

CONSUMER INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS ON THE YOUTH USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIA DURING COVID

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ABSTRACT:

There is a famous quote by Maxime Legace that states, "Spirituality is the art of keeping your internal fire alive." Over the past few years, spirituality has been inculcated by different generations. Even though the concept is an old one, it has gained tremendous popularity in the last few decades. Today spirituality is a broad concept that includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. Spirituality is widespread in different sectors like the health sector, education, and working cultures. Social media is a relatively new concept that has changed the meaning of spirituality. Its impact and reach are maxima among all the media tools.

The pandemic has given people a very difficult time. Many were diagnosed with depression, anxiety, alcoholism, and many such mental health problems. Spirituality has taken a digital route where monks tried to reach out to people using social media platforms to talk to them and convey their teachings amidst the pandemic.

The aim of this paper is to find the influence of social media on spirituality among the youth in India. Our findings suggest a preference among the youth to explore the journey of spirituality through online videos and podcasts as opposed to books and articles. The paper traces not only the rise and impact of social media usage but also its lack of success in spreading awareness about the difference between a spiritual and religious person.

Keywords: Spirituality, Social Media, Modern Monk, Spiritual Leader

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is defined as a person's fundamental values and feeling of purpose in life. These ideals are sometimes religious in nature. They are sometimes associated with 'the sacred' in a larger sense—that is, with ultimate rather than merely functional significance.

Spirituality is now widely believed to be innate in everyone, whether religious or not. The concept has a long and illustrious history. The word's origins can be traced back to Christianity. The term "spiritual" was originally used to contrast with the term "fleshly," which signified "worldly" or "opposed to God's spirit."

Spirituality is a vast topic with many different interpretations. In general, it entails a sense of belonging to something larger than oneself, as well as a quest for purpose in life. As a result, it is a universal human experience that affects all of us. A spiritual experience might be described as sacred, sublime, or simply as a strong sense of aliveness and connectivity.

Some people may discover that their spiritual lives are intertwined with their affiliation with a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue. Others may turn to prayer or a personal relationship with God or a higher force for comfort. Others seek significance in their relationships with nature or art. Your personal notion of spirituality, like your sense of purpose, may evolve with time adapting to your own experiences and relationships.

During the research, 96% of the respondents assured that they were aware of the true meaning of spirituality. This suggests that there is widespread awareness of what spirituality is and the understanding that goes into grasping it. 86% of these respondents mentioned that they believed and followed spirituality which asserts to the thesis that there is a majority of people who have been in touch with the spiritual self or are consistently trying to inculcate it in their life. Parallely, 93% of the respondents were positive that the world would become a better place if people understood spirituality accurately.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the mental state of consumers during the pandemic
2. To understand the importance of spirituality
3. To understand how modern monks helped the youth through social media and became pillars of support

Hypothesis:

1. H0- The mental state of the consumers was highly affected and they needed help.
H1- The mental state of the consumers was not at all affected. It remained the same pre and post-pandemic.
2. H0- Spirituality did not gain any importance during the pandemic. It was the same as before
H1- Spirituality gained a lot of importance. A lot of people started believing and having faith in it
3. H0- The modern monks did not succeed in helping the youth through social media during the pandemic
H1: The modern monks used the social media platforms effectively and became the pillars of support for the youth

8.5 Scope of the Study:

1. The study focuses on the Youth, particularly of the age group 18:30, as they are very active on Social Media and know in and out about various Social Media platforms.
2. The study also focuses only on the Youth of India. To get more specific, accurate, and detailed data only one country was taken into account to conduct the study.
3. The study focuses on only 3 Social Media platforms namely Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook, and does not take into consideration other Social Media platforms.
4. The study incorporates only a few specific parameters that have an effect on Mental and Physical Health.

Research Design: Descriptive research design was used in this study to arrive at a logical conclusion.

Sources of Data:

Primary Sources: The responses for the questionnaire have been entirely taken from Primary sources via an Online Survey Method which was created by using Google Forms. Hence Survey Method was used to capture Structured and Unstructured Data.

Technique: A sample Survey Method was used to collect data which was done via online channels

Tool: Structured questionnaire was framed with the help of Google Forms and was distributed through online channels.

Nature of Data: Non-parametric data i.e. Nominal & Ordinal Data

Secondary Sources: Published research papers and articles were used from Google Scholar. News articles, online articles, and research data warehouses were also used.

Sampling Method: A combination of snowball and convenience sampling methods was used to arrive at a logical conclusion.

Sampling Size: The number of respondents taken into account for this study is 100.

Sample Unit: Anyone who is an active Social Media user and falls in the category of the age group 18-30. These people are college-going students pursuing their undergraduate studies and some have even graduated from college and are pursuing post-graduation or are working. These respondents are active users of Social

Media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. These users know everything in detail about Social Media and hence were considered to get accurate and detailed results.

Sample Area: The sample area used for this study was India.

Population: This study is eligible for anyone who is a Social Media user, for whom Social Media is a daily thing, and who regularly communicates with other people as well as uploads posts and stories on Social Media. Anyone having a presence across Instagram, Youtube and Facebook, belonging to the 18-30 age group & residing in India can be considered to collect data.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

(S Rautela, A Sharma, 2019), in the paper 'Spirituality and Social Media: Connecting Dots' highlights the use of spirituality has grown by leaps and bounds. The increasing use of smartphones and other technologies has advanced the principles of spirituality among the youth. The paper also substantiated that the rise and fall of social media have impacted spirituality. It also identifies the positive aspects of social media to reach out to people and maintain their mental health and stability.

(Maryam Hasanshahi, MS and Maryam Amidi Mazaheri, Ph.D., 2015), the study, The Effects of Education on Spirituality through Virtual Social Media on the Spiritual Well-Being of the Public Health Students of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, states the roles and effects of people's spiritual well-being in the era of social media. The study is aimed at the effectiveness of education on spirituality through social media. The researchers used a semi-experimental study with 50 public health students to understand that after the intervention of education, people's spiritual well-being increased highly. They concluded that spirituality education causes conditions to improve the spiritual well-being of people.

The article, This is How Social Media Influences Our Spirituality by Ely Bakouche states the importance of leading a spiritual life in the modern world. It demonstrates that while the main culprit of our mindfulness activity is the excessive use of phones, social media positively influences our life. It also expresses that social media and spirituality don't always connect as it causes anxiety and depression. It suggests that users should have deep conversations with themselves and use social media without scrolling mindlessly on it.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

1. The Respondent's Knowledge of Spirituality

Objective: To determine if the respondents were aware of spirituality.

Analysis: Out of the 100 respondents, 96 people were aware of what spirituality means. Only 4 people out of 100 don't have enough knowledge of spirituality.

2. The Respondent's Belief in Spirituality

Objective: To determine if the youth in India believed in spirituality.

Analysis: 86 respondents out of 100 agreed that they had faith in spirituality. Only 14 people out of 100 said that they don't believe in spirituality.

3. The Mental State of the Respondents and their Known Ones.

Objective: To find out how the pandemic has affected the mental state of the youth and their relatives or known ones.

Analysis: 80 respondents agreed that the pandemic has affected their or their relatives or known ones' mental health negatively. The rest 20 respondents have been lucky enough to survive the pandemic in a positive environment

4. Do Respondents Follow Monks on Social Media?

Objective: To know if the respondents who were targeted in this survey, followed the monks on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, etc.

Analysis: 80 respondents out of those who were interviewed said that they do follow monks and spiritual leaders on social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, etc. The rest 20 respondents said that they know about the monks but don't follow them regularly on social media

5. The Monks the Respondents Follow

Objective: To determine which monk the respondents follow the most.

Analysis: The data revealed that out of 10 respondents. 35 respondents follow Jay Shetty, 15 follow Gaur Gopal Das, 8 of them follow Gauranga Das, 5 respondents follow Radhanath Swami, 6 of them follow BK Shivani, 10 follow Sadhguru, 7 respondents follow Rakeshbhai, 10 of them follow Ranveer Allahabad, 3 follow Aditya Shastri, 4 follow J Krishnamurti, and 3 follow Luke Coutinho. Some of them have mentioned 2 or the names of the monks they follow on social media.

6. Have the Monks Been Able to Convey their Values and Teachings Through Social Media?

Objective: To find out if the monks have been successful in using social media as a platform to convey their teachings and values to the youth of India during the harsh pandemic.

Analysis: According to the data collected, 85 respondents agree that the monks and spiritual leaders have been quite successful in using social media platforms like Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook to connect with the youth and spread their values and teachings during the pandemic.

7. The Respondents on Whether Spirituality Help in Reducing Anxiety, Stress, and Depression

Objective: To find out if spirituality helps in reducing anxiety, stress, and depression.

Analysis: According to the data collected, 96 respondents agree that spirituality has helped them get over anxiety, depression, and stress during the pandemic.

8. The Respondent's Views on Motivational Speeches by the Monks

Objective: To understand if the motivational speeches by the monks help the youth today

Analysis: 62 respondents agreed that the motivational speeches by the monks, help them understand and motivate when they feel low. The rest 38 either don't listen to or don't feel motivated to do so.

9. The Respondent's Views on Watching Videos or Reading About Spirituality

Objective: To know if the respondents prefer watching videos or reading books on spirituality.

Reading Books	Watching Videos
31	69

Analysis: According to my research, the majority of the youth today prefer watching videos over reading about spirituality and its teachings and values.

10. The Respondents on the Books that Inspired them on Spirituality.

Objective: To know if the books written by monks and spiritual leaders, motivated the respondents to read and know more

Think like a monk	12
Bhagavad Gita	2
Life's amazing secrets	4
The journey home	4
The monk who sold his Ferrari	4
Karma	1
Ikigai	5
The secret	2
The art of happiness	2

Analysis: Out of the 100 respondents that were interviewed, 77 respondents said they don't or have never read a book on spirituality.

11. The Respondents view live sessions on Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube.

Objective: To know if the respondents have attended live sessions of the monks and spiritual leaders on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube.

Analysis: 66 respondents agree that they have attended the live sessions of spiritual leaders on social media.

12. The Respondents View on Metaverse as a Future of Spirituality

Objective: To know if the respondents believed that Metaverse could be a possible future for spirituality.

Analysis: 71 respondents were skeptical that the metaverse could be the future of spirituality. 17 people believed that the metaverse could be a possible future option for spirituality. 12 respondents said they don't see metaverse as the future of spirituality.

13. The Respondent's view on the World Becoming a Better Place if Everyone followed and Believed in the Principles of Spirituality

Objective: To know if the respondents believed that the world would become a better place if everyone followed and believed in the principles of spirituality

Analysis: 93 the respondents believed and agreed that if the people would understand and follow the principles of spirituality, the world would definitely become a better and happier place to live it. 7 of the respondents felt that this would not be possible. They lacked the confidence in believing the world could become a better place.

SUGGESTIONS

According to the survey, the following are my suggestions:

- The youth should be encouraged to read more books and grasp knowledge on spirituality
- The youth of India should know the difference between a person who is religious and a person who is spiritual
- The youth should be given the opportunity to serve in order to understand spirituality a lot better
- The youth should be confident enough to lean on the teachings of spirituality, especially during hard times
- The youth should develop spiritual traditions
- The youth should indulge into the practice of meditation on a daily basis
- Metaverse can be an excellent option for future spirituality
- The youth should collectively work together to spread the values of spirituality and help make the world a better place to survive.

FUTURE OF SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual change has too long turned its eyes away from the earth. The time has now come to heal the division and to unite life and the spirit. It is to make all our actions a sacrifice to the master of our action and an expression of the greater self in man and of all life-Yoga.

1. Our first object shall be to declare this ideal, insist on the spiritual change as the first necessity, and group together all who accept it and are ready to strive sincerely to fulfill it.
2. Our second shall be to build up not only an individual but a communal life on this principle.

Our call should be to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world, – not those who accept the competitive individualism, capitalism, or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future

ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labor for a greater ideal. They must be men who dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realization of God in themselves and in all human beings, and to whole-minded and indefatigable labor for the nation and for humanity.

This idea can be as yet only a little seed and the life that embodies it a small nucleus, but it is our fixed hope that the seed will grow into a great tree and the nucleus be the heart of an ever-extending formation. It is with a confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard-bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of a world in dissolution and of future India, the greater India of the rebirth that is to rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother.

CONCLUSION

Spirituality and social media are two distinct, different concepts. Spirituality exists for thousands of years and social media was born a few years ago. Spirituality is about finding inner peace and harmony while these words are not used for social media in any way. On one hand, the reach and impact of social media are enormous and on the other hand, the need for spirituality is felt by people of all age groups. The paper was an attempt to use the impact of social media to spread the philosophy of spirituality. The paper was an attempt to use the dynamic nature of spirituality to bring peace and harmony to the lives of many. Spirituality has been found to be very useful in different sectors. Different sectors may use the relevant characteristics of social media to spread spirituality. Few online platforms such as soulspeak.com, and peaking tree.in, Isha foundation is already using online platforms to spread spirituality however the intense need demands more such players to come into the picture and use social media for the same.

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