

*The New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI) undertakes research focusing on engagement with Asia, provides a forum for informed debates, and offers a bridge to Asia-related expertise and research within the University of Auckland.*

## Marketing and religion in Auckland's multicultural marketplaces

When religion is under the spotlight in business strategy, the focus is often on religious differences: how religion forbids certain types of consumption, for example. But different religions actually have some strong similarities when it comes to the impact of religion on people's lives, their interactions with others and their consumer behaviour. Research by Angela Cruz, Yuri Seo and Margo Buchanan-Oliver\* investigated the commonalities of religions' impact on consumption practices in multicultural marketplaces. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with Southeast Asians from multiple religious backgrounds who had immigrated to the multicultural marketplace of Auckland, New Zealand.

The researchers found that religion provides a source of continuity and stability during the immigration and settlement process. This sense of continuity and stability was similar even between interviewees of different religious backgrounds. For example, a Christian woman noted: "whatever they're doing or believe in the Philippines, the same thing that we do here." A Buddhist man mentioned that visiting a Buddhist temple provided a connection for him back to Thailand.

The researchers also found that religious practices enabled the interviewees to quickly rebuild social connections in the early stages of settling in Auckland. Thus they concluded that religion facilitates market entry into multicultural market places.

Another common theme that emerged from the interviews was that Auckland's ethnically diverse

religious communities provided a chance for migrants to interact with both Kiwis and migrants from other cultural backgrounds. In particular, interviewees described how religious social gatherings allowed them to practice their English, learn about consumption practices in New Zealand and share their home culture and consumption practices.

The researchers also noted that religion creates both local and international connections through the distribution of donations or monetary tithes. These two findings suggest that religion deepens the interconnectedness of culturally diverse communities.

What marketing managers can take from these findings is that there are gains to be had from exploring commonalities between religious groups rather than avoiding religion altogether or stereotyping religious groups. Religion provides an important opportunity to foster positive consumer relationships in multicultural marketplaces.

\*Full study results available in an article authored by Angela Gracia Cruz, Yuri Seo and Margo Buchanan-Oliver: "Religion as a Field of Transcultural Practices in Multicultural Marketplaces" in the Journal of Business Research (2017). This can be found online at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.07.022>

