

# The Interplay of Marketing and Religion: Genesis and Evolution

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**Abstract-** Religion has become a scorching word in the world right now-it is used more for polarizing rather than uniting. Originally humans had created certain rituals to form into groups and transformed that into religion in order to foster fraternity. But in the recent times, extremists are taking advantage of it by marketing religion to fulfil their selfish ends. It is imperative to study the reasons for marketing religion and its impact on peace and wellbeing of the society. It has also become pertinent to understand the factors behind violence, especially on online platforms such as social media, websites, e-Magazine. This research is, therefore, designed to explore the intentions behind marketing religion and its long-lasting ill effects caused on society. The major finding discussed in this research paper is the extremists' ways of creating confusion by manipulating facts of the scriptures and to brainwash the gullible for achieving money or power. A mechanism to control this religious extremism, which is being spread through religious marketing has also been suggested, and the need for an international platform to discuss various topics about religion, culture or customs of a community, state or nation has been exemplified. Extent literature review has been used for this research work.

**Keywords:** Marketing religion, Extremism, Digital marketing, Polarizing public, Politics, Artificial Intelligence.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The most sizzling topic for debates or discussion has been religion since times immemorial [1] (Liebman, 1983). This has led to wars, creation of factions, partitions of nations, and subjugation or marginalization of some communities. Since ancient times religion has been held with high regard because of its uncanny nature. Humans believe in the existence of a super natural power omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Some religions also worship nature, some worship God in an anthropomorphic form, some even believe in zoomorphism while some do not dare to give any shape to

God and believe him to be power beyond human imaginations [2] (Jonte-Pace, 2001). Very few religions encourage worship of elderly people after their death or while they are still alive. They call them as 'Gurus' and 'Babas', an incarnation [3] (Shourie, 1997). There has always been a frenzy to attain religious supremacy. Messengers, apostles, Prophets, preachers, evangelists and many of such order travelled and traversed unknown and uncharted territories just for the sake of spreading the message of their religion and to attract followers [4] (Movahed, 2004). In marketing parlance we can term it as "personal marketing". So, marketing of religion was always there.

Marketing is defined as an act of promoting some product or service to sell that for certain value in return. Advertisement holds paramount position in marketing and this advertisement kept evolving with change in public need and technology. Now-a-days with the unprecedented use of technology digital marketing gained utmost attention to promote any product or service. This also became a creative task to bring the message involved in promotion to a more personal level with a clear study and analysis on one's interests and preferences. Most sensitive feeling of all humankind, from ages, is Religion (without even any authentic scientific proof, till date).

## **2. Marketing Religion - Concept**

Religion is set of beliefs to worship supernatural power, the creator of this universe and the life on it. It is strong enough to control feelings all sects of humans from illiterates to educates, children to senior citizens, and from all economic strata. Historically religious feelings have been reason for many clashes, separations and wars [5] (Shults, 2012). The strength of this feeling has made a way for religious leaders and other marketers to market their products or also design new products to suit local religious practices. Depending upon the ratio of gender population, purchasing capacity, traditions and religious practices; products started evolving into market [6] (Bush, 2010).

The above-mentioned religion leaders, so called gurus or priests, who lead religion followers in worship, have showed interest in making new market deviating from Product of enlightenment to one of entertainment [7] (Einstein, 2008). Consumer started making personal connection with product and this made that product stand out of the competition and only way for other followers with same faith, according to Mara Einstein in her book, Brands of Faith. As people were deeply indulged in faith, in olden days, it became easy for religious organizations to start developing new products with minimum risk and maximum profits.

Christians believe in worshipping God every Sunday in churches. The decline in church attendance has grabbed many peoples' attention and developed interest to study the factors responsible for this negative growth. The Catholic Church drew as many as 55% of all adult Catholics under 30 years of age to church in a typical week in 1966. By 1975 the figure had fallen to 39% and further declines in weekly attendance were expected [8] (Kotler, 1979). Intensive study brought new techniques into practice by Christian organizations. Growth of church is found to be positively related with broadcasting services on radio, TV and newspaper advertisement [9] (McDaniel, 1989).

Religion is built on historical events and teachings; books are ideal source of wisdom. Motivational speeches and inspirational stories are gathered in religious books and used to invite new members and spread religion. Without the stories of The Puranas and The Upanishads, it could have been extremely difficult for present day Hindus to relate to the complex ideas presented in the Vedas [10] (Media, 2016). Marketing books and music is done by religious organizations through print media and radio channels. This was a booming market and Christian organization made best out of it. The growth rates and profitability of Christian retailing have been drawing in some of the nation's largest corporations, including retailing giant and mega publisher Random house [11] (Buss, 1996).

Radio announcements and TV shows gained popularity with growth in technology and increase in availability of televisions at affordable price. Services aired at particular time became a part of daily routine and seemed to be more easy and effective way of delivering spiritual content [12] (Pohlman,

2011). The number of people who visit cinema halls is rapidly growing and is always above the population attending religious services, it paved a path for religious organizations to start spreading religious beliefs and its importance through movies. It is also proven information through videos and pictures seems more sophisticated than through text in scriptures. Profits are made by selling creative stories with a religion influence to match followers' belief and interests [13] (Praise the Lord and pass the popcorn: [1 Edition], 1998).

Marketing religion became an important aspect for every religious organization, and gave a tough competition to existing religions without advertisements. Consumers with religious beliefs are highly loyal to brands associated with religions. Faith-centric marketing shares similarities with sport/music marketing, where fan(atic)s exhibit similar traits. [14] (Wilson, 2012).

In second half of 20th century, old cities with improper infrastructure started gaining importance just by adding religious significance to ancient buildings and making it a pious place for religious followers. Catalonia Sacra is a good example for this, it was portrayed as a religious tourist place to grab the attention of growing cultural and religious tourism [15] (Dolors Vidal Casellas, 2013).

In this modern era (21st century), growth of religion is found to be directly proportional to their presence in social media. Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp have highest priority among all, as they deliver the best service and have access to huge number of people in one go. Faith memes are catchy, provocative phrases that circulate the essence of a particular faith on the World Wide Web. [16] (Rajan, 2015). Facebook memes, YouTube videos and WhatsApp messages floated from one contact to another like a snowball effect and in matter of minutes can be delivered to millions of users.

### **3. Evolution of Marketing of Religion**

Starting from age old times, when people of a community held their belief and respect to teachings of their community leader, everything was under such leader's control. To keep their followers under strict restrictions, those leaders brought a new concept above their understanding and named that power as creator or God [17] (Schlatter, 1940). According to them, this power is paranormal and is superior to all the creation [18] (Goode, 2012). This belief kept true for long duration and hence became an undeniable fact.

People started obeying the commands disguised under the name of this supernatural power because they did not dare to find any alternative [19] (Rice, 2003). Slowly, this obeying to any religious command opened gates to new opportunities for ancient religious leader and monks [20] (Versnel, 1981). They started selling ornaments made with normal thread and stones for higher rates just by adding few colors and by doing some prayers (chanting mantras). That's the initial religious marketing strategy. Profits were made so easy, all they need is to understand peoples' beliefs and needs to be able to sell a suitable product with minimum incurred cost to prepare the product. It can be priced at any reasonable price range, according to the difficulty level of the problem that the product is intended to solve [21] (Kim Shyan Fam, 2004).

As the days passed and civilization changed, the necessity of the people (religious followers) also kept changing. The standards of religion and its practices are also became sophisticated and reasonable. Religious heads deleted few old rules and added new rules to keep it always up to mark with ever changing trends and requirements [22] (Day, 1998). To educate people on these changes regularly they started conducted masses. As the requirement of these gathering increased, few religions have taken an important and game changing step i.e. to introduce religion in schools as a subject. Christian missionaries and orthodox Muslims encouraged this practice. So, religious feeling went deep into hearts of school students from the very young age. This also created a new market to sell religious textbooks and other school accessories and also reduced resistance against religion and its impact on peoples' life [23] (Laqueur, 1976).

Religious feelings kept digging layers deeper into our regular life and centuries after its inception, it became a common practice and many do not dare to question any religious practice but accepts it as a norm. As religious feelings strengthened, people found new gaps to bring in new products. Interestingly, manufacturing cost of these products is significantly less than the price at which they are sold. That is because of the religious sentiment attached to these goods and less competition in market. In 'Act of Meaning', Jerome Burner mentioned how closely music is associated with our feelings according to scientific proofs [24] (Burner, 1993). We all know the way music triggers inner feelings to burst out our emotions. These emotional feelings are so sensitive and important to control our desires and behavior. Religion has now crept into more sensitive layer of our mind and started controlling our emotions with devotional music [25] (Kaplan, 2015). Best examples for this religious music are Christian carols, bhajans, kirtans, etc. Music albums are released at premium prices at special events and occasions. Albums are decorated with religious symbols, pictures and slogans to create a pious appeal to all devotees. This helps album producer to generate more profits with high margin and also prevents privacy with an inherent terror feeling of God's protection on.

Along with music industry another important industry is publishing. Books are important to carry information of preset religious practices to next generations, as well as, to read about ancient religious rituals and study their impact. These books are called Holy Scriptures and blindly followed without any amendments or alterations. Therefore, these scriptures have great influence on behavior of community, state or nation as a whole. Religious countries give priority to instructions written in these books while formulating their rules and regulations and sometimes seems so new to people from other parts of the world with another set of religious customs [26] (Nord, 2004). Both music and books not only record the present scenario but also helps to invoke new set of isolated points which may lead to new turning in future towards another state changing rules. For example, connecting two dots (points) from different opinions in different books of same time may bring a new opportunity to start another topic in same religion or entirely a new religion. More clearly, Jews, Christians and Muslims and few other religions share same history in different words and names. Few changes in one customs developed a new creed and so, religion [27] (Hume, 1998). It is not just theoretical but also well proved that human tends to show more interest in new combinations and recipes, whether it be in technology, food or religion. It became easy for leaders with huge number of followers to bring a new set of principles and start a new community because no one of those devotees dare to question the reason behind new practices or why they need to change [28] (Laqueur, 1976). This terror is inherited from ages and taught from childhood in schools or through devotional music and books. To bring a product or service it became easy to target the existing practices or make a new ritual and impose it on already existing market. This keeps on going till people realize the tactics behind this kind of marketing strategies, either by companies or religious heads, for their profits. [29] (Ingebreetsen, 1996).

As technology advanced we were able to communicate wirelessly in 1920 and the first wireless communication was through radio. This mass broadcast was initially used to spread government information or other important messages. Slowly and incrementally, religion occupied a separate place for it in radio channels. It became compulsory for radio companies to devote separate time for religious program in their daily schedule. Radio channels also generated more profit from these religious programs rather than other funny stuff because of followers' attention towards that program and their regularity [30] (Segal, 1998).

Regularly floating news and information about religions via radio, newspapers and in religious or political congregations became an old school practice with ever changing technology. The new sharp and shining edge of technology redefines communication, entirely. In the latest phase of technology sending message from any part of the globe to other extreme end became comparatively easy. It is just a matter of seconds. The tools used in this rapid fast communication are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc. with a click of button and this ease brings a new problem. [31] (PH Cheong, 2012).

#### 4. Statement of the Problem

Everyone who has access to internet can watch and read all publicly visible posts. This is a serious threat to peace in society. Anyone, with or without proper knowledge on religion, culture, customs and other beliefs of a region or country can spoil the real essence of that ritual by commenting with half knowledge and spreading a wrong information to the entire world in a single click. There is no proper control mechanism to keep the innocent safe from this hazardous information [32] (Campbell, 2013). This confusion is spotted as the main culprit and grabbed our prime attention in this study about marketing religion online. Many of us do like, share and subscribe various posts and channels in social media like Facebook and YouTube. Subscribing to a channel will make you see more content form that stream and similar posts which slowly and incrementally creeps into subconscious mind and starts controlling ideas and actions. This shows a clear influence on behavior and controls it as the admin of such posts and channels intend to [33] (L Van Zoonen, 2010). It's nothing other than surrendering to someone's control, without even knowing the accuracy (authenticity) of their posts. And for instance, if one is struck with a doubt about a religious concept that is viral in social media, then there is no dedicated platform to fire a religious question or to discuss about the confusion.

#### 5. Extremists' use of religion as a product to market

Invoking religious fervor among people has multiple benefits to various groups of people. The most important out of all is enjoyed by politicians of all countries in this world. If they support a particular religion to get more number of votes, then they spend enough portion of their budget only to spread a positive feeling on that religion or if they (politicians) go against any religion in their election campaign, then they spend same amount of money against that particular religion. In both the cases it is spreading extremist feeling on a religion [34] (Gentile, 2006). This may effect sensitive feelings of, same or other religion, people. These unlawful campaigns draw a thick border between different communities, religions or regions with myriad doubts and confusions. These campaigns vividly demonstrate how religion is marketed to make greedy profits out of peoples' beliefs in a faith or religion [35] (Mottner, 2007).

Apart from politicians there are many other categories of people who try to exploit this delicate area with greedy and unlawful intensions. People with sound knowledge in science and technology try to design a new product suitable to regional beliefs, customs and traditions. These may turn up as successful startups and can leverage the brand value developed from these religious products to other commercial goods in later stages of business life. They try to link technology with existing practices in that specific group of people, simply called community, and gives life to a brand-new product with features to make these peoples' life easy and comfortable to practice their regular rituals. As it is new in market, they sell it at premium price and also gain brand value to become pioneers in that market [36] (Cristian Mendoza, 2017).

All religious books and music are specific to a set of beliefs, most of the times. So authors and music producers target to spread posts about the religion that favors their release and spend lot of money as investment in this as a part of their marketing. It is like controlling people emotions and release a suitable product in resonance with public feelings to make best out of the product. It is now easy to understand public pulse with the help of mega programs working with millionth part of millisecond accuracy and can analyze thousands of Giga bytes in fraction of seconds [37] (Preus, 1990). This data analysis algorithms and Natural Language Programing (NLP) help to draw meaningful information from raw data and analyze it to make reports for predicting the success of any product even before releasing it. Marketing religion is involved with lot of mathematical calculations and computer algorithms.

Along with commercial purpose another important aspect of marketing religion is to provide artificial respiration to age old customs and religious rituals. To keep religion and its practices alive in followers it became a tradition to celebrate yearly festivals under the name of some God or for some other reason. These festivals may not have any true sense but definitely linked to some story or incident believed to have happened in history. To promote this feeling religious leaders quite often try to promote their



religion in those specific days or weeks. The more are the advertisements more is the impact in religious followers or else in this today's world remembering festivals or practices is next to impossible [38] (Tim Oakes, 2010). To keep religion or culture alive, artificial respiration is provided through marketing and reminding people about the reasons for celebrating festival or importance of performing rituals.

Promoting a religion or its importance is becoming easy day by day with advancement of technology. Digital marketing has become serious business. Creating a page on Facebook or channel on YouTube adds followers and subscribers to the list and keeps on bombarding them with regular notifications to keep them tuned with regular news and details about upcoming events. Social media has become a powerful instrument for reaching huge number of people in no time [39] (Simmons, 2008). Companies conduct interesting campaigns and force followers to involve in it by targeting personal feelings or emotionally requesting them to share post with friends or tag their friends to that post. In either way it brings new audience to the posts and make it successful. Then it becomes a viral post which in turn leads to mass communication about the product and tempts consumers to purchase it.

### **6. Consequences of spreading religious fervor**

Marketing religion is more than just marketing because it is not just selling a product under the religious brand but it is developing trust and building rigid walls around religions and customs [40] (Bush, 2010). These walls grow stronger with time and becomes impossible to reunite those divided groups under different religions. Because they are made to believe strongly in some rules and regulations suitable to the product, they keep on believing in it till end and stay comfortable with such practices only. This leads to religious extremism and becomes a reason for fighting and wars among religious groups [41] (Evans, 2002).

To practice some ancient religious rituals, we may need to compromise with environment. To stay in tune with the environmental regulations, the religious leaders amended certain rituals and made them environmentally friendly. With increase in religious pressure, the demand for natural resources to perform age old religious will shoot up. Some of these religious activities require to sacrifice livestock in the name of God. Environmental pollution and harm to animals are side effects of marketing religious feelings [42] (Gottlieb, 1996). In addition to existing religions, new religions come into existence very often. These new religions may come with entirely new concept or combination of existing beliefs from different religions. For example, Christians and Jews believe almost same, the only difference in broad level is – Christians believe that Jesus (the Christ, Savior) born 2000 years ago while Jews are still expecting the arrival of Christ. They share same history and same believes, only New Testament is added in holy book – Bible – of Christians. Around 800 years from birth of Jesus another religion came into existence which also share same history with similar names in other language with another sound of pronunciation and started by Muhammad. It is Islam. There are many Abrahamic religions and these three also belong to that category, because all these religions consider Abraham as their great grandfather from whom their race started. Jerusalem is an ideal example to say how all Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in same history. Jerusalem is holy city for all three above mentioned religion and so they fight (sometimes unseen and other times directly) holy war to grab control over that monumental, historical and holy place. Under the name of religious prestige or to protect its historical values people undergo a lot of mental stress. General public living in border or other affected areas are harassed to extreme levels just for the sake of religion [43] (Baker, 1980).

Now this harassment is no more specific to region/religion, it crossed its boundaries and spread all over the world with the help of social media. Extremism is a serious issue [44] (Liebman, 1983). It is mostly incited by politicians and religious leaders. They try to hit the sensitive point and gain favor of majority to gain popularity. They make money by polarizing the public into different groups as a part of dirty politics. Creating a page and uploading videos in Facebook has become an easy way to spread religious or other extreme feelings about normal issues [45] (T Davidson, 2014). All social problems are

viewed through religious lens to add unnecessary spice and make a religious issue. This is how politicians and other popular personalities make moolah out of marketing religion.

### **7. How to control religious extremism**

As we can see in all above discussions, the major factor for all religious conflicts is the confusion created by middle men for their profits. If there is an international platform to express our doubts and discuss about any religious topics, then it surely clears confusion about most common religious issues. There is no specific platform for religious leaders and devotees to spread or follow truth with appropriate references from Holy Scriptures [46] (Farmer, 2001). Participants from different countries bring new points to discuss and make it an interesting platform to discuss and spread knowledge about various cultures, religions, customs of different states and countries [47] (Fichter, 1981). Freedom to express doubts increases if user can go anonymous while posting question. This is an important feature for all users to get clarity on ongoing issues without disclosing their identity. Anyway, this feature should not keep users' behavior closed from admin, because this platform should not open a new way for extremists to spread hate speech with potential to polarize. Control mechanism plays an important role in controlling the improper behavior or unethical intentions and keep other users safe from cruel and greedy extremists' behavior. This mechanism differentiates this proposed platform from existing discussion forums. As user registers on the platform, he/she should agree to terms and conditions in which it will be stated that their behavior in application is monitored to control extremists' behavior and safeguard innocent user from the risk of being exposed to wrong messages or false impressions.

The mail Id used for registration is therefore used to gather information about the user from other social media platforms registered with same mail Id. If user likes, shares or subscribe to violent posts or pages then it gives a clear impression about their intention to participate in discussions. In case of any anomaly detected in Social media by Artificial Intelligence integrated in this platform, the visibility of their post decreases and it may restrict user from posting questions or participating in discussions. If Artificial Intelligence finds wrong words in comments or posts, which may hurt any religion or spoils the decorum of the platform, then an automated message is generated to warn about the violation of terms and conditions. If this repeats frequently, then posts are blocked and if no positive change is observed then eventually user is restricted from posting on the platform (user is blocked). In this way we can maintain peaceful conversation to clear doubts and spread knowledge. It gradually gains popularity and becomes an important platform for religious leader, devotees, research-oriented scholars and knowledge seekers.

### **8. Future scope**

Technology is going to get more efficient and stronger to accelerate our lives, as well as to schedule our work and control our behavior. Artificial Intelligence is progressing at a thunder speed and grabbing everyone's attention with its unlimited ability of performing most complicated activities with high accuracy in less time. So, to control violence and bring back peace we should opt for efficient algorithms like Facebook insights and deep linking network analysis to understand behavior of people from particular region or religion. This study with the help of powerful programming languages like Natural Language Programming (NLP) we can build a new network and rate the probability of happening for each possibility. In this way we can estimate or predict future of any public problem, political issue, health or disease concern and customer behavior with similar traits. This helps companies in designing the correct product and implement right marketing strategy in proper market with major percent of targeted audience. To perform all these profit-making mathematics and estimation we need raw data about people from a location, religion, age, gender and country. To study about them it is mandatory to have access to understand their thinking ideology and decision-making abilities. The proposed discussion platform in this paper has the suitable characteristics to collect the required information in right manner.

The data collected on this platform is therefore employed in efficient algorithms and well-constructed order of execution to generate weekly statistics and monthly reports. These reports file the required learnings of different geographical locations, religions, communities and other categories. This

information builds a meaningful information for any future study about a specific aspect of public behavior for both commercial and social purpose. Hence this platform helps to construct an organized mine of information for proper analysis and research.

### 9. Final Words

This work is the result of extent literature review in which the evolution of marketing in the field of religion was studied and the reasons why marketing, publicity and polarization was needed in order to preserve and propagate religion. An attempt was also made to study how religion was used as a weapon by anti-social forces and the consequences of shift of religious power in the hands of such forces. The said study also tracked the evolution of technology and the digital marketing means which became a powerful tool in the hands of the religious leaders. Finally, this work attempts to suggest a mechanism in order to control the vicious, incorrect and misleading propaganda about religion on the social media.

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