

Use of Religion as a Construct in Studying Consumer Behaviour - A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Religion being an important part of culture would influence tremendously the way people think and behave. So it is imperative for the consumer theorist to understand the role of religion in studying consumer behaviour. Exploratory research is used to study whether religion is supported as a construct by the previous theory. For investigation in the present study, two patronage behaviour models will be examined, namely Darden's (1980) patronage model of consumer behaviour and Sheth's (1983) integrative theory of patronage preference and behaviour. These two models are of particular interest because they are highly commendable as they represent initial efforts at developing comprehensive explanations of consumers' shopping behaviour (Darden and Dorsch 1989). These models will be studied to find out what are the main attributes that were seen to be important in the explanation of behaviour. In addition, for each model reviewed, an attempt will be made to trace the religious input which might directly or indirectly influence some aspects of shopping orientation.

Keywords- Religion, Consumer behaviour, Model of consumer behaviour, Religiosity, Shopping behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Since cultural background is one of the most important determinants of consumer behaviour, "a marketer with a defective knowledge of culture is doomed" (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1995, p. 145). Indeed, research by Bristow and Asquith (1999), Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000), Chudry and Pallister (2002) and de Mooij and Hofstede (2002), to name a few, all revealed that consumers across different cultural backgrounds envisage certain significant differences of their own, which may require differential marketing efforts. From the managerial perspective, a clear understanding of culture and the influence that cultural values have on consumers' attitudes and behaviour is a prerequisite for designing effective strategies for marketing to consumers of diverse cultural backgrounds. Yet due to diversity in Race, nationality, religious values, geography and customs, it has become increasingly difficult for marketers to use the same marketing mix strategies for all consumer groups (Cui 1997) of a respective culture.

Religion being a major constituent of a cultural values and fairly a stable base for target marketing, influence

consumer behaviour by influencing one's value system. Understanding consumer religious values serves as a strongest base for the marketer to tailor their marketing programme and strategies.

So it becomes evident that the knowledge of consumer religious values would become a strongest weapon for the marketer to flourish. So it is required to know consumer behavior theory support it as a construct to study consumer behaviour.

This paper is of conceptual in nature which examines whether use of religion as a construct to study consumer behavior is supported by previous consumer behavior model and theory. Generally a base of past consumer behavior model is taken to verify whether to use religion as a construct in explaining consumer behavior. Exploratory research design is used for the purpose of study.

The paper starts with abstract followed by introduction which gives an idea about the relevance of the study. Next to it, a religion is defined followed by brief review of various consumer behavior models. A research methodology is discussed which is followed by findings and conclusion.

2. RELIGION DEFINED

The search for a generally accepted theory or definition faces enormous difficulties in the case of religion (Clarke & Byrne, 1993). Scholars identify at least three historical designations of the term: (1) a supernatural power to which individuals must respond; (2) a feeling present in the individual who conceives such a power; and (3) the ritual acts carried out in respect of that power (Wulff, 1997). Such designations have defied social scientific consensus and thus "it is hard to make any generalization [concerning religion] that is universally valid" (Peterson, 2001, p. 6). As a result, different theories and definitions of religion are often used in the literature. Among others, religion has been defined as:

"A belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God". (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990, p. 110)

"A socially shared set of beliefs, ideas and actions that relate to a reality that cannot be verified empirically yet is

There are some empirical studies which were conducted to partially verify Darden's (first presented 1978, proceedings published 1980) model in regards to shopping behaviour. First, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Howell (1979) tested part of Darden's model by investigating the influences of antecedent variables on shopping orientations. His canonical correlation analysis produced results supporting quite well the relationships hypothesised in Darden's patronage model. In particular, shopping orientations were found to be influenced by instrumental values, general lifestyles, sex, social class and family life cycle. Terminal values, however, did not directly influence shopping orientation. But it indirectly influences shopping orientation by influencing lifestyle and instrumental values.

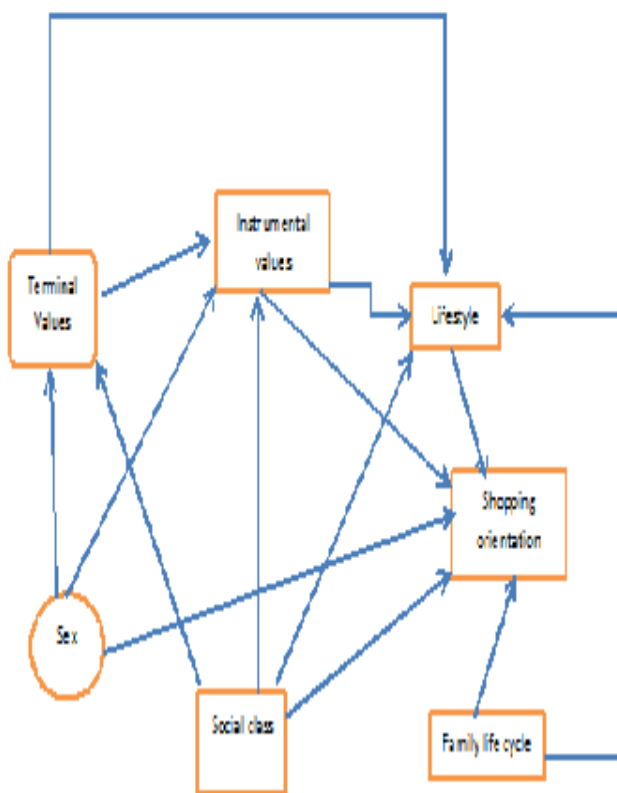


Figure-2 Howell's 1979, p. 142) model of shopping orientations

A second attempt to test Darden's model was made by Powell (1980). In his doctoral project, the researcher focused on the same portion of the Darden's model as Howell (1979) did, but further emphasised the influence of media habits on shopping orientation. According to his findings, terminal values should be kept as the determinant of both instrumental values and shopping orientation, as proposed by Darden (1980).

Another similar attempt was made by Mason, Durand and Taylor (1983). The purpose was to partially test Darden's

model by proposing terminal and instrumental values as antecedent variables influencing lifestyle, shopping orientation and store attribute importance. Both values were hypothesised to affect shopping orientation directly and indirectly through lifestyles. Mason et al. (1983) tested their model with the 296 female members of a Parent Teacher Association. The results of the path-analysis showed some support for the earlier version of the model. The influence of values, however, was found to be restricted to only the attributes of importance.

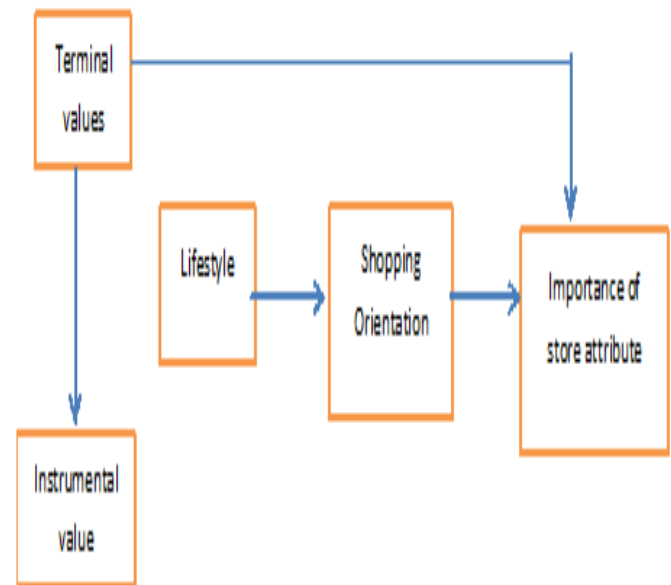


Figure-3 Mason, Durand and Taylor's (1983, p. 350) patronage model

Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992a, 1992b) adapted portions of Darden's (1980) patronage model of consumer behaviour to develop the model on patronage behaviour of apparel shopping. Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992a) examined the relationships among several variables. They were personal characteristics (the exogenous variables which include lifestyle activities, social class and family life cycle), information sources, store attributes, shopping orientations, and patronage behaviour. The results of multiple regression analyses revealed that all four variables were predictors of apparel patronage behaviour of discount stores, specialty stores, department stores and catalogue shopping. Personal characteristics and information sources are the determinants of consumer shopping orientation. Thus, five significant relationships hypothesised by Darden (1980) were supported in their study: (a) importance of store attributes _ patronage behaviour, (b) shopping orientations _ importance of store attributes, (c) personal characteristics _ shopping orientations, (d) information sources _ shopping orientations and (e) personal characteristics _ information sources.

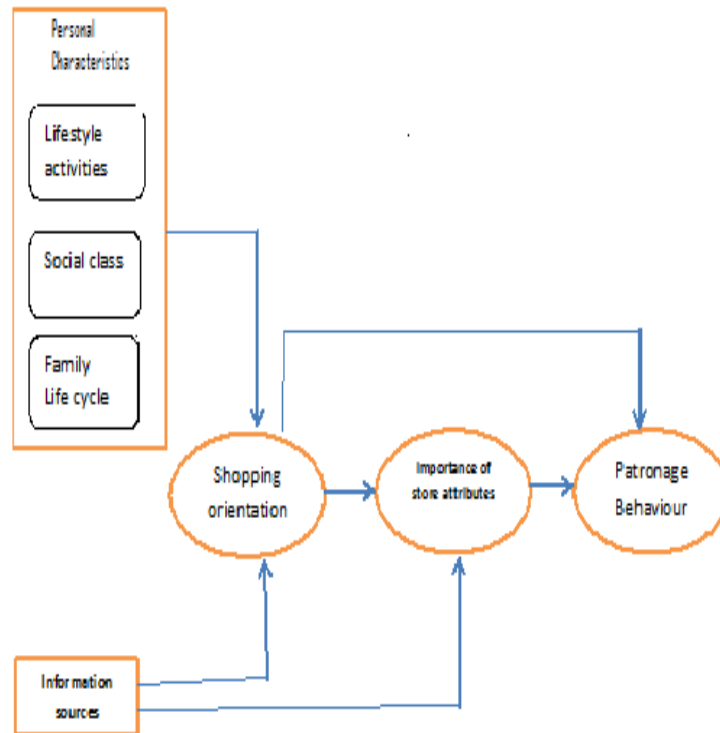


Figure-4 Shim and Kotsiopoulos's (1992b, p. 63) patronage model

More recently, in her doctoral dissertation, Welker (2004) tested the effectiveness of the patronage behaviour model derived from Darden's (1980) patronage model of consumer behaviour and Shim and Kotsiopoulos's (1992b) apparel retail patronage behaviour model to explain the patronage behaviour of small, retail apparel firms. Welker tested her proposed model with 147 female shoppers conveniently sampled at five small, retail apparel stores using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results showed that that all of the proposed paths did flow as the model indicated. However, all of the proposed paths were

not significant and four additional paths were added to improve the fit of the model. Only lifestyles effect on instrumental values was significant. The other added paths were social class and family life cycle effects on instrumental values and terminal values effect on information sources. Both terminal values and lifestyle had significant effects on shopping orientations. Shopping orientation had the largest causal effect on patronage behaviour with the "local store shopper" was the best indicator of small, retail apparel firm patronage.

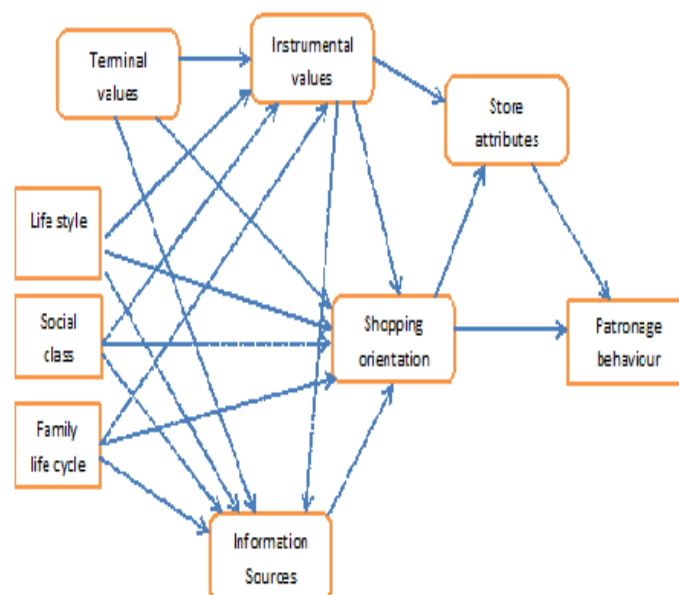


Figure-5 Welker's (2004, p. 63) structural equation model of patronage behaviour of small, retail apparel firms

5.2 Religious Factors in Darden's Patronage Model

As with other retail patronage models (e.g. Monroe and Guiltinan 1975), Darden's model does not specifically address religion or religious values of the consumer, but it is treated as a part of consumer values. The model includes Rokeach's (1973) two types of values: instrumental and terminal. In the Rokeach's sense, values are highly central and quite general, conceptualised as forming the basis for judgements in more narrowly defined situations or with specific referents. Rokeach views terminal values as being related to end-states of existence such as inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict) and belief in salvation (saved, eternal life), that is, of a religious nature. In Darden's model, these religion-related values are viewed as being exogenous and affecting consumer behaviour by retail store attribute importance through instrumental values. Darden also postulates that these terminal values affect shopping orientations directly and indirectly through instrumental values.

5.3 Sheth's Patronage Behaviour Model

Sheth (1983) attempted to integrate existing substantive knowledge into a theory of patronage preference and behaviour. The proposed theory is at the individual level of patronage behaviour and is based on psychological foundations as it is designed for describing and explaining individual patronage behaviour. Sheth's theory is well grounded on various theories of retail preferences and behaviour that consist of two distinct sub-theories: the first limited to establishing a shopping preference for an outlet; while the second focusing on actual buying behaviour from that outlet. Sheth (1983, p. 11) contended the theoretical reasons for keeping these two processes separate as follows:

"It is argued that the two processes and their determinants are significantly different and therefore cannot be combined into a single conceptual framework with a common set of constructs. This is a radical departure from traditional thinking in social psychology, which holds that attitudes lead to behaviour. In fact, we shall focus on the shopping-buying discrepancy in the development of the patronage behaviour subsystem".

This assumption is analogous with Darden's (1980) theoretical bases that shopping and buying are two separate activities. From the perspective of the present study, the first sub-theory concerning shopping preference is of particular interest, since it provides a theoretical framework for examining the religious variable in a shopping context.

In shopping preference theory, Sheth (1983) had proposed two determinants of shopping; demand side and supply side determinants. Both the determinants determine consumer behaviour by influencing shopping predisposition through choice calculus route. Supply side determinants include market and company determinants which influences shopping predisposition(shopping orientation) by influencing choice calculus through shopping options. Likewise, demand side determinants

includes personal and product determinants which influences shopping predisposition(shopping orientation) by influencing choice calculus through shopping motives.

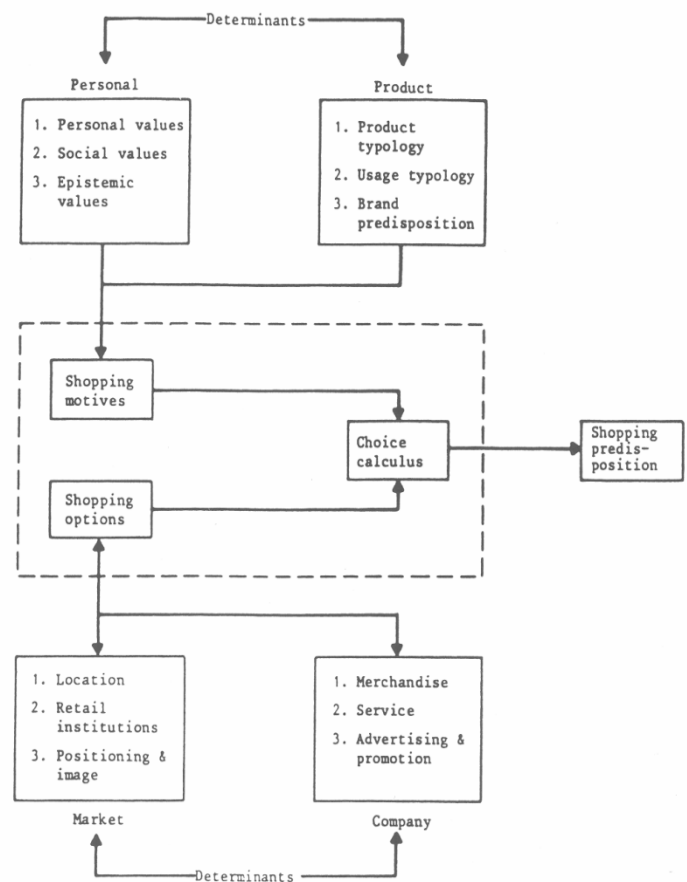


Figure-6 Sheth's (1983) model of shopping preference theory

Sheth's (1983) theory suggests that religion has the most likely affect on shopping predisposition through the demand side determinant – personal characteristics. In his theory, Sheth specifically cites religious variables in proposing that personal determinants (personal, social and epistemic values) shape an individual's shopping motives. The personal values reflect the consumer's personality and are indicative of the influence of values on consumer behaviour. He predicted that personal values might be related directly and indirectly to religion and religiosity. According to Sheth (1983, p. 23):

"An individual's personal values and beliefs about what to look for when shopping for various products and services reflect that shopper's personality and may be determined by such personal traits as sex, age, race and *religion*" (emphasis added).

The social values component consists of family, friends, reference group and society at large. These social groups act as a source of information for individuals in the formation of either general or specific values, attitudes or behaviour. A religious group to which a person affiliated can also serve as a frame of reference for individuals. As Siguaw and Simpson (1997, p. 25) comment:

“Church affiliation can serve as a reference group and as a source of friends, allowing religion to comprise a significant portion of the social values factor as well as the personal values factor as noted by Sheth.” Additionally, Sheth’s theory speculates the possible effect of personal values (e.g. religion) on consumers’ general predisposition towards the act of shopping (i.e. shopping orientations). In his words, Sheth (1983, p. 22-23) explains:

“In some ways, we might say that personal determinants are manifested in a customer’s shopping style, which be that an economic shopper, personalising shopper, ethical shopper or apathetic shopper (Stone, 1954). Alternatively, we might say that a customer is a convenience shopper, bargain shopper, compulsive shopper or store loyal shopper (Stephenson and Willet, 1969).” Following the logic of Sheth’s theory, religion would appear to indirectly affect shopping predisposition along a path from personal determinants to shopping motives to choice calculus then to shopping predisposition (the evoked set of retail outlet alternatives). In addition to these, religion and religiosity may also have a direct influence by affecting acceptable shopping options or alternatives. Clark and Dawson (1996) note that “religiousness may impose limitations on the consideration of alternative actions. Certain potential actions may be unacceptable to the more religious, and therefore may not become a part of an evoked set of alternative actions” (p. 360-361). Thus, Sheth’s theory can be viewed as offering two potential avenues along which religious values may work to impact on shopping behaviour. First, an indirect path originating from religious impact on personal values; and secondly, a direct path originating from religious influences on the evoked set of retail outlet alternatives.

6. FINDINGS

Religion being an important foundation of a culture, has a strong influence on the way consumer act or do make choices. A study of previous model of consumer behaviour especially Darden patronage model and Sheth shopping preference theory has supported to use religion as a construct to study consumer behaviour. In the Darden model, terminal values influence shopping orientation directly as well as indirectly by influencing instrumental values and media habits. Terminal values as being related to the desirable end states of existence such as inner harmony (freedom from inner conflicts) and belief in salvation (saved, eternal life); the goal that a person would like to achieve during their lifetime and may vary among different group of people in different culture that is of religious nature. Instrumental values refer to preferable modes of behaviour. These are the preferable modes of behaviour or means of achieving the terminal values¹.

From the Sheth’s shopping preference theory, it is evident that personal determinants (personal values, social values and epistemic value) will directly affect shopping motives

(shopping orientation) apart from direct influence of product determinants. Individual personal values are indicative of shopper personality which is determined by personal traits such as sex, age, race and religion. The social values components consist of family, friends, reference groups (religious groups) and society at large. A religious group to which a person is affiliated can also serve as a frame of reference for individual shopping attitude or act in general or specific way.

7. CONCLUSION

There is an extensive body of knowledge in the field of consumer behaviour which supports the arguments that culture influences consumer behaviour. In the similar way, being an important part of a culture, religion should also influence consumer behaviour. Also, aforesaid literature review supports that religion influences consumer behaviour by influencing consumer personality or personality trait by way of terminal values in case of Darden patronage model and by way of personal determinants in case of Sheth’s shopping preference theory. So it is evident that religion should be used as a construct to study consumer behaviour.

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