

Religious sensitivity and impact on globalization

[Media](#), [Advertising](#)



When entering into a new country, marketers must be aware of various environmental differences that they may have to address, such as media restrictions and cultural and legal factors. These environmental factors differentiate the domestic market from international markets and must be included when planning a product's marketing strategy. They include various cultural, social and legal/political factors. Legal factors, in particular regulations on advertising images, claims, and media, are of concern to marketers as a country's laws focus in advertising practices while most of the other factors are more general in nature.

Such advertising restrictions can have a major influence on the degree of standardization allowed for a company's marketing program. Religion plays an important role of a culture. Religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to the supernatural, to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, and sacred histories that are intended to create meaning to life or traditionally to explain the origin of life or the Universe.

From their beliefs about the cosmos and human nature, they tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle. There are roughly 4,200 religions in the world. Advertising, culture and religion are intertwined in a consumer society. Religion and advertising have been ethically criticized from various aspects. This paper will touch on the advertising of religion and the acceptance of religion in advertising. The influence of religious beliefs on individual and social behavior is well documented. However, a review of the pertinent literature showed only a handful of studies that directly examined the influence of religion on marketing communications. Moreover, the

religious studies which did look at the influence on marketing communications focused only on the influence of Islam on advertising content and regulation in Saudi Arabia and message contentiousness among Gulf Co-operative Council countries. Both of these studies revealed the importance of understanding the Islamic religion in relation to effective advertising.

Provocative and unconventional advertising strategies and advertisements must obtain prior approval from religious authorities. Failure to do so will result in alienation of a wide segment of the conservative Saudi public. The findings from Michell and Al-Mossawi's (1999) study of Gulf Co-operative Council countries showed religiously strict Muslims scored lower in terms of recall and were unfavorable towards contentious advertisements relative to lenient Muslims. The findings suggest that there is a difference in perceived controversial elements in advertisements between a devout and a lenient Muslim. These findings also highlight the importance of matching creative execution, message content, and etc. to a society's socio-cultural environment. Suffice to say, an alienated public will certainly have a negative attitude towards the advertisement and brand recall. Offensive advertisement will not be effective in capturing an audience's attention or changing his/her attitudes.

Sociologists study religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a social institution, religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions

about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized.

It is this structure that binds people together under the same belief. This structure of belief heavily influences culture and dictates cultural norms. Each major sociological framework has its perspective on religion. From the functionalist perspective of sociological theory, religion is an integrative force in society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in the social order by promoting a sense of belonging and collective consciousness .

A second point of view, supported by Max Weber, views religion in terms of how it supports other social institutions. Weber thought that the religious belief systems provided a cultural framework that supported the development of other social institutions, such as the economy. Karl Marx focused on the conflict and oppression that religion provided to societies. Marx saw religion as a tool for class oppression in which it promotes stratification because it supports a hierarchy of people on Earth and the subordination of humankind to divine authority.

Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the process by which people become religious. Different religious beliefs and practices emerge in different social and historical contexts because context frames the meaning of religious belief. Symbolic interaction theory helps explain how the same religion can be interpreted differently by different groups or in different times throughout history. From this perspective, religious texts are not truths, but have been interpreted by people.

Thus different people or groups may interpret the same Bible in different ways. These collective varied perceptions on religion differ from country to country thus effecting the perception and acceptance of an advertising message. This is due to the cultures level of religious sensitivity. In Malaysia for example being a Islamic nation as well as bi-religion, we are more sensitive to religiously targeted advertising.

In the business of self-promotion or their product is turning to religion to gain a larger audience. In recent trends, there has been an increase of the advertising of religion in the United States. Take the religion of Kaballah for instance, five years ago many of us would openly admit that we had never heard of the religion before. But now, thanks to the media many of us know Kaballah is the religion practiced by such celebrities as Madonna and Britney Spears. In all actuality Kaballah is a more spiritual branch of the Jewish religion.

One of the largest trends of advertising that we have seen is the wearing of a cross. What used to be a symbol of ones' beliefs and values has become a mere fashion accessory. However not everyone is into advertising religion in the mainstream. In January 2005 an article was published in USA Today about a conflict between Rolling Stone Magazine and Zondervan Bible, one of the largest Bible publishers over an ad targeted at "spiritually intrigued," 18-to-34-year-olds.

Rolling Stone, which rejected the ad just weeks before its scheduled run date, cited an unwritten policy against accepting ads that contain religious messages. Executives for Zondervan say Rolling Stone was a key part of its \$1 million campaign targeted at young adults. The actual ad doesn't even

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mention the word God, but the picture shows a young man apparently pondering the problems of life. The text in the picture pushes the Today's New International Version of the Bible (TNIV), one of Zondervan's publications, as a source for the "real truth" in a world of "endless media noise and political spin. A blue bible only peeks through the bottom corner of the ad. Religion has also gained political recognition. Any debate or speech in opposition of abortion will definitely bring up the issue of religion in support of right to life and not committing murder. Likewise, Christians can argue against the corruption of homosexuality on the basis of the dangers of sexual promiscuity in an age of AIDS.

Media in Malaysia is dictated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code that outlines religious content in media under the governing body of CMCF. Following are the content of the law by MCMC; * In dealing with Religious Content, broadcasters shall have regards to Islam as the official religion of the country and the constitutional rights to freedom of religion of all other communities. * Religious broadcasts are aimed at respecting and promoting spiritual harmony and to cater to the varied religious needs of the community.

Broadcasters must ensure that its religious content is not used to convey attacks upon any race or religion or is likely to create any disharmony. * All religious programming on Islam must be approved by the relevant religious authorities prior to transmission. Advise from the appropriate religious authorities should be obtained in relation to Content relating to other religion. * However, the propagation of any religion other than Islam whether

directly or indirectly is not permitted. * Content that is wrongful, fanatical, critical and insulting against any religion shall not be permitted.

When coming off to religious sensitivity, such country may be lenient on the rules and regulations in advertising in a certain country, but some of the countries are very strict. Based on our study we have concluded that religious sensitive advertising have different perspectives in different countries. Countries such as USA do not have any rules regarding the sensitivity of some religious followers but such Muslim country such as Malaysia have those set of rules where advertisers or marketers cannot just simply put an advertisement where it can affect the sensitivity of the Malaysian citizen.

Those set of rules applies for other Muslim countries where most of them have rules to protect their Islam belief. So what does religion effect on globalization, Globalization may not occur because countries have different structure on religious sensitivity. Whereas, the use of controversial religion issues of advertising may be different according to the countries rules and regulation.