

Exploring the Influence of Religiosity on Apparel Shopping Behaviour among the Mizo

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Abstract

Backed by findings from past researchers in the field of consumer religiosity and its relationship with several aspects of consumer behaviour, the present study attempts to establish a link between consumer religiosity and shopping behaviour within the religiously and culturally homogeneous Mizo society in Northeast India. The study looks at shopping behaviour as manifested through trust in apparel sales persons and complaint intention, whereby the term 'apparel' is further confined in scope to include only those styles considered acceptable as 'church clothes'. Consumer religiosity was measured with the help of the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) developed by Allport and Ross (1967). Findings suggest there are statistically significant relationships between religiosity and shopping behaviour.

Key words: Consumer religiosity, Mizo Christian, Church attire, Trust in salespersons, Store loyalty.

Introduction

At first glance, religion and consumption may appear to be conflicting concepts. However, there is a common thread binding the two disparate concepts together which is culture. Religion is one of the most dominant characteristics of a culture (Pohlong, 2004), especially in Mizoram, a small State in Northeast India, wherean overwhelming majority (87.16 percent) of the population follows Christianity (Census 2011). Being 'religious' in the Mizo society involves regular participation in church activities, accentuating the collective nature of the

society. Being a Mizo has become tantamount to being a Christian, with the Mizo identity irrevocably transformed from that of 'vicious marauders and head-hunters' to 'Mizo Christians' (Lloyd, 1991) within the span of a few decades. In fact, Pachuau (2014) says: 'Time in Mizoram is governed by church time, in the span of both a day and a lifetime'. The sheer number of churches of various denominations present at any given locality, and visible from any vantage point, attests to the predominance of Christianity in this remote north-eastern state of India.

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According to Durkheim (1995), 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'. Every religion lays down a formal set of rules or tenets that seek to guide or modify the beliefs, values and behaviour of its followers, providing a reliable support for culture formation (Delener, 1990). Even if individuals do not remain true to these rules at heart 'they would try to remain within its broad framework, at least externally' (Pohlong, 2004). Thus, religion and culture provide humans with values to live by, thereby influencing their behaviour at both the individual and social levels.

Numerous studies (Bailey & Sood 1993; Essoo & Dibb 2004; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz 2003; Mokhlis 2006; Singhapakdi et al. 2000) have attested to the significance of religion as a factor influencing consumers since religion 'is not a fad that can be dismissed by the marketer as a short-term change, but rather it is a long-term phenomenon' Khraim (2010). This is because the basic doctrines of a particular religion are static as compared to other cultural values and attitudes, making religion a reliable factor in studying consumer behaviour (McDaniel & Burnett 1990). However, despite its evident importance in consumers' lives, religion has remained an under-studied topic in consumer research across the world. The present study looks at the influence of religiosity

as defined by Allport and Ross (1967), that is, intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, on Mizo Christian consumer behaviour. Of particular interest is the effect of religiosity on Mizo consumers' trust in salespersons and their intention to complain in case of dissatisfactory consumer experiences.

Religiosity is the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practised by an individual (Kamaruddin, 2007). According to Clayton & Gladden (1974), it is a commitment to an ideology. For instance, religiosity may be manifested in the form of church attendance, donations and participation in church group activities, etc.

The influence of Christianity is deeply entrenched into the everyday lives of the Mizo people. This is bound to have an impact on how Mizo consumers make their decisions regarding their purchases and their general attitude towards consumption. Furthermore, Christian principles encourage a trusting and forgiving nature that may influence the way Christian consumers perceive and react to unpleasantness in their consumption experiences (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Also, religion fosters a conservative attitude which may make religious consumers less adventurous and more risk-averse. Thus, religion has a potential for significantly influencing the consumption and shopping behaviour of Mizo Christian consumers. Past researchers have shown, time and again, that religiosity influences consumer

behaviour (Arli&Tjiptono 2013; Shin et al. 2011; Siguaw& Simpson 1997). Mizo Christianity, being a socio-cultural establishment, is a fitting candidate for such a study.

In Christian cultures across the world, wearing one's best clothes to church is a mark of reverence of the 'Lord's Day', that is, Sunday. In common parlance, the term 'Sunday Best' is traditionally used to refer to such clothes worn by Christians. These are usually the best formal clothes they own, reserved for special occasions. While the culture of Sunday Best is on the decline in other parts of the world (Litfin, 2012), it is still preserved and actively propagated amongst Mizo Christians. Even a cursory observation on any given Sunday will attest to this. Girls and boys, men and women, young and old - all come out carefully attired on Sundays. While the men and boys invariably wear formal pants and shirts, ties and blazers, and often, suits too; the attire worn by women and girls differ according to their age groups. The youngest girls - the ones who go to Beginner's and Primary Sunday Schools - wear frocks and dresses, the older girls in Sunday School wear dresses or blouse-skirt suits, and adult women are expected to wear the *puan* (formal wrap-around) with tailored blouses. While the youngest girls may get away with sleeveless dresses, it is considered unacceptable for older girls and adults to wear clothes that have no sleeves. Pants are not accepted as respectable church attire for females. The Mizoram

Presbyterian Church, in its Presbyterian Handbook 2014, has issued an advisory regarding the maintenance of appropriate church attire for both male and female attendees. Although the advisory is not a prescription, it advises against the wearing of pants by females to church, amongst other pointers. That such an advisory needs to be issued brings to fore the importance Mizo Christians place on their physical appearance and the significance of appropriate church attire in Mizo society. Furthermore, during the year 2015-2016, the *Kristian Thalai Pawl (KTP)*, the Presbyterian Church youth organization whose members constitute the target population for the present study, in their 'Kum Puan Thupui Kaihruaina-Krista Tana Danglam Ngam' (a guide booklet on how to pursue Godliness and be different for Christ) an entire chapter was dedicated on how Mizo Christian youth should distinguish themselves in their manner of dressing and appearance.

Coupled with past encouragements from missionaries (Lloyd, 1991) and the present church's unwavering stand on formal dress codes, there is a longstanding tradition of formal church attire in Mizo Christian life, which is likely to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. In fact, a lot more can be written about the 'Sunday fashion' of Mizo Christians. There is also a long standing tradition of buying new clothes for major annual church events, like Christmas, youth conventions, Sunday School meets, weddings etc. Apart from Sunday Bests and the sartorial demands brought on by

festivals and other special events, there is also the requirement of semi-formal attire for the numerous church activities that occur throughout the week. The more inclusive term 'church attire' is used to include both kinds of clothing - Sunday Best as well as semi-formal clothes worn to church-related social activities.

The penchant for fashion consumption is most apparent in the youth, the Gen Y, who have been described as 'the most consumption-oriented of all generations' (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). This is the rationale behind the selection of the KTP members as the target population for the present study. This Presbyterian youth group comprises of Mizo youth between the age group of 14 to 40 years, the Generation Y cohort. The KTP has the maximum number of social activities in any given year, meeting every Monday night for a worship service, where members are expected to dress in formal or semi-formal clothes, the women notably wearing their *puan*. In addition to this, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday nights, and occasionally Saturdays, are spent conducting choir practices, fund raising activities, committees etc. Even in these places, a certain level of formality is expected from members in the way they dress, except when physical work is involved.

Numerous studies like that of Delener (1990) and Siguaw & Simpson (1997) have shown that religious consumers tend to be more conservative and risk-averse. Some apprehensions are

bound to exist among religious Mizo consumers as to the acceptability (as church attire) of the apparel products being offered in stores. Moreover, Christian teachings extol the virtues of trusting others and holding them in utmost regard. This has a potential for practical application in real life situations, as seen in studies by McDaniel & Burnett (1990) & Choi, Kale & Shin (2010). Within the scope of the present study, it is hypothesized that highly religious consumers place greater trust in salespersons and are more likely to consider their advice, when compared to less religious consumers. This assumption is especially well-founded when the collectivistic nature of Mizo society is brought into consideration.

When dissatisfied, consumers often voice their complaints to business managers or to third parties like consumer courts/forums, their social groups etc. While this is a perfectly rational behaviour, for some highly religious consumers, it may come in conflict with the Christian doctrine that venerates forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, Jr. 1999). This may be one of the reasons why the consumer forums in Mizoram have such few cases to report (Directorate of Economics & Statistics 2014) despite research findings by Laldinliana and Jyoti Kumar (2012) that show Mizo consumers do have intentions to complain in case of dissatisfying purchases. The present study provides an assessment of the influence of religiosity on a consumer's intention to voice complaints, formally or otherwise.

Because religious practices often defy the logic of the marketplace (Iannaccone, 1992), highly religious consumers may behave in seemingly irrational manner which may leave them at a less advantaged position compared to consumers who are not religiously oriented.

Objective and Methodology

The present study seeks to evaluate the relationship between religiosity and the Mizo consumer's level of trust in salespersons and complaint intentions in case of dissatisfactory experiences. The main objective of the study is to gauge the role of religiosity in the Mizo consumer buying process in the context of church-appropriate apparel.

Consumer religiosity is measured using the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) developed by Allport and Ross (1967). The ROS consists of 20 items, divided into two sub-scales - the Extrinsic sub-scale consisting of 11 items and the Intrinsic sub-scale with 9 items.

It is hypothesized that highly religious consumers place greater trust in apparel salespersons and are more likely to consider their advice. It is also hypothesized that highly religious consumers are less willing to lodge formal complaints even when they are dissatisfied with their consumption experience. Thus, two formal hypotheses are framed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between religiosity and trust in salespersons.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between religiosity and intention to complain in case of a dissatisfactory consumer experience.

The study was undertaken among Christian youth belonging to the Mizo community. For this purpose, the KTP, the youth fellowship of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church was selected as the target population, considering its unparalleled share in membership as compared to other similar organizations in Mizoram. The youth fellowship has a total membership of 1,38,871 according to the Kristian Thalai Pawl Report 2014-2015. The study was confined to Aizawl city, the state capital, where the concentration of the target group is the highest at 59,202 members, that is, about 42 percent of total members. The age group of the target population ranged from 14 to 40 years of age. Amongst all the constituent bodies of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church, the youth fellowship has the maximum number of activities in any given year, which may translate into higher demand for clothing variety.

In all, 500 questionnaires were physically distributed across Aizawl city. It was also uploaded on Google Forms. After screening all the responses, 350 completed questionnaires were selected for analysis for this study.

Results and Discussion

All 350 respondents belonged to the age group of 14 years to 40 years, as stipulated by KTP guidelines. Of these, 51.7 percent respondents were male and

48.3 percent were female. More than 95 percent of the respondents were younger than 35 years of age, with two-thirds of all respondents aged between 20 to 29 years. Respondents with at least college-level education comprised of 62.3 percent of the total sample.

The religious orientation of the respondents was measured using the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) developed by Allport & Ross (1967). The ROS consists of 20 items, which is divided into two sub-scales - the Extrinsic sub-scale consisting of 11 items and the Intrinsic sub-scale with 9 items. In order to determine the internal consistency of the Religious Orientation Scale, a reliability analysis was done to find out Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient for the Scale. For the complete ROS scale with 20 items, Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = 0.738$, showing an adequate level of internal consistency. No striking differences were observed between the genders with respect to their responses to the ROS questionnaire. Furthermore, since the present study is concerned with the total index score and not sub-scale indexes, further analysis work is performed on the

index figures and not on the individual item scores.

Kruskal-Wallis H-Test showed the education level of the respondent had a statistically significant effect on the score of the ROS, $H(4) = 12.665$, $p = 0.013$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra test for ordered alternatives showed $J = 19,314$, $z_j = -3.088$, $p_j = 0.002$, $r_j = -0.16$, indicating a statistically significant trend of overall religiosity decreasing with higher education levels ($p_j < 0.05$).

Regarding the analysis on shopping behaviour, the following results were obtained:

i. Trust in Salespersons

The level of trust in salespersons was measured using two questions - one was positively-worded and the other was framed as a negative sentence. Reverse coding was used for the latter question. As shown in Table 1 below, 40.6 percent of the respondents found salespersons to be trustworthy, while 34 percent did not and 25.4 percent were undecided. The median score was 3 for all respondents. When the same question was altered and posed as a negatively-worded statement, the results showed a clearer picture.

Table 1: Trust in Salespersons' Advice

Do you agree with the statement- Salespersons give me truthful advice?						
Rating Scale	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Disagree	5	8	13	1.4	2.3	3.7
Disagree	46	60	106	13.1	17.1	30.3

Neutral	52	37	89	14.9	10.6	25.4
Agree	77	64	141	22	18.3	40.3
Strongly Agree	1	0	1	0.3	0	0.3
Total	181	169	350	51.7	48.3	100

Source: primary data

Table 2 shows that 79.1 percent of the respondents did not trust salespersons while only 6.9 percent trusted them. Reverse scoring is used for this item as the statement is posed in a negative way. The median score was 2 for both genders, with a few outliers in both groups.

Table 2: Perception about Salespersons

Do you agree with the statement- Salespersons say anything, as long as they make their sale?						
Rating Scale	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Agree	35	46	81	10	13.1	23.1
Agree	99	97	196	28.3	27.7	56
Neutral	32	17	49	9.1	4.9	14
Disagree	13	8	21	3.7	2.3	6
Strongly Disagree	2	1	3	0.6	0.3	0.9
Total	181	169	350	51.7	48.3	100

Source: primary data

Mann-Whitney U-test indicated a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of the level of trust they place in salespersons, $z = -1.985$, $p = 0.047$. The effect size $r = -0.106$ indicated a small difference between the genders. The mean ranks (female = 164.46, male = 185.81) implied females were less likely to trust salespersons than males.

Kruskal-Wallis H Test showed that the respondents' education level had a statistically significant effect on their level of trust in salespersons, $H(4) = 21.752$, $p = 0.000$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra

test for ordered alternatives showed that $J = 18,245$, $z_j = -4.129$, $p_j = 0.000$, $r_j = -0.221$, indicating a statistically significant trend of trust level decreasing with higher education levels ($p_j < 0.05$).

ii. Complaint Intentions

As shown in Table 3 below, while 65.7 percent of the respondents were found to be unwilling to approach consumer courts/forums, only 16.9 percent were willing to do so to resolve their complaints. Further, 17.4 percent were undecided or 'Neutral' about this query. The

median score was low at median = 2 willingness to approach the courts/ forums overall.

Table 3: Willingness to Approach Consumer Courts

Do you agree to this statement: I am willing to approach the consumer courts or forums to resolve my complaints?						
Rating Scale	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Disagree	27	34	61	7.7	9.7	17.4
Disagree	87	82	169	24.9	23.4	48.3
Neutral	30	31	61	8.6	8.9	17.4
Agree	33	18	51	9.5	5.1	14.6
Strongly Agree	4	4	8	1.1	1.1	2.3
Total	181	169	350	51.7	48.3	100

Further, as shown in Table 4 below, at median = 2 for both groups. 59.4 percent of all respondents did not have intentions to complain while only 26 percent intended to complain when dissatisfied with their consumption experience. The median score was low

at median = 2 for both groups. However, the range of scores was much wider for the male group. This implied that male respondents were more polarized in their responses than females.

Table 4: Intention to make Complaints

Do you agree with the statement- When dissatisfied, I intend to make my complaints known?						
Rating Scale	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Strongly Disagree	12	23	35	3.4	6.6	10
Disagree	88	85	173	25.1	24.3	49.4
Neutral	25	26	51	7.1	7.4	14.6
Agree	51	31	82	14.6	8.9	23.4
Strongly Agree	5	4	9	1.4	1.1	2.6
Total	181	169	350	51.7	48.3	100

Mann-Whitney U-test indicated a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of their complaint intentions, $z = -2.913$, $p = 0.004$. The effect size $r = -0.156$ indicated a small difference between the genders. The mean ranks (female = 159.34, male = 190.59) implied females were much less likely to have complaint intentions than males.

Also, Kruskal-Wallis H Test showed that the age group a respondent belonged to had a statistically significant effect on the respondent's complaint intentions, with $H(4) = 28.927$, $p = 0.000$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra test for ordered alternatives showed $J=27,409$, $z_j= 4.739$, $p_j = 0.000$, $r_j = 0.253$, indicating a statistically significant trend of complaint intentions increasing with older age groups ($p_j < 0.05$).

Education level also had a statistically significant effect on a respondent's complaint intentions, $H(4) = 29.981$, $p= 0.000$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra test for ordered alternatives showed $J = 28,106.50$, $z_j= 5.331$, $p_j = 0.000$, $r_j = 0.285$, indicating a statistically

significant trend of complaint intentions increasing with education level ($p_j < 0.05$).

Hypotheses Testing

The two hypotheses framed for the present study were tested using bivariate correlation to determine whether significant relationships existed between the variables and also to find out the direction of such relationships. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho r_s) was calculated for each relationship. The results of the hypotheses tests are presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between religiosity and trust in salespersons.

Table 5: Relationship between Religiosity and Trust in Salespersons

Correlations		
Spearman's rho		Trust in Salespersons
Scale: ROS Index	Correlation Coefficient	.333*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
	N	350

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the above Table 5, it can be seen that there is a significant and positive correlation between total ROS score and the tendency to trust salespersons ($r_s = 0.333$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that as the level of religiosity increases, the tendency to trust salespersons also increases significantly. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. However, the effect size = 11.09 percent implies that only 11.09 percent of

the variation in trust tendency is contributed by religiosity.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between religiosity and intention to complain in case of a dissatisfactory consumer experience.

Table 6: Relationship between Religiosity and Complaint Intentions

Correlations		
Spearman's rho		Intent to Complain
Scale: ROS Total Index	Correlation Coefficient	-.163*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	350
* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

From the above Table 6, it can be seen that there is a negative and significant correlation between total ROS score and the intention to complain in case of dissatisfactory experiences ($r_s = -0.163$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that as the level of religiosity increases, the intention to register complaints decreases significantly. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is also accepted. However, the effect size = 2.66 percent implies that only 2.66 percent of the variation in complaint intention is contributed by religiosity.

Other Significant Findings

Correlation analyses indicated a statistically significant and negative relationship between ROS score and willingness to approach consumer courts/forums ($r_s = -0.119$, $p = 0.026$). This implied that respondents with a high religiosity score were less willing to seek legal means to resolve their complaints. A statistically significant and negative relationship also existed between trust in salespersons and intention to complain against unsatisfactory experiences ($r_s = -0.148$, $p = 0.005$). This implied that

respondents who trust salespersons were significantly less likely to lodge complaints against businesses. However, the effect size implied that only 2.19 percent of the variation in complaint intention was contributed by trust in salespersons.

A series of Kruskal-Wallis H Tests were also carried out. Education level was found to have a statistically significant effect on willingness to approach consumer courts/forums with $H(4) = 34.216$, $p = 0.000$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra test for ordered alternatives showed that $J = 28,046.50$, $z_j = 5.591$, $p_j = 0.000$, $r_j = 0.299$, indicating a statistically significant trend of willingness to approach consumer courts/forums increasing with education level ($p_j < 0.05$). Age also had a statistically significant effect on willingness to approach consumer courts/forums with $H(4) = 12.021$, $p = 0.017$. Further, Jonckheere-Terpstra test for ordered alternatives showed that $J = 25,611$, $z_j = 3.189$, $p_j = 0.001$, $r_j = 0.170$, indicating a statistically significant trend of willingness to approach consumer courts/forums increasing with age ($p_j < 0.05$).

The education level of the respondent was, as mentioned earlier, found to have a statistically significant effect on the score of the ROS total scale. There was a statistically significant trend of overall religiosity decreasing with higher education levels. Elçi, Sener and Alpkın (2011) also showed similar findings of religiosity decreasing with higher education levels.

Conclusions

The findings of the present study confirm that highly religious consumers are more forgiving, that is, less likely to lodge formal complaints with consumer courts/forums. However, this finding does not bode well for the progress of consumer rights in Mizoram, even though the effect size is small at 2.66 percent. As the likelihood of heeding instructions from church officials may rise with higher religiosity levels, it is recommended that the church takes up the task of educating Mizo consumers about their rights as consumers and assuring them that exercising those rights do not conflict with Christian teachings about forgiveness.

The findings also indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between religiosity and the tendency to

trust salespersons. This implies that as the level of religiosity increases, the tendency to trust salespersons also increases significantly. This is in line with Christian teachings to trust in others. Businesses must take heed of this finding and invest in improving the quality of their sales personnel through training etc.

Since the present study is confined to a limited section of Mizo Christian youth, the findings of this study, it must be noted, are limited in scope and must not be used as a basis for formulating generalizations about the Mizoram population as a whole. Comparisons between the youth and the older population may bring out more comprehensive findings. Further, comparisons with Christian youth from other cultures may also reveal remarkable findings. Inter-religion studies are also desirable. Furthermore, the relationship between religiosity and consumer behaviour was only analyzed through bivariate correlation, which does not imply causal relationship. More statistically rigorous analyses like structural equation modelling are desirable to find out the direct, mediating and moderating effects of the concerned variables.

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