religion can be a means to provide stability, therapy, and control in contemporary times of social acceleration (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Higgins & Hamilton, 2018; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2018; Rosa, 2013). With the arrival of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the religious landscape has been altered for many; practices such as social distancing and sanitization bring with it new engagements with classical religious doctrine (Baker et al., 2020). The influence of religious meaning-making on adherents becomes even more apparent when such consumers disengage with their religious institutions (McAlexander et al., 2014). While previous research has expanded various theoretical domains and angles with regards to the role of religion in consumer lives and how consumption is shaping religion, we

believe the time is ripe for extending this rich body of work, with a focus on their manifestation in contemporary times.

Religion does not only guide individuals, but it also affects communities. And in contemporary times, such communities are increasingly becoming global. Major institutional religions like Christianity and Islam have a global presence, even as their makeup and memberships continue to evolve. Still, Pew Research Center (2015) estimates that around 84% of the world's population is affiliated with a religion. Hence, religion's influence is also globalizing in unprecedented ways. Religious movements—such as Pentecostals and followers of the Tablighi Jamaat—are spreading across the globe and their transnational prescriptions have bearing on consumer lifestyles and life transitions (Appau et al., 2020; Appau & Bonsu, 2020; Bonsu & Belk, 2005; Rauf et al., 2018a). The complexity is exacerbated as we live in a world where increased globalization and mobility has hybridized our peculiar selfhood (Levitt, 2007; Sharifonnasabi et al., 2019). Given this situation, there is need for more understanding about how the intersection of religion and globalization affects consumption (of religion).

In addition, international events where religion is the centerpiece of the news affect the religious and the non-religious alike. For instance, when a world leader makes remarks that are perceived to be a contravention to religious mores or blasphemous drawings are published, the outcry has repercussions for (the avoidance of) consumption by both the affected religious and marketers uninvolved in the debate whose goods are rejected in terms of boycotts. Consumption objects, such as the *pardah* or veil, have the capacity to become political points of tension (Johnson et al., 2017; Sandikci & Ger, 2010). These outpourings are not event-based, but have deeper roots in historical religious conflict or the divide between secularism and religion, which require deeper understanding (Asad et al., 2013; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010, 2012a; Mahmood, 2013).

Another important issue is the relationship between the market and religion such as the marketization of religion and the commodification of religious goods that accompanies it (Belk, 2020; Dolbec et al., 2021). Consumer research has a history of exploring how these forces bring inherent tensions which include the diluting importance of beliefs, values, and items that were once considered sacred or alternatively raising the status of mundane objects to that of idols. However, the relationship between the market and religion appears more complex than one simply taking over the other (Carrette & King, 2004). Religious exchanges like the Pentecostal prosperity doctrine bundle the norms of sacrifice, market, and social exchanges (Appau, 2020). Some cultures do not even structurally distinguish between the domain of religion and the domain of the market (Appiah, 1993). Added to the mix is the role of spiritual practitioners, entrepreneurs, and leaders who enjoy celebrity status as experts of spiritual and divine matters, which they translate as market offerings (Appau & Bonsu, 2020; Belk, 2020; Khan & Naguib, 2019). These practices and agents operate betwixt and between the religious and the market domains, manifesting as both and neither, and challenging the boundaries we have set between religion and the market. Thus, novel theoretical ideas are needed to unpack the relationship between religion and the market and how this manifest through (and because of) consumption.

History also offers an interesting linkage with religion and consumption. In some societies, religion has had an uneasy historical relationship with consumption and consumption spaces like

the coffeehouse culture in Turkey (Karababa & Ger, 2011). In other ways, old spiritual practices such as religious sojourns, yoga and meditation are now revived as part of everyday modern escapisms (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Masud, 2000; Piuchan, 2021). There is, therefore, an avenue to theoretically explore the historical evolution of religious practices (e.g., yoga), persons (e.g., the Dalai Lama), and objects (e.g., the crucifix) that are popularly consumed in the market and in religious consumption fields (Miller, 2005). Similarly, marketing ideologies and practices are not ahistorical, and some are rooted in religious ideologies, beliefs and practices (Botez et al., 2020). Thus, there is an opportunity for theoretical advances to better understand how some contemporary marketing ideologies and consumption practices, which may appear deeply secular and even opposed to religion may themselves have been birthed from some religious ideology, or in opposition to religion.

New frontiers such as the interaction between religion and technology are also demanding scholarly attention. Some researchers have started to probe this avenue such as investigating religious discourse on social media (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012b). On a darker note, the role of technology has the potential to silo consumers and create groups of hate and division (Rauf, 2020). Needless to say, more work needs to be done on these fronts.

This brings to the fore the need to also examine the dark sides of religion and consumption. While religion has had many positive impacts on society, it has historically also led to violence, discrimination, and exploitation, which sometimes translate to the marketplace and affect consumption patterns (Bonsu & Belk, 2010). Despite the “taboo” nature of the subject, much research is needed to understand how the excesses of religion affect consumption and consumer wellbeing, and how best to remedy these excesses.

We are only at the start of understanding the intersection of religion, the marketplace, and consumption in contemporary times (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). We present this special issue as an invitation to extend this conversation. Therefore, we invite submissions that examine and make novel theoretical contributions to understanding religion and consumption. Below is an illustrative and non-exhaustive list of suggested topics:

- The role of religious institutions in contemporary marketplaces
- Religious exchanges and consumption
- Identity, community and religious/spiritual consumption
- Religion and consumer wellbeing
- Religious communities of consumption
- Ritualization and consumer culture
- Spiritual markets and their diffusion
- Religious tourism
- History and religion from a marketing perspective
- Globalization and its impact on religion and consumption
- Diaspora and the effects of mobility on religious identity
- Religion’s interplay with branding and advertising
- Religious discrimination in the marketplace
- Religious practices and trends in the digital world

- Online communities of religion
- The role of technology and social media in the consumption of religious ideology and religious practice
- Artificial Intelligence, technological design, and its implication for religious consumers
- Religion in Global South contexts
- Religious consumption as a class-based phenomenon
- Religion and capitalism
- Religion and neoliberalism
- The dark side of religion and consumption

Our expectation is that the submissions would advance theory at the intersection of religion and consumption. We welcome empirical, conceptual, and methodological work. We are methodologically plural; we invite qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. We also invite interdisciplinary and critical examinations of religion and consumption; scholars in psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, humanities, sociology, and elsewhere are welcome. We invite papers that contribute both theoretically and managerially. We are also ready to receive shorter thought pieces in addition to full-length manuscripts.

Submission Deadline: The deadline for submission is 11:59 PM PST, November 1, 2022.

Submission Instructions:

Authors should send in manuscripts of up to 8,000 words (including tables, references, captions, footnotes and endnotes) for full length articles, and 2000-3000 words for thought pieces. All submissions must strictly follow the guidelines for Marketing Theory. These are available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/MTQ>. Submissions should be made via the journal's manuscript submission site.

Early expressions of interests and enquiries can be forwarded to the special issue editors at consumption.religion@gmail.com. Interest in reviewing for this special issue may also be directed to the guest editors at the same email address.

Special Issue Guest Editors:

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