

RELIGIOUS PRODUCTS – THE PERCEPTION OF THEIR VALUE

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Purpose: The main objective of the paper is to identify the attributes of the value of religious products. Specific objectives include: conceptualization of the notion and perception of religious products from the perspective of an individual, determining the impact of secularization on consumer behaviour in the field of religious products, exploring and defining research areas that will constitute the basis for planned quantitative research, enabling the quantification of the analyzed variables and verification of research hypotheses generated during qualitative research.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative research (N = 21) on the perception of the value of religious products was conducted among Polish Catholics. Additionally, the understanding of the essence of religious products was examined.

Findings: The research shows that a religious product is defined and perceived by the respondents in various ways - there is no uniform approach in this respect. Considering the approach proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), the respondents perceive the existence of all five values in religious products, among which the relatively greatest importance is assigned to functional and emotional values.

Research limitations/implications: The research carried out is of a qualitative nature and is burdened with the disadvantages of this type of research. It is not a representative study and can only provide a partial picture of the research problem.

Practical implications: The paper has interdisciplinary and exploratory character, covering not only the issues in the area of religion and culture, but also economic, ethnographic and psychological aspects of human behaviour. The conclusions from the conducted research may provide guidance for enterprises offering religious products on the market.

Originality/value: The original value of the article is the conducted own research, addressed to both consumers and enterprises operating in the researched industry.

An additional value is also the approach to the research problem; so far, this type of research has not been undertaken in relation to religious products.

Keywords: consumer behavior and attitudes, marketing, religious products, qualitative research.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The subject of religion, faith and religiousness constitute an extremely broad and multifaceted area of research and analysis for social researchers. Defining the relationship between, for example, the professed faith and the perceived quality of life is a prominent issue, especially in the individual dimension. Until recently, religion and its relationship with economics, marketing and consumer behaviour were topics neglected in the scientific literature (Ustaahmetoğlu, 2020). Currently, the relationships between these issues increasingly often become the subject of research by many scientists (Agarwala et al., 2019; Brenner 2019; Farias et al., 2019; de Wildt, Aupers, 2021). For example, the research by Nguyen et al. (2020) concerns religious consumption based on product, services, media and practices as well as its impact on the attitudes, values and behaviour of consumers. As the authors of the studies indicate, this consumption can also be approached in the context of "life satisfaction, religious brand preference, dollars spending on religious products and monetary donation".

Religious products that combine the sacred with the profane are one of the areas of interdisciplinary interest. Such products are especially important in the most visible layer of religiousness, i.e., the rites, both within church institutions and at the individual level. Of course, depending on the religion, tradition or theological doctrine, they have a very diverse character. Their significance in the modern world is therefore quite heterogeneous. On the one hand, they play a very important role in the lives of many people. This is because the main, but not the only, purpose of buying and possessing them is to meet the needs of a higher order, i.e., spiritual needs. On the other hand, on the supply side, the production of these products is one of key areas of activity, and thus a source of income for church institutions or commercial enterprises. Therefore, it is worth proposing a thesis that the **identification of the essence and significance of religious products in human life. The perception of their value and motives for purchase is an interesting area of scientific research.**

It is worth noting, however, that issues related to religion, faith and religiousness, are an extremely difficult subject of research not only in Poland. This is caused by the sensitivity of this topic, which from the point of view of an individual can be perceived as very intimate and private. Hence, "Many aspects of religiousness are not subject to statistical research, and some of them are not empirically studied at all" (Religious denominations in Poland 2015-2018, 2019).

The Polish society, which is the main area of interest in this paper is dominated by people declaring belonging to the Catholic Church. However, the changes taking place in recent years and the forecasts indicate a continuous decline in the number of Catholics. The ongoing process of secularization of Polish society especially concerns youth and young people. It is a relatively new phenomenon in Poland and can be called a disruption of the intergenerational transmission of faith. In the years 2000-2021, a 20% decrease in the declaration of faith and as much as

a 50% decrease in religious practice could be observed among young people. However, an increase in the number of young people who define themselves as very religious should be noted - an increase from 6% to 8% (Catholic Church in Poland..., 2021).

The main objective of the paper is to identify the attributes of the value of religious products. In order to achieve the goal, the Sheth's value model (1991) was adopted and adapted as the theoretical basis in the conducted own research. The paper has interdisciplinary and exploratory character, covering not only the issues in the area of religion and culture, but also economic, ethnographic and psychological aspects of human behaviour.

Specific objectives of both a cognitive and methodological nature also defined in the research process include:

- conceptualization of the notion and perception of religious products from the perspective of an individual,
- determining the impact of secularization on consumer behaviour in the field of religious products,
- exploring and defining research areas that will constitute the basis for planned quantitative research, enabling the quantification of the analyzed variables and verification of research hypotheses generated during qualitative research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Religious products - economic aspects

The classic debate at the intersection between religion and economics, including marketing, may concern such theoretical issues as e.g., individual rationality and rational choice, market theory, the theory of supply and demand, the usefulness of religious consumption, branding and commodification of religion, consumer habits, churches, competitive strategies and a number of other issues. As indicated by L. Obadia and D.C. Wood (2011) "economics of religion" allows "a new and groundbreaking approach to the study of religious beliefs, preferences, attitudes, belongings, organizations, and dynamics".

As mentioned before, this paper will focus primarily on religious products, hence it is relevant to review selected studies conducted in this area first. As indicated by B.B. Hull and F. Bold (1989) "Churches produce a set of products including entertainment, a variety of socially valuable public goods, eternal life and alteration of otherwise fated events". The purchase of these products, like no others, can be strengthened "by the promise of heaven and threat of hell". Therefore, a service which is for example a promise of eternal life can also be a religious product, as well as experiences of visitors to sanctuaries or places of religious worship. Research related to this area focuses mainly on emotions, motivations, but also on

physical and organizational aspects (e.g., related to the organization of a trip) that occur when visiting such places (Bideci, Bideci, 2021).

N. Muhamad and D. Mizerski (2010) emphasize that people dealing with economics and marketing practice have limited conceptual knowledge in the field of measuring the influence of religion on consumer behaviour in the market. They suggested the need for a holistic approach to religion and in their research they identified “five factors of religious influence. These are commitment, motivation, affiliation, knowledge about a religion and awareness of the social consequences of following a religion”.

The research conducted so far concerned selected, specific product categories. For example, research focused on the sphere of impact of religion on the perception of luxury products (Geiger-Oneto, Minton, 2019), the impact of religiousness on the acceptance of new products (Rehman, Shahbaz Shabbir, 2010), and purchasing intentions among people of different religion in respect of purchasing products bearing halal logo (Jumani, Sukhabot, 2020). On the other hand, S. Ojo and S. Nwankwo (2020) studied the correlations between religion, faith and culture and their impact on entrepreneurship and marketing. As the authors write: “Pentecostal practices unveil the marketing notion of “Pentpreneurship”, which combines both spiritual and enterprise activities to formulate a fused space of engagement straddling the sacred and the secular”. Research on the impact of various advertising messages containing (or not) religious elements as well as the level of religiousness on the attitudes and buying intentions of consumers is another research area related to the relationship between religion and the marketing aspects of products (Ustaahmetoğlu, 2020). On the basis of the conducted experiments the research author notes that religiosity may be an increasingly important criterion for market segmentation today.

In view of the above, the analysis of the perceived values that consumers obtain from purchasing or receiving broadly understood religious products constitutes the novelty of this paper.

2.2. The concept of perceived value and the consumption value theory

Consumers attribute value to a product by assessing its utility based on the perception of what is received and what is given and focus on the benefits or the worthiness of using a specific product (Zeithaml, 1988). The abovementioned definition of perceived value is one of the most widespread since the very beginning of literature discussion on the subject in late 80's and early 90's and posits value perception as an unidimensional construct.

Although perceived value is one of the most studied variables in the marketing literature, there is still no consensus about its definition. Other researchers (e.g., Babin et al., 1994) argue that value perception is rather a multi-dimensional construct. Various perspectives are generated by academics for indicating this multidimensional structure such as customer value hierarchy, utilitarian and hedonic value, as well as consumption value theory.

Moreover, the perceived value has often been poorly differentiated from other related constructs (Lapierre et al., 1999) therefore especially terms such as “value” and “values” should be clearly distinguished. According to Holbrook (1994, 1999) value is the outcome of an evaluative judgment, whereas the term values refers to the standards, rules, criteria, norms, goals, or ideals that serve as the basis for such an evaluative judgment. Because each consumer has a different value system, their behaviour will differ depending on said values (Rokeach, 1973). Values can influence the individual’s attitude (Poortinga et al., 2004) and can provide a basis for consumers’ evaluations and preferences for products. It is also a critical antecedent of the consumers’ purchasing behaviour (Chiu et al., 2014).

Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo (2007) in their literature review on perceived value revealed two main research approaches to the operationalization of value (Fig. 1) which are still valid.

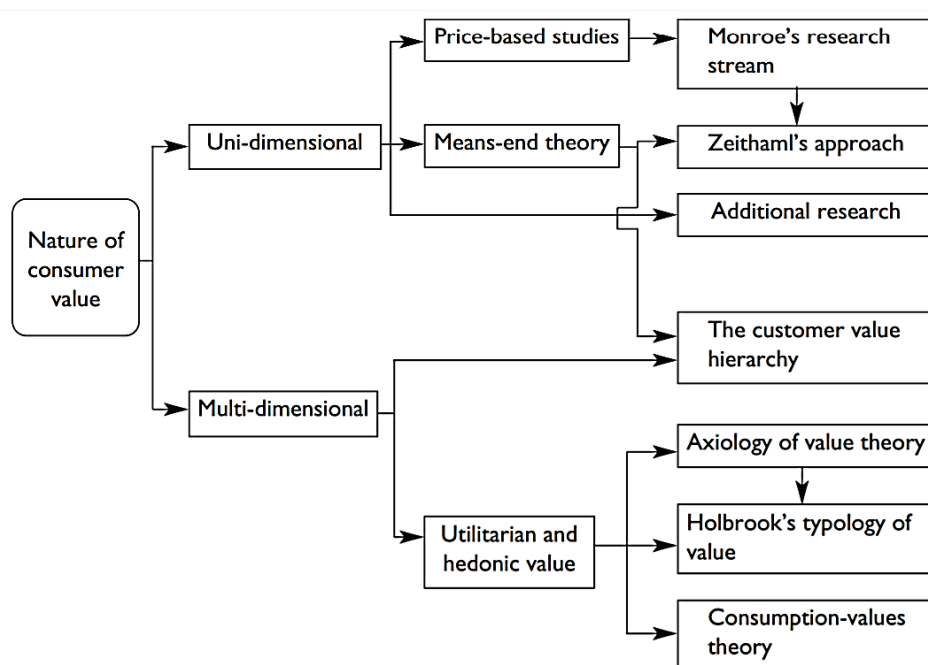


Figure 1. Research streams on perceived value.

Source: Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007.

There are many multidimensional approaches to the perceived value. Babin et al. (1994) proposed that consumer value consists of utilitarian and hedonic components. While utilitarian value is related to non-emotional outcomes of an experience; hedonic value is characterized as emotive aspects of a consumption experience. In other words, benefit that is derived by accomplishing a specific task is defined as utilitarian value. Experimental benefit that is elicited by feelings of fun, fantasy fulfilment, escapism, and excitement is called hedonic value (Jones et al., 2006; Stoel et al., 2004). Grönroos (1997) on the other hand divided perceived value into cognitive value and emotional value, whereas Sweeney and Soutar (2001) divided consumer perceived value into three categories: functional, emotional, and social values.

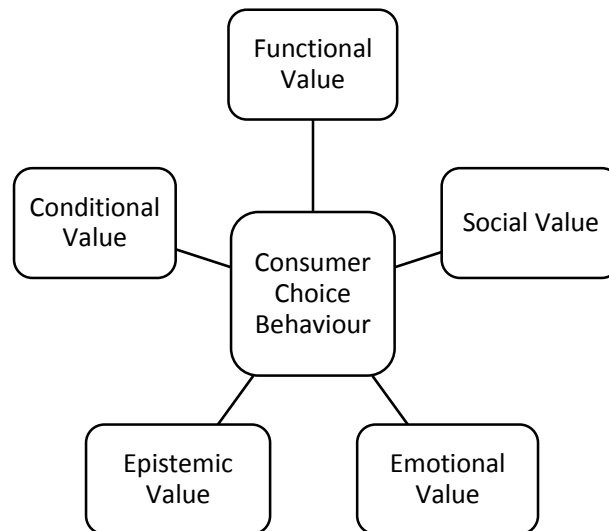


Figure 2. The five values influencing consumer choice.

Source: Sheth et al., 1991.

In this paper, the main emphasis is on the approach proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), namely The Consumption Value Theory which depicts that functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values guide the consumers' choice behaviours (Fig. 2). Functional value is related to perceived benefits of a product's functional, utilitarian, and physical performance. The social value is defined as: the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's association with one or more specific social groups (Sheth et al., 1991). Emotional value is related to a product's ability to create positive or negative affective states. Epistemic value is related to curiosity, novelty, and cognition obtained from the products. Conditional value reflects the effect of a product's utility in the particular situations and circumstances. Since conditional value is not a value itself, researchers mostly consider the first four value dimensions. Moreover, conditional value is considered to have influence on other values' significance only (Denys, Mendes, 2014).

3. Data and method

Primary research was conducted to identify the perception of values in relation to religious products. In the process of the research performance, the grounded theory methodology was used. Qualitative studies were performed using the method of individual-in-depth-interviews (with elements of observation and photography). They were followed by semi-structured interviews and field note-taking. Additionally, the respondents were asked to take photographs (or they were taken by the researcher) of devotional items that the respondents had in their homes. The interview scenario was the measurement tool. The following research problems were distinguished:

- general attitude of the respondents towards religion, including attending masses and participating in pilgrimages,
- conceptualization of religious products (sacred and devotional items), including associations with the essence of such products, and their perceived value,
- consumer behaviour related to such products and purchase motivations,
- perception and quality assessment of such products,

This study was conducted for 2 months in 2021. The sample selection was purposive. The sample was selected in this way because it was found that the research issues may be perceived by the respondents as sensitive (Khraim, 2010; Van Meter, 2000; Lee, Lee, 2012). The main criteria for selecting the respondents to the sample were the purchase of products related to the church, faith or produced (affiliated) by friars or entities associated with the church institution. People related to the production or sale of this type of products, as well as clergy, nuns and other people involved in the organizational aspects of the functioning of the church were eliminated.

21 individual interviews were conducted. 13 women and 8 men participated in the study, the youngest person was 22 years old, and the oldest person was 87 years old. The characteristics of the people participating in the study are presented in table 1 (see: annex). It is worth noting that, considering the priorities in the lives of respondents participating in the survey, they declare that family and health are the most important for them, while faith or a relationship with God appeared in some statements, but was rarely placed higher in the hierarchy.

The analysis of the content of the collected material was performed according to the principles developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), with the use of the descriptive, attribute and process coding of statements in accordance with Saldana's recommendations (2021). Atlas.ti software was used in the data analysis.

It should be added that during the preparation and implementation of the research, the principles of respecting ethical standards were followed. First of all, it was ensured that there were no psychological damages related to the participation of respondents in the research. They were informed, among others, about voluntary participation, the methods of observation and registration used in research (both statements and photographic documentation), data protection and privacy (ensuring anonymity) or the method of publishing the results, as well as not using them for commercial purposes (Malhotra, Miller, 1998). It should be added that the approval of the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research of the Poznań University of Economics and Business was obtained (no. 24/2021).

4. Results

4.1. Conceptualization of religious products - associations and perception from the perspective of individuals

When conceptualizing a religious product, the respondents' spontaneous associations with this concept were first examined. Religious products, i.e., products related to religious worship, are understood by the respondents in different ways. When studying spontaneous associations with these products, some respondents perceived them very broadly, including basically all products related in any way to faith, church, priests or places of purchase. Religious products included: rosaries, pictures (including icons), figurines, crosses, candles, liturgical vessels and vestments, Catholic press, religious posters, religious games and films, souvenirs and gifts (including jewelry), herbs and cosmetic products, and even wine, health tinctures, alcoholic beverages (provided that they are produced by entities associated with the church) and papal cream cakes (i.e. cookies that Pope John Paul II liked). Religious products also include sprinklers, incense, candlesticks, and wristbands (with religious themes). A product became "religious" also by the very place of its purchase (e.g., an oil lamp bought in Jerusalem) or by the unique raw material from which it was made (e.g., an olive wood bell).

However, for some respondents, religious products are a narrow category that includes only "something that is blessed", although the mere fact of sprinkling with holy water is not important for everyone ("I do not bless anything, because it makes no sense, we did not bless anything in the family home either", res. 5). Therefore, this narrowly understood group of products includes, for example, "holy" pictures, rosaries, crosses and medals (but not, for example, books, because they are not blessed).

Some of the respondents, while spontaneously identifying the concept of a "religious product", did not, however, indicate an example of a specific product. They defined such products through the prism of their value, pointing to the needs that they satisfy thanks to them. The respondents emphasized that religious products are products for believers that help them in their lives. As one of the respondents said: "They strengthen faith and character, and they bring closer to God" (res. 4). Some people indicated that such products are not bought as investments or souvenirs from a trip, but to strengthen their own faith ("I buy them for myself, they strengthen my faith, and I become attached to them", res. 3).

Summing up, the spontaneous perception of this concept by the respondents is highly diversified and depends on the level of their participation in religious practices and professed life values.

When defining the essence of a religious product, its features were defined in the second place through the prism of the perceived quality of such products. The connotations of products with a religious sphere raise buyers' trust and strengthen the belief in the high quality of these products, especially if they are produced by friars. As the respondents stated: "I have read that

the Brothers of St John of God have been making their products for centuries, they are as good as those from the herb shop or pharmacy, but certainly better than from the supermarket" (res. 5), and "Without monks, we would not have half of the cheese, beer, wine - they invented it, let them continue to work and develop these products" (res. 10). At the same time, they strongly emphasized the need to choose the right place of purchase, i.e. "In a convent, from friars, in a church shop or in a church bookstore, not at a market, bazaar or supermarket" (res. 4).

According to the respondents high quality mainly results from the fact that religious products:

- have proven recipes that have been "tested for ages",
- are not mass-produced (limited supply – friars' "craft"),
- ingredients and raw materials are carefully selected (own plantations and gardens at convents),
- work better than those bought in a supermarket (e.g., creams),
- have healing properties (tinctures with plant extracts - e.g., "honey tincture for colds"),
- have a guarantee of the "place of purchase", which is sometimes a brand in itself (e.g., a convent),
- are made of valuable material (gold, platinum, silver) or rare raw materials (olive tree and rosewood),
- have an emotional value (they facilitate prayer, are a memento, sometimes a gift for the close relatives).

It should be emphasized that the perception of high quality does not apply to products sold at a market or bazaar (according to the respondents, there are frauds and rubbish here). It is also worth noting that the low quality was also noticed in many souvenirs from the so-called "holy places" that are produced cheaply and massively (by followers of religions other than Christianity) for profit. In conclusion, religious products are largely perceived through the prism of the place of purchase, which clearly affects their perceived quality. In addition, according to the respondents, religious products, to a greater extent than any other, may have an emotional value (more on this value later in the paper), related to faith and the place of purchase of the product "religious products carry an emotional load; they are most often bought for religious events such as baptism, communion or wedding, and as a souvenir from visits to a given place" (res. 8).

4.2. Identification of the value attributes of religious products

When analyzing the attitudes and behaviours of the research participants, it is possible to notice a diversified approach and assessment of the importance of individual dimensions of the value of religious items. The application of the Sheth value model in relation to religious products requires its adaptation, considering the specificity and complexity of these products, the value of which can be perceived in many dimensions.

The functional value of religious products

The functional value of religious products mainly refers to "facilitating prayer, strengthening faith and bringing people closer to God" (res. 4). The religious product is thus perceived as a kind of tool. Certain physical features of the products, especially the material from which they were made, the size and the price determined the purchase of a given item.

In the case of the material, for example, as indicated by one of the respondents, a crucial factor in buying a rosary was the fact that it was made of silicone ("A silicone rosary is convenient to use, e.g., when traveling", res. 10). On the other hand, in the case of product size, it proves that despite the large availability of various religious products in stationary and online stores, some respondents cannot find those that are convenient to use or exactly what they need. An interesting example is a rosary made of large beads by hand, from an old seat mat (Fig. 3a). For an older person (res. 5), the available rosaries are too small and inconvenient "I have many of them and I do not use them, and the large beads from the mat are perfect in practice". Another example of a self-made product is a very big self-carved cross "I wanted to buy a cross for myself, but it was not the size and price that I wanted - in the end I decided to make it myself, it gained an additional dimension" (res. 10, Fig. 3b).



From the left: (a) a handmade rosary of mat beads, (b) a handmade cross, (c) a collection of icons, (d, e) wall decorations.

Figure 3. Religious products - examples showing functional values.

Source: own photos taken during field research.

Taking into account the functional value of religious products, the respondents also indicated aesthetic side of interior decoration and material aspects related to capital allocation. In this respect, buying religious items for collection or investment can be distinguished as another aspect of their functional dimension. Many respondents, often over the years, collect items of a selected product category (e.g., angels, bells, cribs, magnets for a refrigerator with religious motifs, Fig. 6a). The collections can be very large (even several hundred items), they represent an extremely wide artistic and geographical spectrum. Collector's purchases also concern more religiously advanced works. These are mainly icons (Fig. 3c). Respondents buy

icons mainly because of their artistic value (work of art) or the potential increase in the value of their invested capital in the future.

The functional value of religious products is also related to their use as decorations in apartments and houses (Fig. 3d and 3e). The most frequently purchased paintings present saints. These pictures are often family heirlooms kept for many years in a given family. An interesting example is the painting of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn from Vilnius, which was brought by a family of repatriates after World War II, as the only memento from an abandoned house (Fig. 3d).

In addition, considering the functional value of a religious product, the purchase of these products as gifts is worth indicating. In this case, purchases for specific religious ceremonies, in particular the First Holy Communion (but also baptisms and confirmation), are predominant. Religious products are the main category of gifts for children receiving their First Holy Communion. The respondents indicated the security of finding the right gift in church bookstores (St. Wojciech, St. Jacek, Veritas stores). At that time, the respondents emphasized that purchasing religious products in places of religious worship was associated with a higher quality (e.g., gold medals) than if the same products were purchased, for example, in a bazaar, in an ordinary shop or at a jeweler's. The most frequently purchased products related to the First Holy Communion include the Holy Bible, gold products (chains and medals), books and games on religious topics ("If I have to buy something for a gift - I go to the church bookstore, I will always find something suitable there", res. 4).

Moreover, the purchases made when visiting holy places should also be mentioned. They are associated with the epistemic value of such products (discussed later). A person who is in such a place often wants to share a part of the unique personal experience with close relatives. Therefore, purchasing religious items as gifts is a very common motive for purchasing products during pilgrimages.

Social value of religious products

The social value of religious products is mainly related to demonstrating faith to others. This value, as shown by the research, may apply to very different behaviours, e.g., marking your car with a symbol of the Christian faith (Fig. 4a), placing religious symbols in a prominent place in your home or sharing your experiences of buying religious products with other people.



From the left: (a) a fish - a sign of belonging to the Christian religion on a car, (b) a religious cross worn as an ornament, (c) a cross as a sign of keeping up with the fashion based on film, (d) a motorcycle enthusiast's cross.

Figure 4. Religious products - examples illustrating social values.

Source: own photos taken during field research.

The cross is the product that best exemplifies various aspects of the social value of religious products. Among the people participating in the study, it was possible to notice those for whom the cross they wear on a chain is an important attribute of the declaration of faith. In the opinion of these people, the cross with the image of the crucified Christ is not so much a material value, even if it is made of precious metal, but above all it is an expression of faith. One of the participants in the study declared that he had been wearing it since confirmation. It was a gift he received from his parents, and he could not imagine replacing it with another. This product also had an emotional value for him (discussed in the next part of the article), related not only to who he had received it from, but also, and perhaps above all, to memories related to one of the three sacraments of Christian initiation in the Catholic church. This person stated that he had to repair the cross pendant several times and despite the fact that the cross was already heavily worn, he did not want to replace it with another.

A slightly different approach was declared by a woman wearing a cross, which was permanently soldered to the chain (Fig. 4b). In her opinion, it was one of the many ornaments she had. Although she described herself as a believer, she was not really emotionally connected with the cross she had on her chain. For her, it presented primarily an aesthetic value, and she treated it as an ornament that let her emphasize the beauty. Therefore, she treated the purchase of the cross as a typical purchase of a jewelry product. She stated that she was wearing different ornaments interchangeably. It was significant, however, that when she happened to spend holidays in countries where “other religions” dominated, she did not display the image of the cross she had on her chain. This situation clearly shows the simultaneous perception of the social value of this product.

An extreme example was a man for whom the cross he wore on a chain represented only an aesthetic value (Fig. 4c). From the answer given, it can be concluded that he only bought it because it was worn by Dominik Toretto (Vin Diesel) in the movie "The Fast and the Furious". In this context, this cross can be called a necklace because it does not represent a religious value

for buyers, but only evidence of following a certain pressure of fashion related to the popularity of many parts of the movie "The Fast and the Furious". In the case of this research participant, the motive behind the purchase was by no means faith, but the desire to have a product that would be a possibly exact copy of the product worn by the character in the film.

It should be noted that in the offer of many jewelry stores such "crosses" that are popular among buyers can be found. These crosses are made of both stainless steel and silver or gold. They are decorated with cubic zirconia as well as semi-precious and precious stones. The man who participated in the study explained having this "cross" by the fact that he is a motorcycle enthusiast, and such an ornament corresponds to his interests (Fig. 4d).

Products used to decorate homes are another category of religious items that illustrate their social value in an interesting way (Fig. 5). Sometimes the owners of houses and flats, wishing to manifest their faith, periodically or permanently decorate their houses with religious elements. Permanent decoration consists in building home chapels, niches in the walls where a figure of the Virgin Mary and even sculptures and monuments are placed. Examples of such installations in the vicinity of Poznan (the place of residence of the authors of the paper) are presented in figure 5. Periodic decorations are associated with religious holidays or important anniversaries. A special example concerns the peregrination of a copy of the painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa when most of the houses and even fences are carefully decorated for this occasion.



Figure 5. Religious items used to decorate houses - examples illustrating social values.

Source: own photos taken during field research.

The awareness of the support provided in a worthy cause is also an important aspect of social value, through the prism of which religious products can be purchased. It may be a charitable cause, not necessarily for a church institution. An attempt to purchase an icon during an auction is an interesting example. One of the respondents stated: "I did not manage to bid on the icon put up for the auction of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity

[ed. nationwide charity action] by a singer of a well-known music group” (res. 17). Certainly, the people who direct the support to various organizations also choose the church ones – for example, they make donations to the sanctuary, various foundations (e.g., Caritas) and support small family businesses (that produce religious items).

Emotional value of religious products

The emotional value of religious products represents, in turn, the possibility of recalling the moments related to their purchase, possession or receiving from someone as a gift. It is an exemplification of feelings and ties connecting a person with a given product. It is the perception of the value of such products in terms of souvenirs, i.e., products that will allow the buyer to return to a number of memories and emotions related to the place and time of purchase (Fig. 6a), or the person who the product was given by. The desire to have something as a souvenir is often the main factor that encourages the purchase of religious items, e.g., during a stay in a special place, an important celebration, or from relatives (often deceased).

Purchases made during pilgrimages and religious trips are an important group of emotional factors. This especially applies to "holy places" (as the respondents said), i.e., distant pilgrimage destinations (e.g., Jerusalem, Rome, Fatima), where the stay is usually associated with great experiences, emotions and where the pilgrim will most often be only once in a lifetime. A stay in such a unique place known from the Holy Scriptures ("Holy Land") or holy miracles (Fatima, Lourdes, Medjugorje) encourages pilgrims to take actions that are to remember these special places and moments spent there.

An example may be a souvenir bought in Jerusalem, which contains a significant emotional element, but is also a "proof" of stay as well as facilitates memories, and in the future perhaps a return trip to this place ("I buy as a souvenir of visits to this unique place and as a gift for my close relatives" res. 6, Fig. 6b).



From the left: (a) Fridge magnets - souvenirs that evoke emotions related to the visited places of religious worship, (b) A bell with a Jewish theme – it comes from a place with a high emotional load, (c) A rosary box with the inscription "Jerusalem"; (d) Olive wood bell

Figure 6. Religious products - examples illustrating emotional values.

Source: own photos taken during field research.

In the opinion of buyers, products which show the place of stay (e.g., "Jerusalem", Fig. 6c), those made from unique, exotic raw material (e.g., olive wood, Fig. 6d) or in a unique shape (e.g., Jerusalem Cross) are particularly valuable. Sometimes it is possible to combine these three elements in one product ("I collect bells, so when I am in a holy place I buy another bell, I brought an olive wood bell with the inscription Jerusalem from Jerusalem - it is a plentitude of happiness!", res. 6, Fig. 6d).

Souvenirs received from, or left by ancestors, especially those deceased are another source of emotional value of religious products. A wooden cross, which, according to the declaration of one of the respondents participating in the research, is the only material memento of the deceased mother is an example here (Fig. 3a). It is striking that its owner has not found a worthy place for the cross to be honored. It has been on a shelf stuck in between books for a long time (Fig. 7a). The bronze cross hanging on the wall of another respondent's flat is also of exceptional value. After the death of his parents who lived in Lithuania in Vilnius, it is the only heirloom left for him, his children and grandchildren from his ancestors. Thanks to this, it was possible to preserve not only the cross that hung on the wall, but a certain symbol that brings memories of the deceased that are important to the respondent (Fig. 7b).



Figure 7. Crosses - family mementoes of the deceased family members - examples showing emotional values.

Source: own photos taken during field research.

The epistemic value of religious products

The epistemic value of religious products is related to the provision of new, and deepening the existing religious knowledge, or to arousing interest in the subject of faith. The conducted interviews show that this value constitutes a crucial factor for some people, and the modern market has a lot to offer in this respect. Apart from the Holy Scriptures, the respondents were willing to buy books and audiobooks on religious topics, selected and specially prepared fragments of the Holy Scriptures (for specific occasions), and religious games (e.g., board games). They also supported YouTube channels dedicated to deepening knowledge about faith (Fig. 8). As one of the respondents said, "I buy a lot of such things, for example in Studio Błogo, which are good, for example, for a housewarming party or as kitchen stuff. These things contain

passages from the Holy Scriptures. These are, for example, a poster with a cucumber or a vegetable cutting board with a prayer before a meal” (res. 15).



Figure 8. Religious items: poster with the "Hail Mary" prayer, board game and puzzles - examples illustrating epistemic values.

Source: <https://studioblogo.pl/>; <https://sklep.pasterz.pl>, February 10, 2022.

The participation by one of the respondents in the course "Diversity in Otherness - 10 Meetings on Religions" organized as part of the Warsaw Open University classes is an interesting example of an intangible product, i.e., religious services with high epistemic value. As she stated, "It is important for me to explore contemporary problems of various religions, I am one of the 90 students, we can hear about various religions and their peculiarities: about women in Protestantism, about Sunnism and Shiism, about singing in Orthodoxy, about Hinduism, Judaism or about exorcisms in Catholicism. It raises my religious awareness a lot" (res. 18).

It is not surprising that nowadays a lot of information is sought mainly on the Internet and social media. It proves that the Internet is used to search for information on retreats, Christmas carols or pilgrimages, among others. Numerous religious YouTube channels are also gaining popularity. As one of the respondents pointed out, "Sometimes I provide some links to retreats on the Internet, share posts about valuable books, or about going on pilgrimage" (res. 17).

Conditional value of religion products

The conditional value, which is relatively rarely distinguished by researchers, in the case of religious items is mainly limited to purchases made during visits to holy places, taking part in pilgrimages, and in connection with the purchase associated with a given church celebration. Therefore, this value in relation to religious products is closely related to their functional value, i.e., purchasing a gift. The place of purchase and the occasion in question thus constitute conditions that create additional value of religious products for their buyers.

5. Discussion

Perceived value is a subject of research relatively frequently appearing in numerous publications. Research in this area usually covers a very wide spectrum of issues, including the perceived value of organic food (de Morais Watanabe et al., 2020), the perceived value of online group shopping (Sharma, Klein, 2020) or the perceived value of energy-saving appliances (Zhang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is a clear research gap in terms of perceived value in relation to religious products. While publications on the relationship between religion and broadly understood buyers' behaviour are very common (especially in the field of religion as a motive for making a purchase (e.g., Fourali, Gbadamosi, 2021), there are basically no publications directly dealing with the perceived value of religious products. Therefore, the issues discussed in this paper are an attempt to fill the above-mentioned gap.

Based on the concept of perceived value by Sheth (1991) and considering the results of the presented research, it should be emphasized that buyers of religious products perceive value in them at each of the five distinguished levels. The specificity of religious products and the fact that the perception of this concept by respondents is highly diversified and depends on the level of their participation in religious practices and professed life values undoubtedly translates into the perceived value in them. Therefore, on the basis of the conducted interviews, it could be observed that people who participated in religious practices relatively more often found in these products additional values that were not recognized by non-practicing people. These differences could be noticed especially in the area of emotional, functional and social values. It should also be emphasized that the buyers of religious products saw relatively the greatest value in the area of functional and emotional values. Moreover, it should be noted that in the case of religious products the conditional value, often neglected in studies based on the concept of Sheth's value, was relatively clearly marked in the statements of the respondents.

From the conducted research it can be concluded that the secularization of society does not have to mean departing from the church leading even to apostasy, but it can also be expressed by changing the motives when purchasing religious items. For some of the survey participants, the purchase of, for example, a cross does not constitute a declaration of an act of faith, but only results from the desire to have an attractive ornament. Also, other values attributed to religious products (e.g., family heirlooms, souvenirs from travels or related to the allocation of money) are not a manifestation of faith, but a manifestation of secularization. This type of behaviour is a perfect example of transition from the sacred to the profane.

The assumption by the authors that the deliberations were of a diversified nature, covering issues in the area of religion, culture, ethnography, psychology, economics and management, allows for the formulation of interdisciplinary conclusions. The fact that religious products combine the sacred with the profane means that, in the buyers' opinion, the act of purchase allows to satisfy not only the needs of a higher order, i.e. spiritual needs (in A.H. Maslow's

classification they are included in the highest-order category: the needs of self-realization), but also the ordinary needs of owning aesthetic and permanent products of religious worship. In the opinion of the authors of the paper, this may provide an impulse, especially for producers and intermediaries involved in trade in goods, to build their own brands. Having a strong brand can be an essential element in building a competitive advantage. From the perspective of individual customers, product certification could be a determinant facilitating the buyers' choice. If the products, especially food were evaluated externally, they could be of greater value to consumers. It is also worth noting that there's a lot of potential in branding services that are directly connected with religion, e.g. funeral industry (Sanders, 2012).

Considering the theoretical implications of the study, it is worth emphasizing that the conducted research provides a view on the relationship between religious consumption and its values for consumers. In the case of practical and social implications, the considerations contained in the paper provide knowledge useful in creating advertising, activities in social media, marketing of services, church marketing. At the same time, considering the triad: religion-consumer-religious products, knowledge about the experiences of consumers in the sphere of the influence of religious products on the development of the individual sacred, and the analysis of the economic aspects of organizations offering such products, may constitute an extremely major area of further analyzes on social values as well as shape market changes. The availability of the discussed products not only at stationary points of sale, but also in online stores (Pabian, 2018).

Noting the limitations of the research presented in the paper, it should be emphasized that, first of all, they only apply to the behaviour of Christians. It can be assumed that the values perceived in a religious product by other religious consumers (e.g., Muslims, Buddhists, etc.) would be different. Secondly, the research referred to in the paper was performed in Poland, which, as indicated above, despite being a Catholic country, has recently been facing a major crisis of the church as an institution. The question remains whether Christians, including Catholics from other countries, perceive the value of religious products to a similar degree. Thirdly, the conducted research was exploratory, which does not allow for generalization of the results per entire population. Hence, it would be relevant to conduct quantitative research, which will constitute the next stage of research by the authors of this paper.

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