

Spirituality and Religion Apps – The Soul Satisfying Profits

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Abstract

Spirituality is where today's generation is seeking respite from work stress, relationship issues, and tragedies of life or some are on path of self-discovery where they want to connect their inner self with universe. This path often takes them where the today's generation find most answers - on the internet. The entrepreneurs see this \$40 billion market as a business opportunity and the digital realm is filled with e-books, podcasts, videos and applications. This papers presents a business case for spiritual and religious applications studies various applications available on Google Play store and classifies them as SPOTLRR on the basis of products and services offered.

Keywords – Religion, spirituality, mobile applications

Introduction

Spirituality is one of the most talked about term these days and is celebrated by young corporate employees and senior citizens equally. Spirituality is considered to be a holistic way which gives peace and ensures that an individual is in sync with the universe. It is more of an outside – in approach. Religion is considered a bit old school and spirituality is more acceptable term in youth which frees them from instructional structure of religion.

The origin of the word lies in Latin word spiritus which means breadth of life. Benner (1989) states that spirituality is a human response to God's gracious call. Myers (1990) explains spirituality as a continuing search for meaning, depth and purpose of life, an understanding of universe and natural forces contributing to a personal belief system. Kale (2006) describes spirituality as individual's connect of inner self to the known world and beyond. For the purpose of this study we will consider spirituality and religion as one.

This quest for discovering the inner self is seen as an excellent marketing opportunity by the marketers. The market is flooded with Gurus, aromatherapy products, yoga mats and apparels, self-help books, mantra CDs, and now the latest addition is various Mobile applications and digital products claiming to connect men to the divine.

The number of smart phone users is increasing ever year and around 432 million Indians are accessing internet through Phones. Indians have downloaded 12.1 Billion applications on their phones according annual report by App Annie, an analytics company

This paper aims to explore the market of religious and spiritual products in India and study the applications available on Google Play and classify them on the basis of the services they are providing.

Literature review

The researchers have always been exploring the impact of social context and norms like materialism (Yang & Stening, 2016) religion and spirituality (Arlu, Cherrier, & Tjiptono, 2016; Casidy, Phau, & Lwin, 2016) on consumer behavior.

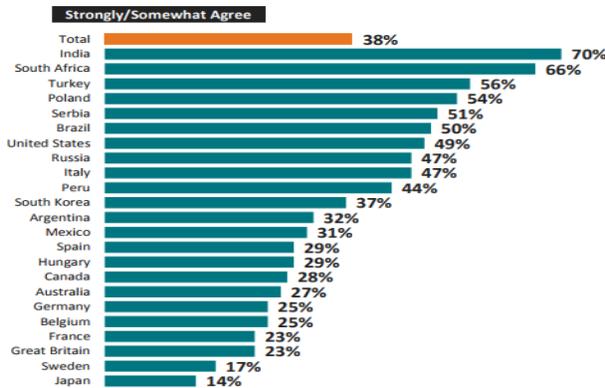
Authors have explored the connect between leadership and spirituality (Herriott et al., 2009), workplace spirituality (Case and Gosling, 2010) and many researchers have enriched the field of management and spirituality (McCormick, D. W. 1994; Dehler, G. E., & Welsh, M. A. 1994). The consumer spirituality and its impact on buying behavior is also explored. (Narang, R. 2013). There are lot of products in this segment and rise in consumption of such products Deirdre Shaw, Jennifer Thomson, (2013) But marketing through spirituality I still an under explored area. Marketing through spirituality to children in USA was explained by Mercer (2006) he explains various companies are selling products for spiritual development using both online and offline platforms. Spirituality is a big business. (Kale 2006) Spirituality is a highly sellable wonder product. (Basci, E. 2015). More than six thousand applications related to religion and spirituality are available on iTunes App store, there are apps on spirituality but not much research in this area (Buie, 2013). The people who participate in online religious activity don't separate their online and offline religious life much and they go through their religious beliefs through internet (Helland,2005).

Deep rooted Religion

India has been land of spirituality and multiple religions, religious tourism, puja materials, religious books yoga, bhajan CDs etc have always been high selling products in the market. The new age products and services that have hit the market are using the latest digital technology.

India has roughly 2.5 lakh crore (\$40 billion) religion and spirituality market and the startups have started tapping this huge market with the use of technology. In a survey conducted by IPSOS Online portal system in which data was collected from 23 countries there are interesting results about importance of religion in Indian. 70% of the respondents from India agreed that the religion defines them as person

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
“My religion defines me as a person.”

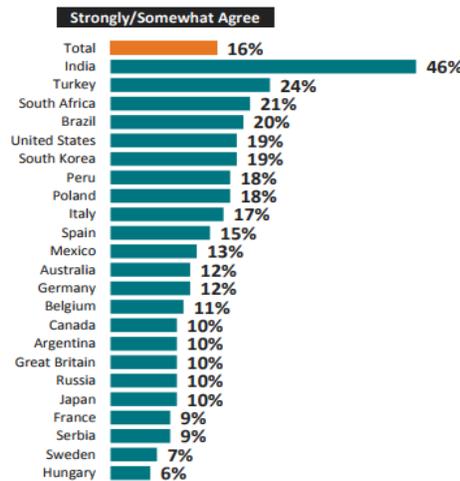


Source :- HT Mars 2017

The survey revealed that Indians lose respect for people without any religious beliefs

Most countries are tolerant of people without religious beliefs – although more Indians report this as an issue compared to others.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
I lose respect for people when I find out that they are not religious.



Source :- HT Mars 2017

Another report from HT Mars 2017 states that 67% want to get married with religions rituals and 63% youngsters are against inter- religion marriages. Religion is very deep rooted in youngsters as well.

According to SocialBakers Reports spirituality and religion are popular on social media

S.no	Facebook	No. of Fans
1	Dalai Lama	13 908 298
2.	Khatushyamji	10 010 868
3.	UnderstandQuran.com India	2 535 950
4.	Lord Shiva India	1 146 551

5.	Drukpa India	865 362
6.	Sai baba Jaha koi nahi ata waha mere sai ate he Indi	787 328
7.	Karmapa India	764 451
8.	SikhNet India	615 066
9.	Maa Vaishnaov Devi India	607 052
10.	Tirmula Deva India	579 874
S.no	Twitter	No. of Followers
1	Sadhguru	2078852
2.	Dera Sacha Sauda	357487
3.	Muslim voices	118864
S.no	YouTube Channels	No. of Subscribers
1	Saurabh Parikh	3102061
2.	Bhakti	5474676
3.	Spiritual mantra	1305946

Source – Socialbakers.com

The above social bakers data reveals that there are many followers of spiritual and religious content across various digital platforms.

From enlightenment to enterprise

Understanding the huge potential of the market (roughly 2.5 lakh crore) startups have offered a range of services to Indian Customers using augmented or Virtual reality, Image processing VR based apps as well as OTT streaming.

There are various apps available on Google Playstore that provide religious or spiritual products and services but there is no specific category in Google Playstore where these apps can be found. These apps can be classified under these major heads.

This paper aim to study the digital products and services offered to Indian customers and classify them

Applications Based on Religion

- Hindu apps
- Muslim apps
- Cristian apps
- Sikh apps
- Jainism Apps
- Buddhism Apps

Application Based On products and Services Offered

The application can be classified as SPOTLRR – Sacred Text, Prayer, Organization , Tourism, Leader, Rituals and Recreational Applications

- **Sacred Text Apps** – These are the apps that are either in form of audio books, or e-books or digitalized versions of the parts or complete sacred books of various religions. They contain explanation or translation of the verses. The apps have Vedas, Gita, Quran, Bible, in readable or audio forms.
- **Prayer/Meditation Apps**
This category of applications have prayers, mantras and steps for puja/meditation etc. Guided meditation, yoga, mantra chats etc. are very popular among younger generation. Posting prayers and requesting prayers is something that is most common on social media.
- **Organization Apps (Religious/Spiritual)**
The religious organization apps promote membership of a religious organization and informs the members about latest events etc. These applications provide information about online and offline events and encourage people to participate in it. They also are a source of asking for donations. These applications involve prayer request for specific people who fill prayer request form, the objective is to develop a strong sense of online community.
- **Tourism Apps (Religious/ Spiritual)**– The interconnection of religion and tourism cannot be denied (Timothy and Boyd, 2003) the events with largest human gatherings are mostly religion related Hajj in Macca where approx. 3.4 million Muslims gather each year (Raj & Griffin, 2015), 150 million people were expected to visit Kumbh Mela in 2019. A website and social app was launched to facilitate the pilgrims this year by UP govt. Another digital initiative is by Uttarakhand government an app called Shubh Badrinath Yatra to inform the tourists about accommodation, closest ATM, petrol pumps etc.

Book your Holy trip is an app that has 600 plus destinations listed across different religions. There are apps that give virtual tour of religious places, live telecast of arti, puja etc.

- **Leader (Spiritual/ religious)**

The apps that spread the views, opinions and preaching of a spiritual leader have high number of downloads and the app contains their preaching in text, audio and video forms. The app Sadhguru - Yoga, Meditation & Spirituality has more than 1,000,000 downloads the apps has an option to listen to podcast lecture, watch new videos of sadhguru on varied topics get daily mystic quotes.

- **Rituals Apps** – These apps are becoming very popular they have a range of services and products to offer, the apps contain information like how to do specific rituals, puja, fast, best time for worship, direction, and has details of various birth, marriage and death related rituals.

The apps have add-on services like specialized pandit on call, organizing the entire ritual including materials used in the ritual, it is like outsourcing all the arrangements of a ritual. Apps like Subhpuja also provide online rituals (through skype, facetime or other video call platforms) done by priests for NRIs who want to do rituals authentic Indian way but are not able to find the materials required or priest.

Subhkart is offering a range of services in both online and offline mode. Their products are available on reliance stores, they offer around 200 puja items and 18 sub categories of services and products.

These apps have varied offerings like astrology, palmistry, puja materials, gemstones, vastu services, some advanced apps also offer specifically designed corporate services with gadgets to check energy flow in offices and remedial measures for negative energy.

- **Recreational Apps**

There are apps that provide information about cooking for festivals, fasts and locations to shop for festivals, tickets/passes availability and purchase for different religious events.

The apps that guides a user to restaurants that serve Halal meat only for Muslims, Kosher food for Jews or exclusively Jain food outlets also fall in the same category.

Navratri Damal is one such app that updates devotees about the food and Navratri celebration in specific selected location. It has arti collection and garba tutorials.

Conclusion

This study offers a classification of religious applications available on google playstore since there is no separate category for spirituality or religions the author had to depend on search option to identify and study apps. The classification of the apps is based on its use and does not investigate the extent to which these apps are used. The digital platforms are full of spiritual and religious apps and they are downloaded by lakhs of people. There is a range of services provided by these applications that cater to the religious and spiritual life. More than 432 million Indians are using internet through phones and an average adult spends around 3 hours on internet. The number of mobile internet users is on a rise and people are having a more wired lifestyle, which leads to use of internet in most of things and religious in no exception. The number of Applications for spiritual and religious needs is increasing and so are the subscribers owing to the wired lifestyle and smart phone addiction. The youngsters have also strong inclination towards religious beliefs, though this market is in its nascent stage but the future seems to be blessed for the entrepreneurs.

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