

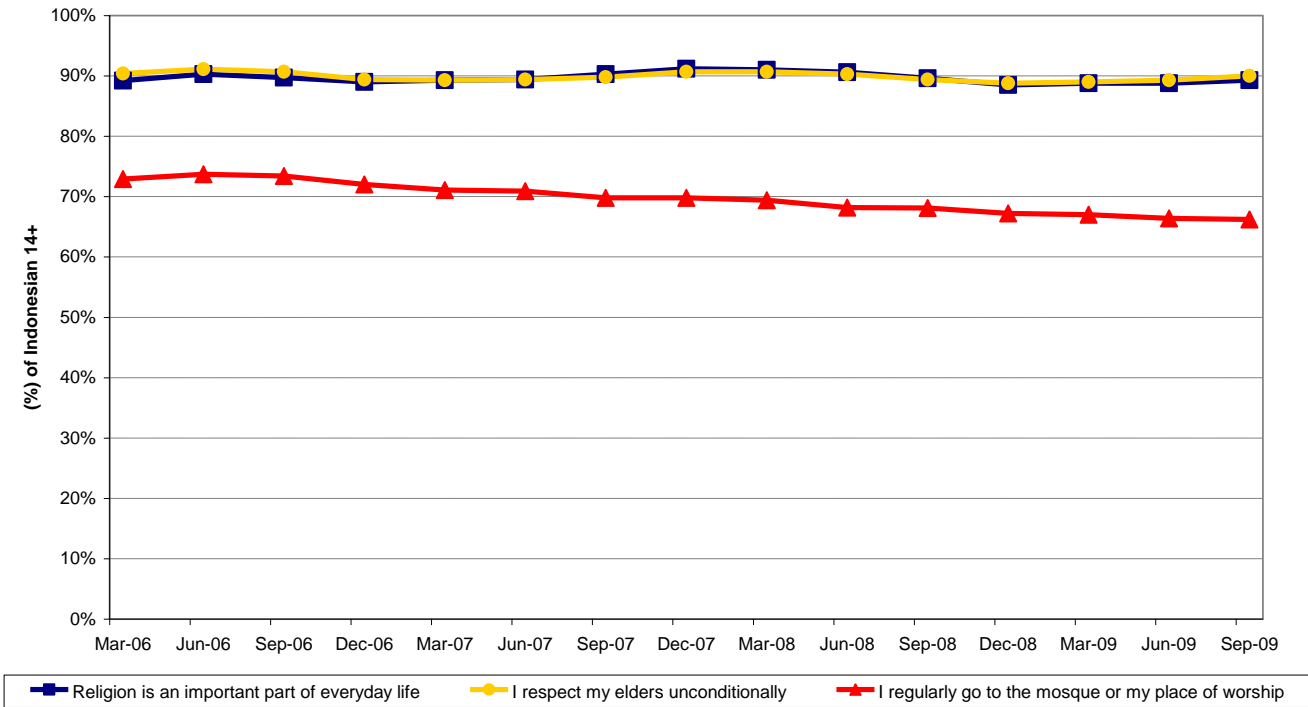
**Change is a constant, except for old colonials.**

As that old saying goes, the only constant is change.

Perhaps the most unchanging facet of our lives is our faith. In Indonesia, nine out of ten people believe that “religion is an important part of everyday life”. That belief has remained constant in Indonesia in recent times.

Similarly, nine out of ten Indonesians believe they “respect my elders unconditionally”. They are the same nine. The connection between religious teachings and human behaviour are obvious, seemingly unchanging. So strong is the belief that some have learnt to kill in the name of their gods. But even in the realm of faith, even in Indonesia, an interesting and noticeable change is taking place, but is going unnoticed. There is a steady decline, not in religious belief but in religious behaviour. In June of 2006, 74 per cent of Indonesians said they “regularly go to my mosque or formal place of worship”. At the end of September this year, that number had declined to 66 per cent. That’s 8 percentage points in three years. That is a big difference, in a large country with a huge population. Such a rapid decline isn’t happening in the United States, for example, a country where 40 per cent are regular worshippers. In Australia today, only 18 per cent go to their place of worship regularly.

**FAITH MAY BE CONSTANT, BUT WORSHIP IS NOT**



The big question of course is “Why”. But how many marketers are asking the question? Is it important to know? If there is a marketer who believes this is an irrelevant ‘factoid’, he or she would be well advised to seek another profession. Because this is a fundamental change

in human behaviour, as fundamental as any that one could imagine. Could it be because the pressure on a growing number of people, and their time, is increasing? There is clear evidence that structural changes are taking place in society. Roy Morgan Values Segments, a societal map, clearly illustrates that while the self-focussed youth segment “Look at Me” is increasing, young parents grouped together in “Conventional Family Life” are decreasing as a percentage of society. It is obvious that young people are postponing the decision to have children early in life, unlike their parents. Is that because they are too busy or are simply keen to enjoy life for longer, before taking on the responsibility of parenthood? Is the frequency of visits to the mosque, the church, the temple going down because more people are happy to practice their faith at home or because they have less time? These are the questions a focus group discussion can dwell on, without trying to ascertain market share in five cities while ignoring the rest of the country.

Societal developments like these have major impact on consumer behaviour, on the products and services they buy and the brand choices they make. But how many marketers do you know who really have a finger on the pulse of their consumer, let alone society at large? The colonials of Indonesia’s marketing fraternity still reign supreme, unwilling to change. They come in all shapes and sizes, from far and near. They are the know-it-alls, doing things by rote, like they were told to by their bosses yesterday and as they tell their juniors today. The colonisation of the mind continues everyday, with dictats both local and from overseas. Some of the disciplines practiced by some of the biggest names in business even today border on the ridiculous. A concept as simple as statistical reliability isn’t understood by too many marketing pretenders. That information should be sourced from real consumers from the right geography is an obvious reality too often ignored.

Some of the conversations that this writer experiences every other week in the boardrooms of Jakarta would be laughable, except of course they aren’t funny. If you think expatriates are exempt, you would be wrong. More often than not, they are the culprits of the disarray they are in. They are the neo-colonials of marketing, with scant respect for local knowledge and too much misguided faith in their textbook wisdom. They have yet to realise that this country will be the world’s 5<sup>th</sup>-largest economy by 2045, outstripping Germany and France. They are still listening to New York, London and now Singapore, no questions asked and no eyebrows raised. The old historical advantages take time to fade, but the rate of change speeds up eventually and exponentially. That’s what’s happening now, in industry after industry, right here in Indonesia. Ignore them if you wish, but at your peril.

These conclusions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, a syndicated survey with over 25,000 respondents 14 years and older interviewed each year. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, from the cities, towns and villages around the country. The data is updated every 90 days. It is rapidly becoming Indonesia’s most popular information resource, among marketers, agencies and now students and academics.

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