Religious feeling influences new product uptake

May 21 2015, by Niki Widdowson

Thamer Baazeem

Companies introducing new products or services could face significant delays in adoption if they ignore the religious status of their target market.

They could, however, do well if they consulted religious leaders before release about modifying the product to lower religious objections, says a QUT PhD marketing candidate.

Thamer Baazeem from QUT's School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, investigated the effect of religiosity, or the intensity of

religious feeling, on consumer intentions towards new "religiously questionable" products.

"Religious scholars often take positions for or against new products citing religious values and norms and their rulings often influence the process of adoption of these new products," Mr Baazeem said.

"However, after a time the power of these rulings tends to diminish as the product grows in popularity."

Mr Baazeem said his interest in how religion influenced consumer behaviour began after he noted that when cameras were first introduced in mobile phones, religious scholars in his native Saudi Arabia banned them.

"However, it was only a couple of months before people started buying phones with cameras and now everyone uses them. This sparked my interest in how religion influences consumer behaviour," he said.

For his study, Mr Baazeem first measured the level of religiosity of 947 Muslim participants from Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US and then presented them with two fictional scenarios about new products that could pose religious questions.

"The fictional products were a social media site called FRIEND MAKER which let males and females be real friends through online introduction, and a mixed gender dance school called The Life.

"The study then measured the relationship between participants' degree of religiosity and their 'psychological risk' (uncertainty about doing the right thing), and their 'social risk' (how they think others would perceive them), if they were to adopt these new products.

"The results showed that having high religious belief affected psychological risk more than social risk. In other words, those with intensely felt religious views were more worried about whether they were doing the right thing in adopting the product than what other people would think about them if they did."

Mr Baazeem's second study, with 2860 participants, looked at the impact of warnings from religious scholars about the fictional products and the popularity or unpopularity of the products.

He found popular products that had not been the subject of warnings had the weakest relationship between religious feeling and risk perception, but that the effect was still significant.

Furthermore, when religious warnings were introduced, the effect on people with extrinsic religiosity - those who don't care about religious scholars but about what others think about the product - was also apparent.

"This research indicates even in this era of globalisation, religion should still be considered an important factor when introducing a new product."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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