

# The Effect of Consumers' Religiosity on Environmental Attitudes: The Mediating Role of Personal Moral Philosophies

Mücahid Yıldırım, Şuayıp Özdemir

Households' overconsumption has been echoed as a major cause of increased environmental problems around the globe, so much so that it contributes to 60% of greenhouse gas emissions and 50-80% of total land, material, and water use (Ivanova et al., 2016). Changing such behaviors might be possible by understanding the factors affecting the attitudes that lead to these behaviors (Ajzen, 1991, Homer & Kahle, 1988). Religiosity is recognized as a crucial factor that influences consumer attitudes and behaviors, especially in the setting of consumer ethics (Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Arli & Tjiptono, 2021; Bhuian et al., 2018; Rice, 2006; Felix & Braunsberger, 2016; Martin & Bateman, 2014; Schultz et al., 2000). Moreover, one must also consider the influence personal moral philosophies (i.e., idealism and relativism) have on the relationship between religiosity and environmental attitudes with respect to noting consumers' moral inclinations (Arli & Tjiptono, 2021, Chowdhury, 2018). Environmental attitudes are viewed as ethical judgments in the context of consumer ethics. This article investigates the mediating role of personal moral philosophies on the relationship between religiosity and environmental attitudes towards environment in accordance with the Hunt-Vitell (H-V) general theory of marketing ethics.

@ Ar. Gör., Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, mucahidyildirim@aku.edu.tr

0000-0003-3502-6035

@ Prof. Dr., Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, sozdemir@aku.edu.tr

0000-0002-6799-8480

## Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

### Consumer Ethics

Muncy & Vitell (1992: 298) defined consumer ethics as “the moral principles and standards that guide the behavior of individuals or groups as they obtain, use and dispose of goods and services.” A large body of literature has investigated the relationships consumer ethics has in different cultures with several social factors such as religiosity and values as well as with certain individual factors such as personal moral philosophies, Machiavellism, and demographic features (Swaidan et al., 2003; Erffmeyer et al., 1999; Lu & Lu, 2009; Vitell & Paolillo, 2003) and cross-cultural aspects (Arli & Pekerti, 2016; al-Khatib et al., 2012; Belk et al., 2005; Rawwas et al., 2005; Ford et al., 2005; Rawwas et al., 1995). Most of these studies adopted the perspective of Vitell and Muncy (1992, 2005), the developers of the Consumer Ethics Scale (CES). CES contains seven dimensions of ethically questionable practices. However, we have adopted the H-V model as the theoretical basis of this study, as we feel environmental attitudes must be studied in the context of ethical decision-making (Culiberg & Bajde, 2013).

### Personal Moral Philosophies

In the H-V model of ethical decision making, teleology and deontology are two major philosophies on what affects ethical judgments (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Arnold et al., 2016). Teleology evaluates actions according to consequences, while deontology inquires into the ethicality of action with regard to principles (Shaw & Barry, 2016). Forsyth (1980) proposed a similar approach that has been widely accepted, which suggests the idealism-relativism taxonomy to explain the interpersonal differences in ethical judgments. Idealism is a personal moral philosophy that uses universal moral principles to decide what is right, while relativism assesses what is right based on the situation (Steenhaut & Kenhove, 2006; Dubinsky et al., 2005). Forsyth (1992) associated idealism with deontological philosophies and relativism with teleological philosophies.

### Religiosity and Personal Moral Philosophies

Much evidence exists in the consumer ethics literature that relates religiosity with personal moral philosophies. One study showed intrinsic religiosity to be positively associated with idealism and negatively associated with relativism (Arli & Tjiptono, 2021). Chowdhury (2018) and Özbek et al. (2013) reached similar results. Another study (Arli & Pekerti, 2016) found religious consumers to be more inclined toward

idealism than relativism. One study supporting this finding indicated idealism to be positively related to conservatism, which has also been associated with religious values (Steenhaut & Kenhove, 2006). Cornwell et al.'s (2005) study involving various religions detected religion to have some effects on personal moral philosophies. As such, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

**H1:** A positive relationship exists between consumers' religiosity and idealism.

**H2:** A negative relationship exists between consumers' religiosity and relativism.

### Environmental Attitudes

Behaviors that support environmental quality may stem from any of the following three value orientations: Social-altruistic, biospheric, or egoistic values (Stern et al., 1993). Based on this proposition, Thompson and Barton (1994) suggested two basic motives to be present that underlie environmental attitudes, these being ecocentrism, which means valuing nature for its own sake, and anthropocentrism, which means valuing nature because of its benefits for humans. If one's environmental attitudes are not strong, a third motive emerges: environmental apathy (Soyez, 2012; Thompson & Barton, 1994). Ecocentric and anthropocentric attitudes both refer to pro-environmental attitudes, albeit while representing different motives (Casey & Scott, 2006).

Fewer studies are found emphasizing the role of culture and ethics on pro-environmental consumption (Halder et al., 2020, p. 7). However, sufficient empirical evidence exists associating ethics with environmental attitudes. Agag & Çölmekçi-oğlu (2020) detected idealism and relativism to have significant moderating effects on the relationship between attitudes toward visiting green hotels and intention to visit and on the relationship between subjective norms and intention to visit. Another study (Zaikauskaite et al., 2020) found idealism to positively influence pro-environmental attitudes but not relativism. Halder et al. (2020) also found idealism and relativism to both be positively related to green consumption values, with idealism having a stronger effect. Moreover, idealism was found to have a positive direct relationship with recycling and positive indirect relationship with environmental awareness, with relativism having a negative effect (Arli & Leo, 2017). Zou & Chan (2019) also indicated idealism to positively and relativism to negatively influence ethical judgments about the environment. Thus, we consider idealism and relativism to influence environmental attitudes as ethical judgments. Accordingly, we have developed the following additional hypotheses:

**H3:** A positive relationship exists between idealism and pro-environmental attitudes.

**H4:** A negative relationship exists between relativism and pro-environmental attitudes.

**H5:** A positive relationship exists between relativism and environmental apathy.

**H6:** A negative relationship exists between idealism and environmental apathy.

### Religiosity and Environmental Attitudes

Several consumer studies have assessed the relationship between religiosity and the environment in terms of various religions (Bhuiyan et al., 2018; Hwang, 2017; Felix & Braunsberger, 2016; Liobikiene et al., 2016; Martin & Bateman, 2014; Rice, 2006; Casey & Scott, 2006; Schultz, 2000), and these studies provide contradicting evidence. White (1967) once blamed Western Christianity because of its anthropocentric nature for being the cause of the ecological crisis that appeared in the West. Schultz (2000) tested this proposition in different Western countries and confirmed Christian religiosity to be mainly anthropocentric. Casey & Scott (2006) also reached similar findings. Accordingly, while Catholic Christians show more anthropocentric attitudes, they perform less pro-environmental behaviors. However, some studies contradicted these findings (Felix & Braunsberger, 2016; Liobikiene et al., 2016).

Conversely, Islamic religiosity has been instead associated with ecocentric attitudes, as individuals are seen to be responsible for preserving all other creations (Rice, 2006). Bhuiyan et al. (2018) indicated religiosity to be a significant moderating variable in increasing pro-environmental consumer behaviors (PECBs). Rice (2006) also confirmed Islamic religiosity to mostly influence PECBs. Furthermore, we believe the distinction between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism in Türkiye is not as severe as in Western cultures due to Rice's (2006) proposition. Therefore, we state these two types of attitudes to exist under one dimension: pro-environmental attitudes. Accordingly, we have developed the following hypotheses:

**H7:** A positive relationship exists between consumers' religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes.

**H8:** A negative relationship exists between consumers' religiosity and environmental apathy.

The H-V model theorizes personal moral philosophies to mediate the relationship between religiosity and ethical judgments. Chowdhury (2018) found idealism to mediate the relationship between religiosity and pro-social consumer behaviors. Arli & Tjiptono (2021) additionally showed idealism to mediate the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and ethically questionable consumer behaviors. As a result, we have hypothesized the following relationships:

**H9:** Idealism mediates the relationship between consumers' religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes.

**H10:** Relativism mediates the relationship between consumers' religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes.

**H11:** Idealism mediates the relationship between consumers' religiosity and environmental apathy.

**H12:** Relativism mediates the relationship between consumers' religiosity and environmental apathy.

## Method

### Research Sample and Measures

The population of this study involves all consumers of different demographics living in Türkiye who use the Internet, due to the data being collected online. The sample consists of 541 consumers across Türkiye over the age of 18.

Personal moral philosophies were measured using the Consumer Ethics Scale (CES) developed by Forsyth (1980). We utilized Ozbek's (2012) study to adapt the CES into Turkish and rewrote some items using the retranslation method. Ok's (2011) Religious Attitudes Scale was utilized to measure religiosity, and the Environmental Attitudes Scale was adapted from Soyez (2012).

## Findings

To test the hypotheses, we constructed a structural equation model (SEM). The path analyses indicated a positive relationship to exist between religiosity and idealism ( $\beta = 0.423, p < 0.001$ ), which supports H1. However, a positive but weak relationship was found between religiosity and relativism ( $\beta = 0.129, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H2 is not supported. Moreover, idealism positively affects pro-environmental attitudes ( $\beta = 0.754, p < 0.001$ ) and negatively affects environmental apathy ( $\beta = -0.292, p <$

0.01). These findings support H3 and H6. The relationship between relativism and pro-environmental attitudes was not significant ( $\beta = 0.037, p > 0.05$ ), and thus H4 is not supported. However, a positive relationship between relativism and environmental apathy was confirmed ( $\beta = 0.408, p < 0.001$ ), and this finding supports H5. H7 ( $\beta = 0,057, p > 0,05$ ) and H8 ( $\beta = 0,212, p > 0,05$ ) were not also supported.

Regarding the mediating effects, H1 and H3 being supported confirms that idealism has a positive full mediating effect between religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes, thus supporting H9. However, due to H2 and H4 not being supported, the mediating effect of relativism was not confirmed, and thus H10 is not supported. H1, H5, and H6 being supported indicates idealism to have a negative partial mediating effect and relativism to have a positive partial mediating effect between religiosity and environmental apathy. These findings also support H11 and H12.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The findings support the H-V model in the context of consumer ethics, as the findings demonstrate religiosity to affect environmental attitudes not directly but indirectly through personal moral philosophies. These results comply with those from Arli & Tjiptono (2021) and Chowdhury (2018). This means consumers' religious attitudes are not directly related to their environmental attitudes. However, we did confirm religiosity to be somewhat related to environmental attitudes with regard to personal moral philosophies (i.e., idealism and relativism).

One remarkable finding is that consumers with strong religious attitudes are mostly ethically idealistic, but sometimes they are also relativistic. Özbek & Özer (2012) also failed to confirm the expected negative relationship between religiosity and relativism. In most non-Western countries, idealism is considered to be the moral inclination, because the individuals in these countries have been raised with certain rules and standards such as respect for titles, prudence, and ultimate respect for seniority (Rawwas, 2001, as cited in Arli & Pekerti, 2016). Rawwas et al. (2005) revealed Turkish consumers to be more idealistic than Americans, but no significant difference to be present between them with regard to relativism. Yurtsever (1998) also found Turkish consumers to be more idealistic than relativistic. Meanwhile, this paper has concluded idealistic consumers to have stronger pro-environmental attitudes and relativistic consumers to have more apathetical environmental attitudes. Thus, religious consumers adopt an idealistic morality as opposed to a relativistic one in their pro-environmental attitudes. Arli & Pekerti

(2016) have found idealism to be negatively related and relativism to be positively related to questionable consumer behaviors for religious consumers, while idealism and relativism are not significantly related to these behaviors for non-religious consumers.

A few studies researching the relationship between Islamic religiosity and environmental attitudes have associated Islamic religiosity with stronger pro-environmental attitudes (Rice, 2006; Bhuian et al., 2018). However, we found no direct relationship between religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes. We also found a negative direct relationship between religiosity and environmental apathy. This study's contribution has been to confirm that attempts at explaining the relationships between religiosity and environmental attitudes while disregarding the moral aspect of the issue are likely to generate misleading results. As Arli & Pekerti (2016) stated, religion may not be enough to overcome unethical consumer practices. Thus, governmental and religious institutions must educate consumers morally about pro-environmental consumption by targeting relativistic consumers in particular. Debates must also occur on how to make people more idealistic in religious societies in terms of a sustainable environment.

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### **Ek- Analizden Çıkarılan Maddeler**

Bir eylemi yapıp yapmamaya, o eylemin olumlu sonuçları ile olumsuz sonuçlarını karşılaştırarak karar vermek ahlaki değildir. (İdealizm)

“İdeal” davranışlar bellidir ve bununla örtüşen eylemler ahlaki eylemlerdir. (İdealizm)

Yalan söylemekle ilgili hiçbir kural konulamaz; yalanın caiz olup olmadığı tamamen duruma bağlıdır. (Görecelilik)

Dini inancın gerekli olmadığını düşünüyorum. (Dindarlık)

Doğayı korumak, insanların zevkine ve refahına katkı sağladığı için önemlidir. (Antroposentrizm)

Doğayı korumanın en önemli sebeplerinden biri insan için bir sürekli yüksek hayat standardı sağlamaktır. (Antroposentrizm)