



Faithful Resilience: Profit and Support Strategies of Religious Institutions amidst the COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the observation on making a profit for religious institutions and providing social support during the COVID-19 pandemic in a tropical country in Indochina. The study utilizes a descriptive approach, combining a literature review and a case study to explore the specific situation in the region. The article begins with an introduction to the concept of social marketing and then focuses on a unique form of religiously related social marketing: the production and sale of amulets. The potential benefits for religious establishments in terms of both financial gain and social support are highlighted. Furthermore, a detailed case study on ritual amulet marketing during the COVID-19 outbreak crisis is provided, shedding light on the strategies employed and the outcomes achieved. The findings suggest that social marketing by religious institutions can be a valuable advertising tool even during times of public crisis. The article concludes by emphasizing the potential of social marketing as an effective means for religious institutions to address societal needs and generate positive impacts. This research contributes to the understanding of the role of religious organizations in the promotion of social welfare and offers insights for practitioners seeking innovative approaches to navigate challenging circumstances.

Keywords: Amulet; COVID-19; marketing; profit; religious; Ritual; social support.

Abstrak

Artikel ini menyajikan analisis dari pengamatan terhadap upaya lembaga keagamaan dalam menghasilkan keuntungan dan memberikan dukungan sosial selama pandemi COVID-19 di sebuah negara tropis di Indocina. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif, menggabungkan tinjauan literatur dan studi kasus untuk mengeksplorasi situasi spesifik di wilayah tersebut. Artikel ini diawali dengan pengenalan konsep pemasaran sosial dan kemudian berfokus pada bentuk unik dari pemasaran sosial yang terkait dengan agama: produksi dan penjualan jimat. Manfaat potensial bagi lembaga keagamaan dalam hal keuntungan finansial dan dukungan sosial disoroti. Selain itu, studi kasus terperinci tentang pemasaran jimat ritual selama krisis wabah COVID-19 juga diberikan, menjelaskan strategi yang digunakan dan hasil yang dicapai. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pemasaran sosial oleh lembaga keagamaan dapat menjadi alat periklanan yang berharga bahkan selama masa krisis publik. Artikel ini diakhiri dengan menekankan potensi pemasaran sosial sebagai cara yang efektif bagi lembaga keagamaan untuk memenuhi kebutuhan masyarakat dan menghasilkan dampak positif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang peran organisasi keagamaan dalam mempromosikan kesejahteraan sosial dan menawarkan wawasan bagi para praktisi yang mencari pendekatan inovatif untuk menghadapi situasi yang menantang.

Kata Kunci: Jimat; COVID-19; pemasaran; keuntungan; keagamaan; Ritual; dukungan sosial.

INTRODUCTION

The current study is a qualitative scenario analysis of a unique disaster that has never been documented in the world of literature: the COVID-19 pandemic. Focus is placed on the situation regarding religious institutions making money and offering social support throughout the crisis. This offers fresh information that can be used moving forward. It is commonly recognized that religion plays an important part in the community's spiritual well-being and social welfare (Corrigan, McCorkle, Schell, & Kidder,

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2003). However, there hasn't been much information about the actual worldwide catastrophe. It is normally theorized that religious unit can have role but it is previously difficult to demonstrate the correct picture. When there is a genuine global crisis, the situation in the real world may be precisely what can sustain the traditional idea of the function of the religious institution. With no specific case study, the current study sought to define the precise state of affairs and dispel any ambiguity regarding the function of religion in times of crisis.

Social marketing is a relatively new marketing concept. It is a method of developing activities that aim to change or maintain people's behavior (Grier & Bryant, 2005). The goal of social marketing is usually not for an individual's profit, but for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole. As a result, social marketing is a concept that deals with a macro- rather than a micro-scale. Social marketing has evolved into a novel and useful modern marketing concept. It deconstructs the previous concept of profit for a small group, a few individuals, with no regard for the other people in the community. As a result, social marketing is an effective tool for promoting a sustainable society.

An intriguing fundamental challenge in social marketing is how to generate social profit from the sale of commodities. It is a very intriguing idea to switch from selling items to returning profits in order to assist a big number of people on a social level. There are numerous types of effective social marketing. Marketing of ritual amulets, which primarily seeks to generate revenue for maintaining religious unit, is an excellent example. The religious institution typically plays a significant role in providing the community with spiritual assistance, taking into account its welfare role. The religious organization typically encourages "doing a good thing" among the local populace and is linked to a peaceful, happy society and social benefits.

Religion is fundamentally a spiritual conviction that frequently places an emphasis on the veneration of an upright supernatural ruling force (Semenov, 1981). Religious practices typically aim to act morally and with good intentions. Marketing in light of religion is intriguing because religion has a wide range of behavioral effects on people. There are many things connected to religion, some of which are created with the intention of being sold or distributed. A specific religious item produced by a religious setting is referred to as a ritual object. The object is typically given to the visitor to a holy site as a joke or reward for acting morally.

This is an avenue for spiritual assistance. Since not everyone can reside in or visit a sacred location constantly, an amulet is a take-home item for mental support. It is said that the amulet's sanctity will bestow luck and provide protection to whoever wears it. In addition, having a problem like a disease may result in a compromised mental state, necessitating the need for support. Amulet is a traditional local proverb seeking spiritual support in dealing with the issue. It is undeniable that patients who suffer from a variety of illnesses, such as chronic diseases, frequently wear amulets (Gopichandran, 2015; Lloreda-Garcia, 2017). A healthy individual who works in a dangerous profession like law enforcement or the military may also require spiritual assistance. The amulet also provides them with mental assistance (Wiwanitkit, 2010).

A great example of social marketing based on spiritual religious belief is the marketing of ceremonial amulets. The amulet, a little trinket, was specifically created by a religious institution. It usually progresses from its initial creation to holiness activities like group prayer conducted by well-known religious leaders. The amulet is used all over the world. In locations with a rich history and culture, there are usually several amulets, according to local beliefs. Amulets are still widely believed in today in many Asian countries. In other words, amulets have been a part of the neighborhood's culture for a very long time. The Asians who live nearby frequently look for an amulet to wear. Many religious organizations now

participate in amulet making. A religious organization can now directly raise funds for its operations or to support its community-benefitting religious and spiritual welfare programs through amulet marketing. It's intriguing how a religious group generates income from amulet sales because one of the four 'Ms' of any organization is money for administration. Generally speaking, a religious organization might construct an amulet as a thank-you gift for someone who makes a donation to support the organization's efforts. Sometimes, a particular amulet manufacture may be utilized as a means of raising money if the religious organization needs a significant sum of money to fund some specific activity, such as the construction of a building.

But it's also important to acknowledge the amulet's part in the unique circumstance. During a social crisis period, one can see the clear picture. The psychological impact on the broader public usually happens when there is a crisis. Using an amulet was a traditional method of mental support in the past (Černý, 2013). According to the holistic medical theory, having a sound mental and spiritual health is a prerequisite for having a sound body. There are many ways to see the problem. The case study in many circumstances is intriguing. The authors examine and offer a case study from Indochina on ritual amulet marketing in this article, with the goal of generating revenue for religious institutions and providing social assistance during crises like the COVID-19 outbreak. During the COVID-19 outbreak, some temples and religious institutions produced unique holy amulets. This is a method of providing the local population with spiritual support during a significant public health crisis as well as a means of generating cash to fund the religious unit's operations during the lengthy lockdown.

In actuality, a social crisis typically results in a number of issues. The conventional marketing technique is subject to numerous negative repercussions. The conventional method of selling might not be effective during the crisis. During a crisis, the consumer typically faces financial difficulties, and there may also be underlying spiritual issues that inhibit normal consumption. As a result, it might be difficult to market effectively during a crisis. This is a fascinating topic for a marketing research study. The current essay is a case study that describes the selling of ceremonial amulets in relation to the COVID-19 breakout problem in Indochina. The case is an illustration of the use of ritual amulet marketing to generate income for a place of worship and provide social assistance during a crisis. The context of this case is a particular region of Asia where Buddhism is strongly practiced, and the ritual amulet is a part of the local culture there. The scenario is based on the actual COVID-19 catastrophe that will take place in this region of Asia in 2020. The case's specifics are discussed by the authors with careful consideration.

A fascinating topic and effective illustration of how to utilize sustainable marketing to attract and engage socially conscious customers is the idea of "faith and social support in times of crises." This concept is also fresh, pertinent, and deserving of study. Even though this case study is now focused on the Indonesian environment, implications for global consumers could be added to increase its applicability to a global audience. Other South East Asian nations like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore might be particularly affected by this, too.

As was already said, ritual amulets are a typical item in many nations. An amulet for spiritual fulfillment is typically found by someone who practices their religion (Schneck, 1977; Stahl, 1966). Worldwide, religious practices are frequently engaged in. There are some significant pilgrimages as well as routine visits to religious sites or shrines. Most pilgrimages are undertaken in the hopes of obtaining good fortune and health. Without a doubt, the activity promotes good mental and spiritual health and represents genuine wisdom in holistic health care (Insoll, 2011). People typically engage in religious activity throughout any visit, including prayer and practice. Obtaining an amulet in exchange for going to

a religious location is a custom. One who is ill might also need more spiritual support, so looking for an amulet made at a well-known religious site is a common practice (Venkatrajut & Prasad, 2014).

Without a doubt, amulets are produced all over the world. To meet the needs of the religious practitioners who visit the religious location, several religious entities manufacture and make amulets. The making of amulets is an intriguing way the neighborhood religious group raises funds for the group. In fact, the 4'Ms (people, money, materials, and management) are necessary for any firm to operate efficiently. A religious establishment typically receives its funding from donations because it is a public nonprofit organization. Making amulets is one technique to increase revenue for the church. When a visitor to a religious site wants an amulet, the visitor may purchase one from the site's religious shop, and the religious site will receive the proceeds. Standard marketing principles can be used to explain how ritual amulet marketing is structured.

In actuality, a religious establishment's primary function in terms of community welfare is that of the spiritual hub. Many religious institutions now also support the neighborhood in extraordinary ways. For instance, a religious institution might establish a neighborhood hospital or school to serve the local community (Kaewla & Wiwanitkit, 2015, 2017). There, the proceeds from the sale of amulets can be put to those remarkable uses. Currently, a lot of religious institutions manufacture amulets and run social marketing campaigns. The proceeds from the selling of amulets will also be used to help other places of worship, schools, or hospitals that are supported by that particular place of worship. This indicates that the community's residents will eventually reap the benefits. Additionally, it can help maintain the religious's social and spiritual roles. Additionally, it can help to reinforce the bond between the locality and the religious institution and support the sustainability of the religious institution's social and spiritual roles. As a result, the selling of ritual amulets as a form of social marketing is a particularly intriguing topic. A recent development in amulet marketing at the moment is marketing through online media and e-commerce (Mookdarsanit, 2020).

A novel coronavirus infection called COVID-19 has the potential to cause febrile respiratory disease. More than 200 countries around the world are currently affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has infected more than 6 million people worldwide. A patient's physical health may be impacted by COVID-19. Additionally, it can have an impact on the social system, leading to widespread panic and mental impairment. The socioeconomic decline brought on by COVID-19 is a significant problem that needs to be managed effectively.

Weakening of community strength is a fundamental characteristic that occurs in every community when a COVID-19 outbreak strikes. A community center that aids in problem containment must be present during a crisis. The religious establishment or spiritual center is a crucial component that aids the neighborhood during a crisis. A religious facility could provide the community with refuge, spiritual inspiration, and support for daily necessities like food and clothing. It requires a budget for those aforementioned purposes. How the religious institution raises the funds to carry out its activities is a fundamental question. Amulet marketing is an intriguing strategy. Theoretically, a person's religious background influences how they view and react to social marketing strategies (Brennan et al., 2020; Lumpkins et al., 2016). It has a significant role in promoting public health as well. Locals in underdeveloped areas may use amulets as helpful objects to manage medical issues (Danino & Amar, 2008).

RESEARCH METHOD

This descriptive case study analysis focuses on the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic in an Indochina country where Buddhism is the predominant religion, with over 95% of the local population adhering to religious ritual beliefs. The study population consists of Buddhist monasteries in the country, and a purposive case selection approach was employed to choose suitable cases that met specific inclusion criteria. These criteria included being a legally registered Buddhist monastery, having continued activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and serving as a center for ritual beliefs and amulet distribution.

The intervention involved conducting a thorough situation analysis to describe the patterns and dynamics that emerged during the study period amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection for this study was purely qualitative, utilizing a descriptive approach that allowed for the use of the local language without any language barriers. Primary data was gathered through direct qualitative observation techniques and surveys conducted within the monasteries. Additionally, secondary data was obtained through a comprehensive review of available documentation.

The collected data underwent a rigorous analysis process, combining the qualitative observations, survey results, and literature analysis. This in-depth situation analysis allowed for a detailed exploration of the collected data, revealing patterns and insights into the observed situation.

Ethical considerations were taken into account for this observational study and retrospective situation analysis, as no prospective experimental interventions or implementations were conducted. Since there was no direct involvement with human or animal subjects, ethical approval from the local committee was not required, and informed consent was not applicable.

The results obtained from this study align with the research hypothesis and are supported by the collected data. They provide valuable insights into the specific dynamics and patterns observed within the Buddhist monasteries during the COVID-19 pandemic, shedding light on the role of religious institutions in providing support and maintaining ritual practices during challenging times.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case study on ritual amulet marketing

The authors of this article give a case study on the sale of ritual amulets during the COVID-19 crisis. There are numerous fascinating instances of amulet marketing by numerous religious establishments in the unique COVID-19 context. The best instances can be seen throughout several Asian nations. The authors would like to provide examples from Indochina, which is the second region in the world to be affected by COVID-19 after China, as case studies in this article. Numerous local Buddhist pagodas construct ceremonial amulets during the COVID-19 outbreak period in many Buddhist nations of Indochina. During the COVID-19 outbreak, more than thirty large, well-known pagodas and monasteries distributed new amulets.

The names of the new amulets are frequently connected to COVID-19. For instance, practically all 622 pagodas and monasteries in a province in southern Thailand, a Buddhist nation in Indochina, produced and distributed amulets to the local populace. Thousands of locals visited the pagodas and monasteries daily to purchase amulets. Pagodas and monasteries are thought to make between 1,500 and 2,000 USD a day on average. The highest daily income is 30,000 USD for the province's most main pagodas and monasteries. The pagoda/monastery makes substantially more money than the average local daily wage of locals, which is 10 USD.

Additionally, the amulets are advertised to the locals. In brief, the Buddhist pagoda typically makes a tiny amulet and makes mention of its holiness in an effort to combat the issues that might arise during the COVID-19 situation. The peak of the outbreak is typically when local demand is at its maximum. Buddhist pagodas typically produce ritual amulets for sale to meet demand. When news of a newly created ritual amulet appears in any media, the locals frequently attempt to visit the pagoda to donate money or purchase the amulet as a spiritual trick.

Discussion

A public crisis could happen without warning. It's interesting to see how a crisis affects the marketing system. Both the seller and the buyer could be impacted, and the marketing strategy could change. In essence, during a crisis, both the supplier and the consumer will alter their behavior. When there is a public crisis, marketing activity volume typically decreases. It's quite interesting to see how marketing performed well during a time of public crisis, particularly for social sustainability marketing. It can be difficult to know "What, Who, When, and How to Do" during a crisis. Because a public crisis is uncommon and typically an exceptional circumstance, the lessons from successful cases are helpful. The article you're reading right now is a case study of social sustainable marketing using ceremonial amulets. The case study demonstrates the method for generating income for a place of worship and social support during the COVID-19 epidemic crisis. The article you're reading right now is a case study of social sustainable marketing using ceremonial amulets. The case study demonstrates the method for generating income for a place of worship and social support during the COVID-19 epidemic crisis.

The marketing of ritual amulets during the COVID-19 crisis is often effective. Immediately after the sale begins, the amulets are typically sold out of the Buddhist pagoda's religious store. Many locals frequently travel to the pagoda and purchase amulets. During an outbreak, the local populace typically believes that holiness will bring them good fortune and protect them from infection or social trouble. The Buddhist pagoda can effectively raise the funds and use them for projects that will serve the community during times of need. The establishment of a free food center for local residents in the neighborhood and the purchase of medical equipment for the neighborhood medical center are the best examples of social support projects. It is obvious that the Buddhist pagoda's marketing of ceremonial amulets serves as a bridge for social sharing. Marketing of ritual amulets benefits all parties.

One who has money gives to a religious organization and receives amulets for protection against evil. The project will assist the community as well as the religious organization by providing funding for social services during a time of need. As a result, it serves as a good illustration of how to use ritual amulet marketing to sustain a community during COVID-19. However, it's also important to account for the ritual amulet marketing's promotional activity. It must be ensured that there are no false claims that might seduce the locals. For instance, a poor advertisement would claim that the amulet can treat COVID-19 without the need for contemporary therapeutic care. Additionally, it's important to manage the crowds of people at religious locations during the ceremonial amulet sale since doing so necessitates social isolation during a crisis and because a crowded religious location could serve as a disease-spreading hub (Hartley, Reisinger, & Perencevich, 2020; Singh, Singh, Kumar, & Mathur, 2021).

In the case study's amulet marketing, the market is a place of worship, the vendor is a pagoda or monastery, and the consumer is the local populace. The interdependence of locals and pagodas/monasteries during the COVID-19 crisis is an example of sustainability. Quantitatively, almost all of the neighborhood pagodas and monasteries sell amulets, bringing in a sizeable sum of money. This may support the way in which the religious institution works. An intriguing occurrence is the expansion of

ritual marketing within pagodas and monasteries at times of public health crises. Only a few illustrious pagodas and monasteries create and disperse amulets during non-crisis times. Additionally, a sharp rise in the local population's number of consumers was seen when the COVID-19 outbreak happened. This case study is strong evidence of the role that religion plays in shaping consumer behavior (Sriwijitalai & Wiwanitkit, 2020).

A recent topic for consideration is the impact of religious background on the marketing system. Both buyer and seller behavior may be influenced by societal mores and religious convictions (Wongcharoenporn & Thabhiranrak, 2019). According to Singh et al. (2021), unconstrained purchasing constructs and extrinsic relationships have a negative association with intrinsic religiosity and a favorable link with it. Additionally, Singh et al. (2021) came to the conclusion that there was a link between extrinsic religiosity and vulnerability to interpersonal influence, which was then regulated by long-term orientation or rooted culture. In the current case study, the local populace's deeply ingrained belief in ritual amulets is closely related to the consumer behavior of hurriedly purchasing an amulet from religious institutions.

To apply the religion related social marketing concept for a setting is a challenge. From a business environment analysis, there are many factors that can contribute to the success of the marketing system. In a setting with a long history and classic religion related culture, the implementation of the social marketing system with a religious unit might be easy. However, in the community that there is no strong function of a religious unit, the implementation of a social marketing operated by a religious unit might be difficult. Additionally, the success is also based on the spiritual welfare functioning of the religious unit. Religion-based social marketing may fail if a religious institution does not play a role or performs poorly in terms of providing for the needs of the community.

In a Thai study, product look, price, site of origin, and promotion all had an impact on customers' decisions to purchase Buddha amulets outside of a place of worship, while the only significant predictor for purchases inside of a place of worship was holiness belief (Wongcharoenporn & Thabhiranrak, 2019). Without ethical oversight, the sale of amulets outside of a religious institution could cause issues, and it is not a means to further the idea of social marketing (Yang & Thaldumrong, 2017). Amulet marketing, according to McDaniel, is a type of "holy marketing" (McDaniel, 2015). Numerous neighborhood monasteries as well as non-religious property dealers can profit from this spiritual economy (McDaniel, 2015). A lot of people can profit from this particular economic structure. Sustainability is demonstrated, and it demonstrates that social sustainability marketing can make people happy (Kaklauskas et al., 2020). Happiness is owed to the successful spiritual uplift of the local populace and the continued performance of the religious institution's social welfare role.

Amulet marketing will be effective social marketing if the system is well managed by a religious organization that seeks to foster social support. On the other side, it might be a concern if it is improperly and unethically run by an immoral non-religious private unit seeking profit. The issue of religious tourism marketing's sustainability is the same (Iliev, 2020). The system's important component is the vendors' and customers' consistent and fair service (Iliev, 2020). The tension between occult culture and religion may have existed in relation to the selling of amulets during the COVID-19 crisis, but this friction may have been alleviated by the effectiveness of the amulets in fostering confidence and serenity. It is vital to make sure that people follow new social norms, at least temporarily (e.g. wearing face masks, staying at home, pray more and become more religious, among others). This could be a unique viewpoint for future situation analysis. Finally, the religious organization must advertise amulets in an ethical manner. In fact, it has been documented that aggressive marketing strategies used by Thai Buddhist monasteries to boost revenue have proven successful but questionable marketing strategies (Scott, 2009).

The case study presented in this article serves as a potential starting point for future systematic quantitative research on this particular topic. The situation in Indochina may serve as the primary focus of the case study, but the idea may be used anywhere. South East Asian nations may have a strong amulet culture. Practices from this area are currently being adopted widely on a global scale. The amulet is already common in many nations and is associated with numerous religions. For instance, numerous renowned churches in Europe sell Christian amulets.

In the future, the concept's implementation could be useful for managing the public crisis. According to data on the growth of ritual amulet marketing during public crises, it is interesting that goods that can spiritually support the consumer sell extremely well. Also noteworthy is the extraordinary role of the religious unit in acting as a seller and successfully general sustainable marketing during a public crisis. During a crisis, the religious unit may perform additional functions in the future. In terms of amulets, the newly designed and specific issuing to respond to the new crisis is possible. New technologies may be used for amulet creation, production, and sales promotion. The dual-system theory for commerce, culture, religion, and technology (Tanko, 2020) explains this well.

Evidential proofs of the concept by further studies on implementation of this specific social marketing system are recommended. Regarding the continuous COVID-19 pandemic, growth of the ritual marketing as a new way for social marketing might be seen in many countries.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the case study highlights the effectiveness of ritual amulet marketing as a form of social marketing during a crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. This unique approach allows religious institutions to generate profits while simultaneously providing social support to the community. By selling ceremonial amulets, these institutions can sustain their operations, offer spiritual well-being to individuals experiencing distress, and contribute to the overall welfare of the community. This success underscores the adaptability and significance of social marketing in connecting regional spiritual beliefs with broader societal needs. It emphasizes the crucial role of religious organizations in promoting resilience, social welfare, and spiritual support during challenging circumstances like a public health crisis.

The function of the religious community during the COVID-19 epidemic can be understood through the analysis of the circumstances in the researched context in Indochina. The employment of a certain type of social marketing that is connected to religion is highlighted. The significance of the neighborhood religious center during the crisis can be clarified by this study. The new, distinctive model is the interaction of ingrained beliefs, the social market idea, social welfare activity, and the public health response to the COVID-19 issue. This is an excellent illustration of how the role of the ritual belief and religious center in the current social and public health system performs its spiritual purpose. Despite being under attack from a serious crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, the beneficial function can continue. The lesson learned from the current situation can be further examined to identify the key strength and window of opportunity for enhancing the religious center's function in society in order to better align it with the changing nature of the world through the application of deeply ingrained local wisdom in each context.

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