

Shopping karma: Cultural factors affect consumer satisfaction

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If you believe in karma, you're more likely to have higher expectations, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Some consumers strategically lower their expectations in order to try to increase their satisfaction with a product or experience, write authors Praveen K. Kopalle (Dartmouth College), Donald R. Lehmann (Columbia University), and John U. Farley (Dartmouth College). But people who believe in karma tend to have a more long-term orientation, which decreases the importance of momentary [happiness](#).

The authors describe the doctrine of karma as having three main tenets. First, is the notion of rebirth where actions in a particular life may bear fruit either in the current life or in the next. Second, actions can be broadly classified into appropriate (good) or inappropriate (bad). Finally, good actions in the present lead to good outcomes in the future. "The doctrine of karma links current conduct to future consequences either in this life or the next," write the authors. "Thus, a belief in karma entails, among other things, a focus on long-run consequences."

"Individuals with a long-term orientation are likely to be less inclined to lower expectations in the hope of temporarily feeling better," write the authors. "With a long-term orientation, even those individuals who are most unhappy when a product fails to live up to their expectations of it have a limited incentive to artificially lower their expectations and hence have higher (and more accurate/realistic) expectations."

The authors compared results in China with those in India and found that a significantly higher percentage of people in India believed in karma (64 percent versus 10.5 percent).

It is important for companies to understand these types of cultural differences if they wish to reach consumers in a globalized [marketplace](#), the authors write. "Perhaps most importantly, the findings are also encouraging concerning the feasibility of explicitly measuring cultural factors and assessing their impact on consumer behavior."

More information: Journal of Consumer Research: August 2010. A preprint of this article can be found at journals.uchicago.edu/jcr

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