

The State of Spirituality in India and Insights for Marketing

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Abstract

There is an emerging paradigm shift in management over the last two decades towards spirituality. Before going for studies in marketing and spirituality in the Indian context, it is essential to first understand spirituality in the Indian context because India is a diverse country. However, there is lack of a pan – India study to understand the current state of spirituality. This research paper filled this research gap by studying spirituality in India's 36 states and union territories. The results showed differences across states and union territories, small states and big states, islands and mainland, and across different regions. Marketing professionals can use the findings of the study while designing the marketing strategy and marketing mix to reach out to the consumers in a better way. One limitation of this work is that it could have undertaken a pilot project or a case study to relate the findings on spirituality with the spirituality paradigm in the Indian context.

Keywords : Spirituality, religious orientation, spirituality paradigm, marketing, India

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Spirituality and religious orientation have been a subject of study for a long time. However, there is an emerging paradigm shift in management over the last two decades towards spirituality. There is a move towards including spirituality in the workplace and the rise of spirituality movement in which organizations are trying to have the spirituality dimension (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000 ; Fernandes Bella et al., 2018 ; Geigle, 2012 ; Joelle & Coelho, 2019 ; Karakas, 2010 ; Miller & Ewest, 2013). Spirituality has become an important area for organizations. The initial focus of spirituality in the management context has been largely from human resource and organizational development perspectives. Over the last decade, there are studies from the marketing perspectives also.

In India, the importance of the spirituality paradigm is being realized, and some studies have been undertaken, but these are mainly from a human resource perspective. There is a lack of studies from the marketing perspective, though research shows the importance of spirituality in marketing and consumer behavior (Arvidsson, 2014 ; Mathras et al., 2016 ; Mick, 2017 ; Rinallo et al., 2016 ; Redden, 2016). Before going for studies in marketing and spirituality in the Indian context, it is important first to understand spirituality in the pan – Indian context. However, there is a lack of a pan – India study that can understand the current state of spirituality in India's different states and union territories, the regional differences, and differences across states and union territories. This research paper is an attempt to fill this research gap.

The insights from the results of this unique and probably first of its kind research work in India contribute to understanding spirituality in the Indian context. These insights have implications both for practice and theory of management. These insights can be used in multiple ways, and can give rise to a number of future studies in

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various areas of management, including marketing, contributing to the emerging spirituality paradigm in the business management discipline in the Indian context.

Literature Review

Definitional Issues

Spirituality is a universal human phenomenon, yet confusion and incomprehension of the concept are ever-present (Chiu et al., 2004 ; De Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2012 ; Karakas, 2010 ; Pirkola et al., 2016 ; Zinnbauer et al., 1999). One could contend that one of the major hindrances in defining spirituality is its relationship with religion (Dyson et al., 1997). Most research is based on religiosity measures rather than spirituality (De Jager Meezenbroek, 2012). Instead of strong identification with religion, spirituality now includes an even stronger focus on personal aspects (Chiu et al., 2004). Spirituality in India has a long history. Spirituality in India is considered to be a private matter, and often it is interpreted on religious backgrounds (Thakur & Singh, 2016). Without going into a wider debate on the concept, for this research, I have used the word 'spirituality and /or religious orientation.' For the remaining part of the paper, I will be using the word 'spirituality' to convey the same meaning.

Rise of Spirituality Paradigm in Management Research

Spirituality and religious orientation have been a subject of study for a long time. There is growing interest in organizations for using spirituality and learnings from religious orientation for increasing organizational performance (Balog et al., 2014 ; Loo, 2017). Spirituality has inspired a lot of research work in the last few decades in management (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000 ; Benner, 1989 ; Geigle, 2012 ; Herriott et al., 2009 ; Miller & Ewest, 2013 ; Mitroff & Denton, 1999 ; Ratnakar & Nair, 2012 ; Rocha & Pinheiro, 2020).

A number of successful organizations have started to reap benefits of associating spirituality with the workplace (Adams et al., 2003 ; Cavanagh, 1999 ; Daniel, 2010 ; Garg, 2017 ; Geigle, 2012 ; Miller & Ewest, 2013 ; Rocha & Pinheiro, 2020). Organizations have realized that to harness the potential of their employees ; they have to offer them meaning in what they do or who they are as an organizational member (Gatling, 2015). However, the majority of the studies initially were in the human resources and other areas. Marketing scholars, it seems, have shied away from discussing spirituality for far too long (Kale, 2006). However, there is an increasing number of marketing scholars in the last decades researching the spirituality paradigm.

In the Indian context, there are a few studies in which researchers have done empirical studies and found that in workplaces where spirituality is nurtured, respected, and motivated, their employees are more consistent, satisfied, and committed and their productivity is high (Belwalkar et al., 2018). Though there are few studies from human resource perspectives on spirituality, there is a lack of studies on spirituality and marketing.

Research Gap

From the literature review in the management discipline, a vast research gap is prevalent in Indian management research on spirituality, particularly in the marketing discipline. However, a more significant fundamental research gap exists on spirituality, which needs to be highlighted and focused upon. There is a lack of studies in India on understanding spirituality on a pan-Indian basis and on comparing different states and union territories. Though there are many studies in India on spirituality, which I am not discussing here to keep the work focused more on the context of management, the research gap on understanding spirituality on a pan – Indian basis exists. India is a diverse country, and what is true for one part of it might not be true for other parts of it. Before we attempt

to study the spirituality paradigm in business management in the Indian context, the first step is to fill the fundamental research gap on spirituality and need to know the state of spirituality in India, its different regions, and its different states and union territories. Then marketing and other business management areas can build on this knowledge. This study is an attempt to fill the research gap.

Methodology

This article represents a part of an overarching study – the *India Happiness Report 2020*. For this study, a questionnaire was developed. The questions covered in this paper were modified from the Cantril ladder (Cantril, 1965). This study required participants to think of an imaginary ladder with steps numbered from 1 at the bottom to 5 at the top of spirituality. The questionnaire was pretested on different groups of people and on the basis their feedback, few minor adjustments were made. After which, the questionnaire was sent to respondents. The survey was conducted strictly confidentially and anonymously. The final survey lasted from March – July 2020. A total of 16,950 responses were collected from all over India. It included more than 400 responses from each state and union territory to meet the sample size requirement of a 95% confidence interval and a .05% margin of error (Pillania, 2020). Descriptive statistics were used to reach at the final scores on spirituality for each state and union territory.

Spirituality is a subjective concept and survey is an accepted method for subjective research (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010 ; Pillania, 2020). For subjective research, one time data is used in many studies, which I have also followed (Kapuscinski & Masters 2010 ; Pillania, 2020). Due to the large size of our country, my research team and I took four months to collect the data from all 36 states and union territories. This is a first of its kind study in the pan – Indian context.

Analysis and Results

In the spirituality rankings of states and union territories, Sikkim, Nagaland, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands are in the top three position as given in Table 1, which shows the rankings based on spirituality aspects of the 28 states and eight union territories of India.

It is interesting to compare the spirituality scores in these 36 states and union territories on the various basis as done in Figure 1. It can be observed that the islands of India consisting of two union territories – Andaman &

Table 1. Rankings of States and UTs

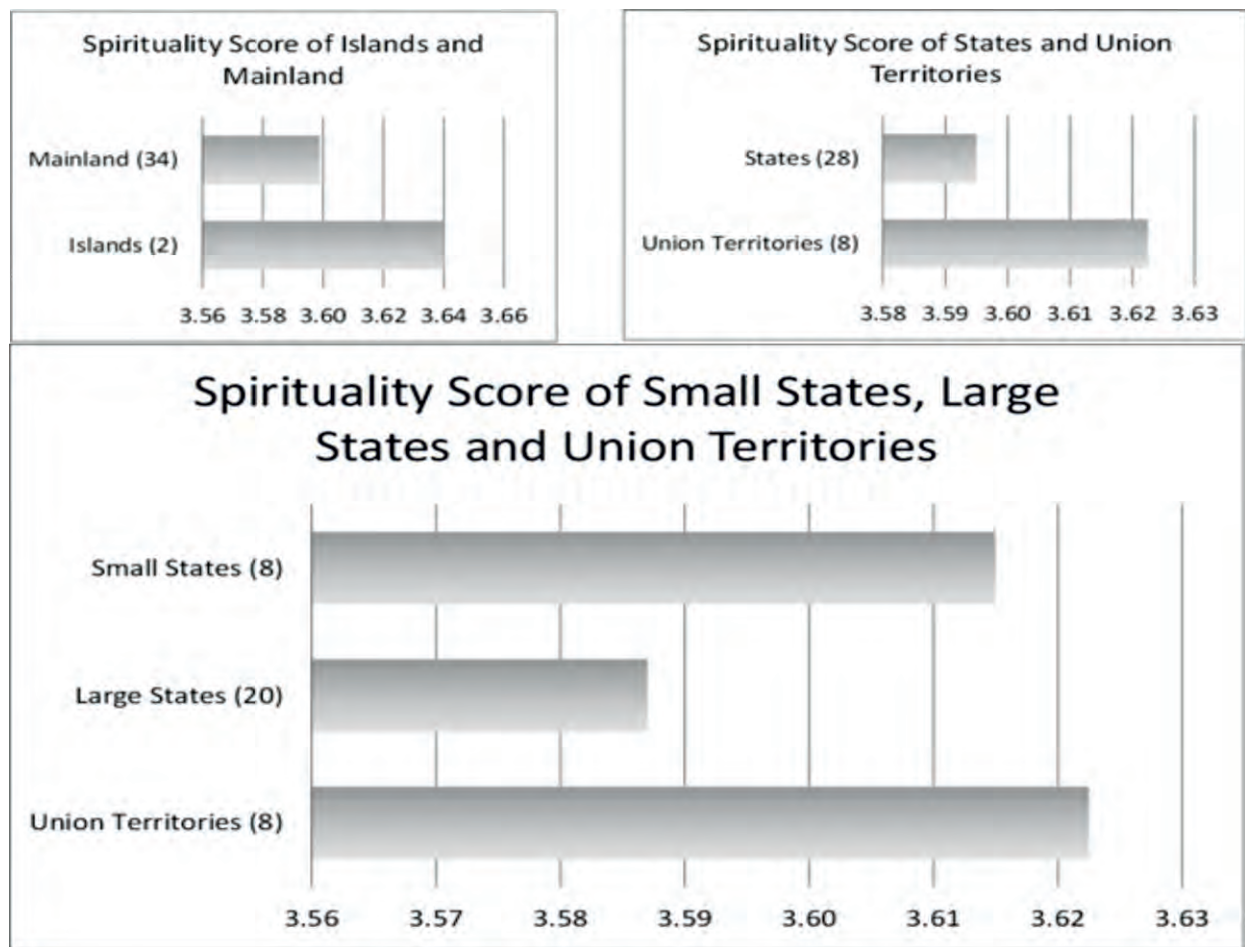
State/UT	Ranking on Spirituality	Score Based on Spirituality	State/UT	Ranking on Spirituality	Score Based on Spirituality
Sikkim	1	3.86	Arunachal Pradesh	19	3.6
Nagaland	2	3.78	Andhra Pradesh	20	3.59
A.&N.Islands	3	3.76	Jammu & Kashmir	21	3.59
Tripura	4	3.72	Tamil Nadu	22	3.59
Himachal Pradesh	5	3.71	Haryana	23	3.58
Ladakh	6	3.71	Kerala	24	3.58
Jharkhand	7	3.7	Odisha	25	3.56
Puducherry	8	3.69	Telangana	26	3.56
Delhi	9	3.68	Chandigarh	27	3.52

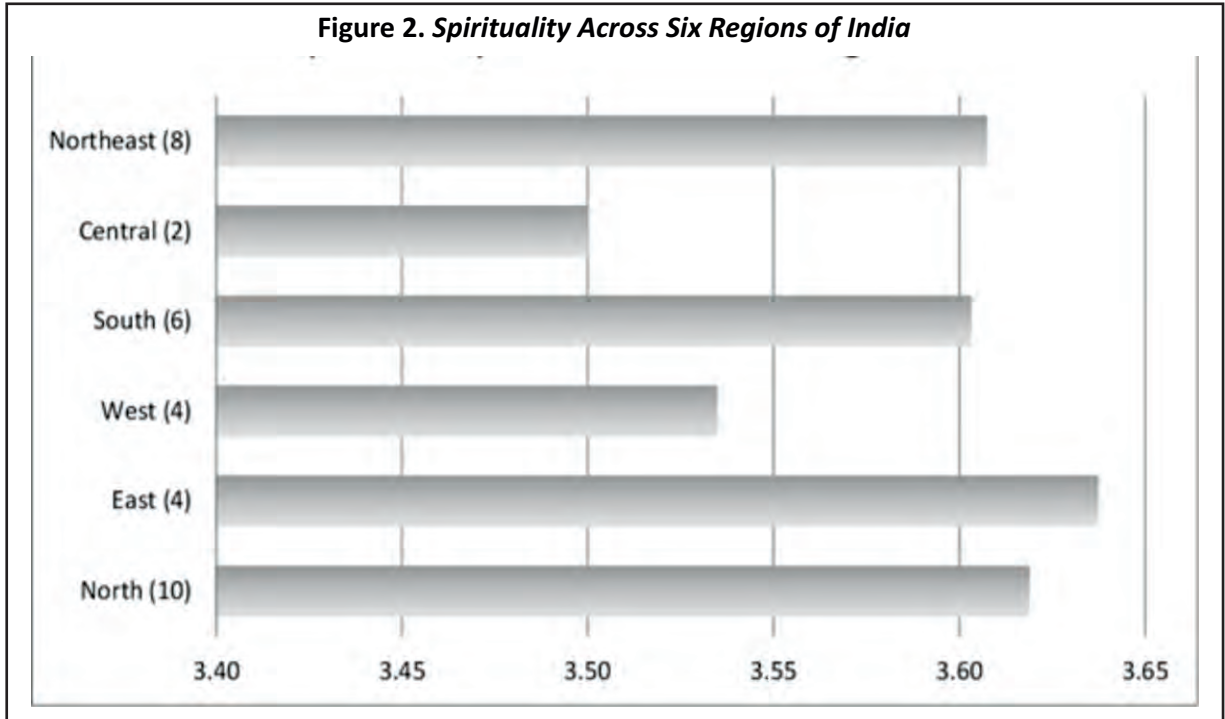
Rajasthan	10	3.66	Lakshadweep	28	3.52
Bihar	11	3.65	Mizoram	29	3.52
Uttar Pradesh	12	3.65	Chhattisgarh	30	3.51
Manipur	13	3.64	Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	31	3.51
West Bengal	14	3.64	Madhya Pradesh	32	3.49
Gujarat	15	3.62	Uttarakhand	33	3.48
Karnataka	16	3.61	Goa	34	3.4
Maharashtra	17	3.61	Meghalaya	35	3.4
Punjab	18	3.61	Assam	36	3.34

Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep – are in a greater spiritual state than the mainland of India consisting of 34 states and union territories.

Union territories, that is, which are governed by the central government, and the smaller states are in a more spiritual state than the large states. Among the large states, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan top the

Figure 1. Spirituality Score Comparisons: Islands vs Mainland, States vs UTs, Small vs Large vs UTs





charts in spirituality rankings. Among smaller states, Sikkim, Nagaland, and Tripura top the charts in spirituality rankings. Among union territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Ladakh, and Puducherry top the charts in rankings based on spirituality.

The spirituality scores vary across regions, as seen in Figure 2. The Southern region is at the fourth position among the six regions of India in terms of spirituality. Among the Southern region consisting of six states and union territories namely Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Puducherry, the top three rankers on the basis spirituality are Puducherry, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

The North-Eastern region, consisting of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura is on the third position in terms of spirituality. Among the Northeast states, the top three states in terms of spirituality are Sikkim, Nagaland, and Tripura.

The Northern region, consisting of 10 states and union territories of India namely, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan (southern part might be considered West), Uttar Pradesh (southern part might be considered Central), Uttarakhand, Delhi, Ladakh, and Chandigarh is at the second position in terms of spirituality and Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi are the top three in spirituality in the Northern region.

The Western region consisting of four states and union territories – Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu is the second last among all regions in terms of spirituality. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu are the top three in rankings in terms of spirituality in this region.

Eastern region consisting of four states, namely Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, and Odisha is the most spiritual region of India. In Eastern India, Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal are the top three in rankings in Eastern India.

The Central region consisting of two states, namely Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is ranked sixth (last) in spirituality, marginalizing over the Western region. Chhattisgarh leads in the central Indian states in rankings.

Discussion and Insights for Marketing

Consumers usually get attracted to spirituality, and this spiritual behaviour also affects the consumers' buying behaviour. Therefore, there is a need to study the change in consumption patterns of consumers due to spiritual beliefs. Spiritual utility urgently needs to be incorporated along with other utilities when considering product benefits (Kale, 2006). A cross-cultural comparison of organizations of U.S. and China through the influence of spirituality on buyer behaviour in business to business (B2B) relationship marketing observed that spirituality is an important dimension in differentiating the cross-cultural organization through dimensions of spirituality (Standifer et al., 2010).

Over the last decade, there is growing interest among marketing researchers to study spirituality, religion, marketing, and consumption. Marketing researchers are progressively intrigued by the role of markets and consumption in the quest for meaning, and the research field at the intersection of spirituality, religion, markets, and consumption is gradually taking shape (Arvidsson, 2014 ; Bamossy et al., 2011 ; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019 ; Izberk - Bilgin, 2012 ; Mathras et al., 2016 ; Mick, 2017 ; Redden, 2016 ; Rinallo et al., 2013 ; Rinallo et al., 2016). This research stream has shown the irrevocable connection between the spiritual and material world and spirituality and marketing. This research has three broad streams namely, use of spirituality by marketing professionals to make their offerings more attractive, use of marketing by spiritual and religious institutions (Einstein, 2013), and consumers converting their everyday needs into sacred ones (Buchanan - Olivier & Schau, 2013 ; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019).

The literature shows the strong need for including spirituality in the marketing function, and the results show the state of spirituality among the different states and union territories of India. It makes the marketer's job easy as the results provide a good starting point to understand the state of spirituality and differences. Consumer behaviour is an essential dimension for marketers in India (Agarwal & Singh, 2018 ; Chattaraj et al., 2018 ; Kakati & Ahmed, 2016 ; Kumar & Kanchan, 2019 ; Simon & Manohar, 2017). Marketing professionals can use these results to create an effective marketing strategy and marketing mix to cater to different levels of spirituality of consumers and resulting differences in consumer behaviour.

Key Takeaways

As stated in the beginning, the diversity of India plays a role, and the key takeaway of this study is that different states and union territories are at varying levels of spirituality and their relative positions are also identified on spirituality. This is a very important insight for building the spirituality paradigm in business management in the Indian context.

Implications

Implications for Practitioners, Particularly Marketing Professionals

As discussed in the literature review part of the paper, spirituality can influence consumption and consumer behaviour. Thus, marketers can use the findings of the study while designing the marketing strategy and marketing mix to reach out to the consumers in a better way. The results provide one additional dimension to understand consumers in different states and union territories of India.

Implications for Researchers

This research provides a first of its kind pan – India study on spirituality to researchers. The results of the study can

be used by marketing researchers to build on the findings to understand marketing and consumer behaviour in different states and union territories of India through spirituality.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Work

One limitation of this work is that it could have undertaken a pilot project or a case study to relate the findings on spirituality with the spirituality paradigm in the Indian context in general and with the marketing discipline in particular. In future work, when there is a more precise understanding of spirituality and religion among the masses, the two concepts of religion and spirituality can be taken as separate constructs.

This work can be further expanded in the future by using the findings to better understand the spirituality paradigm in the business management field in general, and marketing in particular, in the Indian context.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Rajesh K. Pillania has undertaken this unique and pioneering work studying the state of spirituality in 36 states and union territories of India. There is an emerging paradigm shift in management over the last two decades towards spirituality. Before going for studies in marketing and spirituality in the Indian context, it is essential to first understand spirituality in the Indian context because India is a diverse country. However, there is a lack of a pan – India study to understand the current state of spirituality. This research paper fills this research gap by studying spirituality in India's 36 states and union territories. The results show differences across states and union territories, small states and big states, islands and mainland, and across different regions. This is an important insight for corporates, governments, and academicians while dealing with different states in India. Marketing professionals can use the findings of the study while designing the marketing strategy and marketing mix to reach out to the consumers in a better way. One limitation of this work is that it could have undertaken a pilot project or a case study to relate the findings on spirituality with the spirituality paradigm in the Indian context in general and marketing in particular. Future studies can use these insights to build upon the spirituality paradigm in the Indian context.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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