

Chapter 5

Islam and Consumption: Religion Interpretations and Changing Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

Today Islam is world's second largest religion but has the highest growth rate among all the top religions. In a few decades, the Muslim population will be the largest consumers on this planet. This chapter tries to bring forth the interpretations of Holy Quran and Ahadees as is along with the current consumer behavior of Muslims using different products. There are different schools of thought based on the understanding of the religion. There are gaps in the actual meaning and the portrayal of the message, along with different interpretations of the theories around Islam. Like every other aspect of life, religion too has its existence in areas which are beyond black and white, in shades of grey, and here lies the marketing potential to fill up this void by understanding the Muslim consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

How consumption is shaped by the value system of a religion has been appreciated and researched in Psychology and Sociology but Marketing is still scratching this important dimension of consumption (Esssooa & Dibb, 2004). However, the phenomenon is changing globally with formation of societies like International Islamic

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Marketing Association (IIMA) and dedicated publications like “Journal of Islamic Marketing”. A deeper look into the commonalities that bind the followers of Islam together seem to be thick and deep rooted which guides the consumption of Muslims. While it can be argued that it is the same for all the bookish religions of the world which believe in the concept of one God, one has to see the current patterns of the world trade. The market right now is led by the Western corporations and thus it can be assumed that it falls in line with the major religion of the world, i.e., Christianity. Also, the large presence of Jews in the western society and being the backbone of their success, the fundamentals of their belief too are now mainstream, at least in first world countries. Kosher is a fine example. Kosher foods are those that conform to the regulations of Kashrut (Jewish dietary law).

Alam, Rohani, and Hisham (2011) conducted a study of Muslims consumers from the middle- and upper-income groups who work in Shah Alam and Bangi in the Selangor state of Malaysia. They found that religious Muslims in Shah Alam and Bangi area consider Islam as their source of reference and they spend moderately, as commanded by Allah in the Quran. Their study confirms that religiosity acts as a full mediating role in the relationship between relative and contextual variables, and purchase behavior of Muslim consumers.

Based on the above background, the purpose of this research paper is to explore the consumption patterns suggested by Holy Quran and what it means to Muslim population at large. The various categories of consumer goods chosen are as follows.

- Foods and Beverages
- Clothing and Accessories
- Finance and Investment
- Travel and Tourism
- Education
- Personal Care Products
- Religious Festival and Occasion-based Purchases
- Electronics, Consumer Durables, and Technology

ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM CONSUMER

Muslims account for around one-fifth of the world’s population - or about 1.6 billion people (Population Reference Bureau - April 2013). 10% of world’s Muslim population is in India and is world’s largest Muslim-minority population. Muslims are diverse, varying by race, language, and the degree of their religious conservatism. Some Muslims live in countries where the government is influenced or ruled by Islamic or Sharia law (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran), while others live in countries

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