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Importance of Money, Religiosity, and Spiritual Well-being of Young Fast-Food Consumers, and its Impact on their Ethical Beliefs

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**IMPORTANCE OF MONEY, RELIGIOSITY, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING
OF YOUNG FAST-FOOD CONSUMERS, AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR
ETHICAL BELIEFS**

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IMPORTANCE OF MONEY, RELIGIOSITY, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF YOUNG FAST-FOOD CONSUMERS, AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR ETHICAL BELIEFS

ABSTRACT

Building on the revised general theory of marketing ethics that suggests that individual values and attitudes are determinants of unethical beliefs, we examine the impact of importance of money, intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being on the active and illegal dimension of consumers' ethical beliefs. Using a sample of 426 young fast-food consumers (240 male and 186 female) in a collectivist society (India), we test several hypotheses using moderated regression analysis. For the first time, we test for interaction effects among these three individual determinants of consumer's ethical beliefs. We also test for the impact of gender on the ethical beliefs. Our study throws new light on the extant understanding of these individual determinants of consumers' ethical beliefs. We find that neither of the independent variables, namely, importance of money, intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being determines consumers' ethical beliefs. However, their interaction terms are all significant, suggesting that although the three predictors of consumers' ethical beliefs may not directly influence their beliefs, it may do so in combination with other predictors. We also find a moderating impact of gender. Intrinsic religiosity positively affects consumers' ethical beliefs in male customers but not in female customers. Similarly, spiritual well-being positively affects female customers' ethical beliefs but not male customers. Importance of money does not influence either.

KEY WORDS: Consumer Ethics, Money, Religiosity, Spiritual Well-Being, Young Consumers, India.

INTRODUCTION

Today, almost all firms place a high emphasis on being customer-oriented in selling their product offerings. Marketers practice their selling strategies by trying to satisfy the customers' latent needs, and avoid sacrificing their long-term interest, even by giving up the opportunity of an immediate sale (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). However, customers may not always reciprocate in the same way. Recent research (e.g., Fullerton and Punj, 2004; Reynolds and Harris, 2009) suggests that customer misbehavior may be a larger phenomenon, which may include unethical consumer behaviors such as, shoplifting. For example, research estimates that as many as 60% of consumers have shoplifted at least once in their lifetime (Klemke, 1992). Therefore, many researchers have called for examining personal factors influencing consumers' judgment of ethical beliefs (e.g., Vitell, 2003). Towards this objective, the aim of the present study is to enrich the consumer ethics field by examining the impact of consumers' importance of money, their intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being on their ethical beliefs. The paper adds to the growing need to understand the range of antecedents of dysfunctional consumer behavior (e.g., Al-Rafee and Cronan, 2006; Fullerton and Punj, 2004; Vitell, 2003).

Vitell and Paolillo (2003) suggest that there are very few studies examining consumer ethics specially those investigating the role of religiosity in consumer ethics, despite the latter potentially playing a key role in forming consumer values and moral beliefs. Despite an intuitive sense to the contrary, Vitell and Paolillo found an insignificant relationship between consumer ethics and religiosity. Therefore, it becomes important to study these relationship is a different context to test its existence, as we do in this paper

using a sample of 426 young consumers in India. We also examine the role of other antecedents of consumer ethical beliefs, namely, importance of money, and spiritual well-being of consumers, besides looking at the moderating impact gender on these relationships. Our research context, that of young consumers in an emerging market i.e., India makes it even more interesting since India is a growing market, where consumption and incomes are rising very fast. India is also a land of many religions, where religion and spirituality has a special place in people's thoughts and beliefs. Therefore, our research context makes the roles of importance of money, religiosity, and spiritual well-being become more manifested.

Our study contributes to literature in several ways. We extend the extant understanding in the literature to show that compared to the individual determinant's separate impact on ethical beliefs, the interaction of these variables is more important in determining the consumers' ethics. We also show that gender plays a key role in the way the determinants influence the ethical beliefs of consumers. Our study also extends the current understanding about young consumers, their beliefs, and attitudes. The rest of the paper is structured like this- we first provide a theoretical background of the study, then formulate our hypotheses; test these hypotheses, and then discuss results, suggest several managerial implications of our study and finally end the paper with limitations of our study and provide directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Consumer Ethical Beliefs

According to Ferrell and Gresham's (1985) contingency model of marketing ethics, willingness to behave unethically is contingent upon individual's values, opportunities, and members of their social group. Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics suggests that the individual first perceives the ethical problem, then alternative solutions and finally the consequences of his/her behaviors under influence of environmental factors. Therefore, it is plausible that the social context plays a role in shaping the ethical beliefs of the customers, given that society is an integral constituent of the marketing environment. However, Jones and Kavanaugh (1996) have contended that if consumers have low expectancy of rewards, they may be less likely to have selfish motives, and show higher concerns for others, and would therefore show behaviors that are more ethical.

According to the consumer ethics scale (Muncy and Vitell, 1992; Vitell and Muncy, 1992), one of the important dimensions is, 'actively benefiting from illegal activities' which represents actions in which the consumer is actively involved in benefiting at the expense of the seller. An example might be drinking a can of soda in a store without paying for it.

Importance of Money

According to the revised ‘general theory of marketing ethics,’ (Hunt and Vitell, 1993) individual values and attitudes are determinants of unethical beliefs that may influence ethical judgments. One such attitude is an individual’s attitude towards money which may be related to important biographical, personality and attitudinal variables (Mitchell and Mickel, 1999). Tang (1992, 1995) has suggested a four factor scale (importance, success, motivator and rich) to measure the ethical meanings that people ascribe to money-also called money ethics scale. Tang (2002) also notes that an individual’s money ethic has a significant and direct impact on unethical behavior. Thus, customer’s importance of money as a constituent of his/ her money ethic is hypothesized to have a significant relationship with consumer ethical beliefs.

Religiosity

Probably for the first time, Allport (1950) clarified that religious motivation is different from intrinsic religiosity. Allport and Ross (1967) further clarified that depending upon the nature of the individual’s motivation source (extrinsic or intrinsic), an individual may either use or live his/her religion. Hunt and Vitell (1993) in their revised ‘‘general theory of marketing ethics’’ state that religion significantly influences ethical judgments, which may also impact customers’ decision-making processes. This also finds support from previous studies (e.g., Magill 1992; Huffman 1988) which suggest that individual’s ethical behavior must be interpreted in the backdrop of his/her religiosity, which also happens to shape his/her value systems. Individual religiosity is also known to have an

influence both on human attitudes and behavior (Weaver and Agle 2002). Several recent studies (e.g., Vitell et al. 2005; Vitell et al., 2006) have found empirical evidence to support that intrinsic religiosity is a consistent determinant of consumer ethical beliefs.

Spiritual Well-Being

Spirituality has been defined as “expressing our desires to find meaning and purpose in our lives” (Neck and Milliman, 1994; p. 9). Mitroff and Denton (1999) propose that an important element of spirituality is interconnectedness, and Porter, Kraft, and Claycomb note, “The healthy spirituality also increases the closeness of their social relationships and a sense of emotional connectedness” (2003, p. 197). Efforts towards attaining an ideal way of life are likely to lead to higher spiritual wellbeing. Staying connected that leads to more meaningful social relationships. Since wellness is not just spiritual, but an integration of social, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions of human existence as well (Bensley, 1991), a more meaningful life, a concern for others, a detachment from work related outcomes and a life that purports to higher spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, it is expected that customers high on spiritual well-being, being spiritually healthy would be more likely to be ethical in their beliefs. It is also possible that there would be a difference between male and female customers in the way it impacts their ethical beliefs.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the above review of literature, we posit the following set of hypotheses for relationships between intrinsic religiosity and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H1a: Intrinsic religiosity is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H1b: Relationship between intrinsic religiosity and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

For importance of money, we posit the following set of hypotheses:

H2a: Importance of money is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H2b: Relationship between importance of money and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

For spiritual well-being, we posit the following set of hypotheses:

H3a: Spiritual well-being is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H3b: Relationship between spiritual well-being and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

Finally, we also posit a set of hypotheses based on the interaction variables, as given below:

H4a: Intrinsic religiosity x Importance of money is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H4b: Relationship between Intrinsic religiosity x Importance of money and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

H5a: Spiritual well-being x Importance of money is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H5b: Relationship between Spiritual well-being x Importance of money and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

H6a: Intrinsic religiosity x Spiritual well-being is positively associated with active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs.

H6b: Relationship between Intrinsic religiosity x Spiritual well-being and active, illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs is moderated by gender.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A questionnaire was sent to a sample of 800 young consumers (Age group 18-35 years) in cities of Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Of the entire sample, 426 consumers responded to the questionnaire for a response rate of 53.25 %. All returned questionnaires were usable. The sample consisted of 53.6% male respondents. 54.6% respondents were in the age group 18-24 years, 29.1% in the age group 25-30 yrs, and the remaining between 31-35 years. 73.4% respondents had at least a college degree. Since the sample consisted of young consumers, not all of them had a steady source of income.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section included the intrinsic religiosity scale (adapted from Allport and Ross, 1967), as well as the attitude toward money (importance) scale from the Tang et al. (1992) MES. The second section included the active/illegal dimension of the revised Muncy and Vitell (1992) consumers' ethical beliefs scale, while the third section contained various demographic measures such as age. The dependent construct in the analysis was consumers' ethical beliefs as measured by the revised Muncy–Vitell scale (Vitell and Muncy, 2005). The respondents were asked to rate each behavior on a 7-point scale from – strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). A typical item was, 'Using a discount coupon that does not belong to me'. A high score indicates that consumers find these actions as more acceptable, and less unethical. The

reliabilities of the active/illegal dimension of the consumer ethics scale was found to be acceptable (5 items; $\alpha= 0.744$). Intrinsic religiosity was measured using the intrinsic religious orientation scale adopted from Allport and Ross (1967) and using a 7-point Likert type scale. The scale was adapted to suit the context of our study, and such that the items did not appear to be measuring any specific religion, but rather a general religious orientation. The intrinsic dimension was measured using six items and is exemplified by items such as, “I try hard to live my life according to my religious beliefs.” This dimension exhibited a reliability of 0.781. The Money ethic scale’s importance of money was measured with a 7-point Likert type scale using the Tang et al. (2002) MES dimension measuring money as being “important.” A typical item is “Money is an important factor in my life.” The reliability of this measure was 0.733. The spiritual well-being scale was measured using an adapted version of the original 20-item scale developed by Ellison and Paloutzian (1982), and further shortened to 8 items to suit the context of our study, and exemplified by items such as, “I Enjoy a Meaningful Relationship with God.”. The reliability of this measure was 0.880.

RESULTS

Three separate multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses with intrinsic religiosity, money ethic scale (importance of money), spiritual well-being as independent variables, and gender as the moderating variable. Consumer ethics scale (active-illegal dimension) was dependent variable. Table I shows the correlation matrix for the independent and dependent variables. In order to examine the

relationships between the independent variables, the moderating variable, and the three interaction variables, separate multiple regressions analyses were run. Table IIA reports the results of these regression analyses using the total sample, while Table II B compares the results of the regression using male and female samples.

We first ran the model consisting of the 3 determinants of consumer ethical beliefs (CE), namely, importance of money, intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being, and their interaction terms (importance of money* intrinsic religiosity, intrinsic religiosity* spiritual well-being, and importance of money* spiritual well-being). For example, importance of money* intrinsic religiosity means when we consider a young consumer who holds a particular importance for money and a certain religious orientation, s/he may show a different type of ethical belief (as a combination of these two variables), than when his/her ethical beliefs are determined by only using either of these two variables. We included the interaction terms to enhance our understanding of these predictors of consumer ethical beliefs, which may not have a direct impact on consumer ethics. We checked for multicollinearity, and it was not found to be a problem (VIF values less than 2). Further, we checked for the possibility of common method bias using Harman's one-factor test shows that the first factor in the unrotated factor analysis accounts for only 22.5% of the overall variance (70.2%), thus reducing the likelihood of the threat of common methods bias (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). Moreover, the presence of the interaction terms in the regression reduces the likelihood of CMV being a threat in the study.

-----Table I about here-----

-----Table II A about here-----

-----Table II B about here-----

The summary of the results obtained for hypotheses testing is given in Table III, and detailed discussion of the results of each hypothesis in the next section.

-----Table III about here-----

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the study are quite interesting. First, we found that neither of the independent variables, namely, importance of money, intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being determines consumers' ethical beliefs. This result is not only counter-intuitive, but also departs from results obtained by previous studies. For example, our results differ from few studies (e.g., Vitell et al. 2005; Vitell et al., 2006) which found that intrinsic religiosity is a consistent determinant of consumer ethical beliefs, and also that importance for money ethic has a significant and direct impact on unethical behavior (e.g., Tang 2002). Our result show that these individual level personality and other characteristics are shaped by social characteristics which are different in our sample which comes from a collectivist society in India, where individuals still consider attaching importance of money as social taboo. However, spiritual well-being, and intrinsic religiosity being unrelated to consumers' ethical beliefs is surprising at first.

However, results from gender as moderating variables show that results are not uniform across both genders. Intrinsic religiosity positively affects consumers' ethical beliefs in male customers (more religiously oriented male customers more likely to view questionable consumer behaviors as wrong and vice versa) but not in female customers. Similarly, spiritual well-being positively affects female customers' ethical beliefs (more spiritually healthy female customers more likely to view questionable consumer behaviors as wrong and vice versa.) but not male customers. Importance of money does not influence either.

We can only speculate that consumers may have a personal life driven by a set of values that may not strongly influence their purchase behaviors, but probably future research can throw more light. It is also probable that male and female customers show intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being in different ways due to which we obtain differing impacts on their ethical beliefs. If male customers practice religiosity in a way different from their female counterparts, then it would be interesting to explore how these are different and why. That question we leave for future researchers.

However, more interestingly, we see that in the total sample, all interaction terms are significant. This may suggest that although the three predictors of consumers' ethical beliefs may not directly influence their beliefs, it may do so in combination with other predictors. For example, we note that importance for money may not alone impact ethical beliefs, but only when combined with intrinsic religiosity or spiritual well being. Similar is the case with the combination of intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being. However,

unlike the other two interaction terms, we note that the combination of importance of money and spiritual well-being affects consumer beliefs negatively. This implies that a customer giving more importance to money, as well as high on spiritual well-being may consider questionable consumer behaviors as correct. This is counter-intuitive result. We only speculate that consumers may think differently when this combination of predictors interacts to produce a negative impact on their ethical beliefs. We observe similar results in the male and female samples separately, albeit male customers show a stronger influence on their ethical beliefs than the female customers (0.435 and 0.290 respectively). Finally, since our sample consists of young consumers in the age group 18-35 years, the results of this study may not be generalized to the customers of other ages.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have several interesting managerial implications. First, we show that three important predictors of consumers' ethical beliefs do not manifest themselves separately in predicting their ethical beliefs and attitudes in all contexts. It is important for managers to realize that the social and the cultural context plays a dominant role in determining the impact of the importance of money, intrinsic religiosity, and spiritual well-being of consumers on their ethical beliefs. While western societies may show that any of these predictors influence the beliefs and attitudes of the young consumers, we do not see similar results in the collectivist society of India. It is also possible that young consumer behave differently from customers of other ages. Therefore, managers must build this learning in their marketing programs to ensure that young consumers are treated differently from those of other ages, when it comes to the

importance they give to money, their religiosity as well as their spiritual health and well-being. Secondly, we also show that gender is a decisive factor in determining consumer ethics. Managers should ensure that their marketing messages are differently designed to target women customers than to their male customers. For example, for women customers, spiritual health is more important for determining their ethical beliefs and attitudes than religious orientation. But for male customers, just the opposite is true. Finally, our results also show that treating individual determinants of ethical beliefs is less important than in combination since the results of this interaction among individual determinants may produce a different result. For example, importance for money and spiritual well-being combined produce a negative impact on beliefs than importance for money and religiosity combined or spiritual well-being and religiosity combined. Marketers can be sensitive to these interactions among the individual customers' personality and other personal characteristics when designing market offerings as well as in their communication messages.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY & DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

However, like in other empirical studies, the current study's results should also be interpreted with its limitations. While discussing these limitations, it is also meaningful to simultaneously also highlight the further research questions that can be addressed by researchers in their future research.

First, this study has been carried out in a collectivist society that of India with young consumers, so the results may not be generalizable to other societies such as individualist societies in the western world. Secondly, probably for the first time, we have tested for the interaction effects of spiritual well-being, importance for money, and intrinsic religiosity. Therefore, these results must be validated in other future studies before being applied to all situations and contexts. Third, given that our sample consists of only young consumers, the results of the study may not be generalizable to consumers of other ages. Finally, it is also speculated that any of the variables used as determinants of the consumers' ethical beliefs may manifest itself differently in the context of the present study given that social and cultural environments shape individual values, beliefs, and attitudes, we urge future researchers to develop and validate new scales developed using inductive studies in collectivist societies to understand this phenomenon in more depth.

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Table I: Correlation Matrix

	CE	SWB	REO	AM	AM*REO	AM*SWB	REO*SWB
Spiritual Well Being(SWB)	-.129*						
Intrinsic Religiosity(REO)	-.079	.625*					
Importance of Money(AM)	-.117*	.245*	.267*				
AM*REO	-.003	.203*	.069	.022			
AM*SWB	.205*	.136*	.215*	.097**	.623*		
REO*SWB	-.066	-.381*	-.321*	.173*	.124*	.078	
Means	2.11	5.78	5.16	5.46	0.39	0.29	0.79
Standard Deviations	1.09	1.01	1.25	1.17	1.63	1.24	1.65

*: p<0.01

** : p<0.05

Table II A: Regression Results**[Total Sample; N= 426]**

Dependent variable: active/illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs(CE)			
	β	t- values	Significance
Constant		10.214	.000
Intrinsic Religiosity(REO)	-.102	-1.630	.104
Importance of Money(AM)	-.072	-1.408	.160
Spiritual Well Being(SWB)	-.112	-1.724	.085
AM*REO	-.191	-3.081	.002
AM*SWB	.378	6.190	.000
REO*SWB	-.135	-2.486	.013
R-Square	0.118		
Adjusted R-Square	0.105	F-Value:9.341	Sig:.000

Table II B: Gender-wise Regression Results

[Male Sample N=240; Female Sample N=186]

Dependent variable: active/illegal dimension of consumer ethical beliefs(CE)						
	β male	β female	t- values (male)	t- values (female)	Sig. (male)	Sig. (female)
Constant			7.558	6.984	0.000	0.000
Intrinsic Religiosity(REO)	-.218**	.014	-2.539	0.154	.012	.878
Importance of Money(AM)	-.033	-.051	-.468	-.625	.640	0.533
Spiritual Well Being(SWB)	-.051	-.235**	-.559	-2.584	.577	.011
AM*REO	-.219*	-.228**	-2.684	-2.244	.008	.026
AM*SWB	.435*	.290*	5.401	2.758	.000	.006
REO*SWB	-.215*	.020	-2.695	.243	.008	.809
R-Square	0.150	0.121				
Adjusted R- Square	0.128 F-value 6.854 (Sig 0.000)	0.092 F-value 4.106 (Sig 0.001)				

*: p<0.01;** : p<0.05

Table III: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Supported at $p < 0.05$ (Yes/No)
H1a	No
H1b	Yes
H2a	No
H2b	No
H3a	No
H3b	Yes
H4a	Yes
H4b	No
H5a	Yes
H5b	Yes
H6a	Yes
H6b	Yes