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RESEARCH PAPER

Religiosity to Voluntary Simplicity: Bridging the Gap with Altruistic **Environmental Concerns**

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the association between intrinsic religiosity (IR) and voluntary simplicity (VS) behaviour through mediation by altruistic environmental concerns (AEC). Quantitative research is lacking in the subject area. The present study is a pioneer in examining the rarely investigated relationship between IR and VS through mediation by AEC in Muslims. 458 usable responses were collected through a survey from Pakistani Muslim consumers. PLS-SEM approach was applied using SmartPLS and analysis results indicate that IR has a significantly positive impact on AEC and VS. The indirect effect shows that AEC positively mediates the association between IR and VS behaviour. Furthermore, the study provides practical implications for the consumption behaviour of Muslims, a major market worldwide. To enhance environmental care and anti-consumption for sustainable development, marketers and policymakers in Islamic countries should advocate Islamic values linked with environment care and simplicity while promoting sustainability initiatives and marketing mix.

KEYWORDS

Altruistic Environmental Concern, Intrinsic Religiosity, Voluntary Simplicity Muslim Consumers, Sustainable Anti-Consumption Behaviour, SmartPLS

Introduction

Sustainable consumption behaviour (SCB) is not limited to the "consumption" of pro-social or pro-environmental products and services only, but it could also primarily involve voluntarily decreasing or simplifying one's consumption (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Such consumption is also referred to as sustainable anti-consumption behaviour (SAB) (Balderjahn, Seegebarth, & Lee, 2021). It is pertinent to integrate the concept of SAB with sustainable consumption research because of its potential to contribute to sustainable development and, ultimately, well-being and quality of life (Seegebarth, Peyer, Balderjahn, & Wiedmann, 2016). Insights about the consumers' anti-consumption behaviour and its motives are necessary for the development of a profound understanding of consumer behaviour (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013).

Scholars and practitioners are interested in exploring the "reasons against" consumption, owing to which the consumers reject or restrict their consumption (Makri, Schlegelmilch, Mai, & Dinhof, 2020). Anti-consumption behaviour is now considered a source of decreasing unsustainable usage of natural resources (Black & Cherrier, 2010) that can help reduce the burden on the environment to achieve sustainability objectives.

Researchers have operationalised SAB under different concepts of consumer behaviour and lifestyles (Makri et al., 2020). Among these is voluntary simplicity (VS). Consumers wilfully limit their consumption in VS due to various personal and social motives for living a simple life (Rebouças & Soares, 2021). However, consumers differ in their drives for anti-consumption, which can also include ethical and religious motives (Peifer, Chugani, & Roos, 2020; Zavestoski, 2002).

The Value-Attitude-Behaviour model establishes that values are the precursors of human attitude and behaviour (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Among these values, religion is a primary attribute that provides obvious guidance about the followers' preferred behavioural and attitudinal indication (Mathras, Cohen, Mandel, & Mick, 2016). Religiosity is specifically a determining factor of consumer behaviour in individuals who follow any major world religion because of the significant doctrines about human behaviour (Minton, Johnson, Vizcaino, & Wharton, 2020). Intrinsic religiosity (IR) is a subsidiary concept of religiosity orientation and an important motivator of ethical behaviours.

Although VS is conceptualised to have religious roots, quantitative studies examining the influence of IR on VS behaviour are very limited (Chowdhury, 2018). Likewise, primary research which investigates the relationship between religiosity and environmental attitudes is also rare (Felix & Braunsberger, 2016; Felix, Hinsch, Rauschnabel, & Schlegelmilch, 2018). Methodologically, in anti-consumption literature, most studies focus on qualitative approaches, and there is a need for quantitative empirical studies exploring the antecedents of anti-consumption behaviour (Makri et al., 2020). Limited studies are considered a drawback as it is unclear how religious consumers are influenced by the extent of their religiosity in framing their psychological traits, attitudes, and behaviours (Bhuian & Sharma, 2017).

The people in developing countries are relatively less familiar with the SCB-related concepts as compared to the citizens of developed nations. Owing to this, the concepts of SCB in developing countries are also under-researched. Although the literature shows burgeoning research in the field of SCB theoretic reflection and empirical evidence relevant to the antecedents of anti-consumption behaviour from emerging and evolving countries is scarce.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this paper is the pioneer in quantitatively examining the impact of IR on VS through the mediating effect of AEC in Muslim consumers in Pakistan. Pakistan is the second largest country in terms of Muslim population, and Muslim consumers are a rarely investigated market in this perspective because the previous studies in the literature (Chowdhury, 2018) were based on a mixed sample from a developed country, and the respondents were mainly Christian consumers. The present study fulfils these research gaps. The findings are novel to the field and extend knowledge about SAB and the influence of religiosity.

Literature Review

Voluntary simplicity is a type of SAB. According to Iyer and Muncy (2009), anticonsumption is a consumer manifestation of reducing total consumption or consuming less of a specific brand or product. VS is considered a lifestyle and embraced by researchers as a type of SAB in which people willingly decrease their consumption of materials intending to live a simple life (Iyer & Muncy, 2009). It is defined as a "choice out of free will... to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning" in life (Etzioni, 1998). The notion is often criticised due to the understanding that VS is a behaviour by people who, although they have the monetary sufficiency to fulfil their desires of material acquisition, tend to restrict themselves to manifest VS (Balderjahn et al., 2021). However, the VS is a broader concept, far more than just a restricted consumption behaviour of the wealthy or resourceful people. VS is a primary attribute of many religious customs (Gregg, 1936), which teaches the followers to limit their consumption with a motive of inner peace and fulfilment. Not necessarily consumers with only sufficient monetary strength but people who focus on religious traditions, the desire for well-being, insufficient financial resources, or even a

self-adopted personality choice may exhibit VS behaviour to make themselves contend with the less. For example, people with fewer monetary resources could struggle to fulfil their materialistic desires. Regardless of whether they can make it possible, they may experience stress and restlessness during their efforts for the desired possessions. Thus, some people may voluntarily adopt simplicity to limit their desires and avoid psychological distress. Similarly, religious people would like to achieve personal well-being by connecting to their religion by following the preachings about VS and pro-social behaviour.

With this debate, authors propose the following definition for VS, which might not be complete but would represent VS as a form of behaviour with broader implications. According to the authors, VS is a form of behaviour in which people voluntarily adopt simplicity by restricting the acquisition and consumption of tangible or intangible resources owing to materialistic or non-materialistic reasons to achieve well-being for themselves, others, or the environment. In Islam, the concept of VS is termed *Zuhd*, a voluntary restriction of material consumption and unethical practices driven by religious motives of purifying one's soul and altruistic concerns about others.

The present research follows the VAB model to build hypothetical associations among the constructs. The psychological framework of VAB is based on cognitive hierarchy theory, which studies values as the determinants of attitudes and behaviours (Homer & Kahle, 1988).

Intrinsic Religiosity and Voluntary Simplicity

A person with IR abides by the religious doctrines in life to live the religion for God and not to seek social connection through religious practices (Allport & Ross, 1967). Intrinsically religious consumers are less inclined towards materialistic possessions because they are more concerned about inner peace and fulfilment through religious principles (Arli & Tjiptono, 2014; Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, 2005). Similarly, the VS concept is rooted in religious preaching and is based on the intrinsic motivation of rejecting overconsumption and voluntarily living a simple life. Chowdhury (2018) empirically investigated the link between IR and VS and found a positive relationship between the two constructs. Thus, considering the theoretical underpinnings of the literature, it is proposed that:

H1: Intrinsic Religiosity has a positive effect on VS behaviour

Intrinsic Religiosity and Altruistic Environmental Concerns

Due to the harmful impacts of environmental issues, people can be concerned about the ones or objects they value, e.g., themselves (egoistic), other people (altruistic), plants or animals (bio-spheric) (Wesley Schultz, 2001). Religiosity is also found to be an influential predictor of eco-friendly attitudes and behaviour (Batool, Shabbir, Abrar, & Bilal, 2022; Minton et al., 2020). Felix et al. (2018) found a positive association of religiousness with environmental concerns and they emphasised the need for further investigation in this subject area. Chau, Johnson, Bowers, Darvill, and Danko (1990) also depicted a positively significant link between IR and altruism. In line with these studies, it is proposed that,

H2: Intrinsic religiosity has a positive effect on altruistic environmental concerns

Altruistic Environmental Concerns as Mediator

According to Shaw and Newholm (2002), altruistic concerns can also be one of the potential drivers of VS behaviour among people. The individuals who adopt VS owing to

altruistic concerns about the environment, society, and other living beings, like animals, are referred to as the "ethical simplifiers" (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). As discussed earlier, religiosity is an important predictor of altruistic attitudes and VS behaviour, whereas altruistic concerns act as the driver of ethical simplifiers. In this view, it is proposed that AEC can explain the relationship between IR and VS. The value-attitude-behaviour (VAB) model, constructed on the cognitive hierarchy theory, also explains that values are the antecedent of human attitudes, which consequently form behaviours (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Thus, hypothesis H3 is drawn that AEC as a mediator will explain the relationship between religiosity and the SAB manifestation of VS behaviour based on the VAB model hierarchy.

H3: Altruistic environmental concerns positively mediate the association between intrinsic religiosity and voluntary simplicity

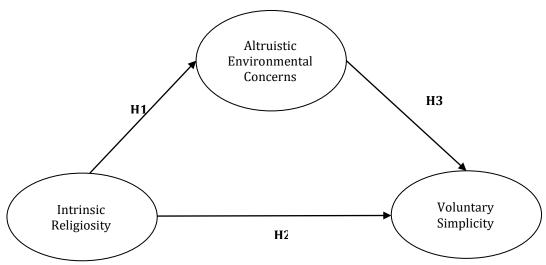


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Material and Methods

Previously available measures in the literature were utilised to construct the structured survey instrument for the study. The IR scale was adapted from the study of Allport and Ross (1967), AEC indicators were taken from the study of Wesley Schultz (2001) and statements related to VS were adapted from the paper of Cha and Lee (2021). All the measures were answered on five-point Likert scales that ranged from "1=strongly disagree" to "5= strongly agree". A final data of 458 usable responses was collected from Pakistani consumers aged 18 years and above through a structured survey questionnaire and convenience sampling technique.

Results and Discussion

Four demographics-related questions were asked i.e., gender, age, education, and profession. As per the results presented in Table 1, 46.07% of the sample surveys were collected from female consumers, and 53.93% were from male consumers. According to the age statistics, most of the responses were from Generation Z. Furthermore, 88.43% of the consumers had bachelor's or above qualifications, while 16.38% were intermediate. By profession, 46.07% were students, and 53.93% were either businesspersons, employed, doing household work, or unemployed.

Table 1 Respondents' Profile

Respondents 110me						
Respondents' Profile (n=458)	Frequency	Percent (%)				
Gender						
Male	247	53.93				
Female	211	46.07				
Birth Year						
Born before 1965	0	0.00				
1965 to 1980	5	1.10				
1981 to 1996	44	9.6				
1997 to 2012	409	89.3				
Education						
Bachelors	330	72.05				
Intermediate	75	16.38				
Masters & above	53	11.57				
Profession						
Employed	57	12.45				
Household	9	1.97				
Self-employed	163	35.58				
Student	211	46.07				
Unemployed	18	3.93				
	·	·				

Partial least squares structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) was adopted to analyse the collected dataset with the latest version of SmartPLS4 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2022). Table-2 depicts the findings related to the measurement model. According to the statistics, outer loadings for almost all the indicators were more than the desired score, i.e., 0.707 (Joseph F. Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). The loading for one indicator, AEC4, was 0.548; however, the construct as a whole filled the reliability criteria, and therefore, item AEC4 was retained.

Table 2
Reliability

Construct	Indicators	Outer	Cronbach's-	Composite-	AVE	
	marcators	Loadings	Alpha	Reliability		
Altruistic Environmental Concern	AEC1	0.760	_			
	AEC2	0.804	0.702	0.817	0.533	
	AEC3	0.777	0.702		0.333	
	AEC4	0.548	_			
Intrinsic Religiosity	IR1	0.782		0.883		
	IR2	0.781	_			
	IR3	0.781	0.835		0.602	
	IR4	0.803				
	IR5	0.732	-			
	VS1	0.813				
Voluntary Simplicity	VS2	0.846	0.744 0.854		0.662	
• •	VS3	0.780	-			

The composite reliability (CR) scores were above the threshold of 0.70 (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017) for all the variables. Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha also showed more than 0.60 value (Churchill, 1979).

Convergent validity was determined with the examination of average variance extracted (AVE) thresholds, which were greater than 0.50 (Joe F. Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011) for all the variables. The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion along with the heterotrait–mono-trait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015) were assessed for discriminant validity, which are resented in Table-3.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity

Discriminant variaty						
	1	2	3	R ²	F2 (AEC)	F ² (VS)
1. Altruistic Environmental Concern	0.730	0.854	0.855	0.439	=	0.127
2. Intrinsic Religiosity	0.663	0.776	0.837	-	0.786	0.219
3. Voluntary Simplicity	0.627	0.663	0.813	0.502	-	_

The values in bold italics font are the squared AVE values for every construct. For all of the constructs, the squared AVE values are greater than the correlation values with any other constructs. Hence, the Fornell and Larcker (1981)criterion was met. The underlined values in Table 3 represent HTMT ratios, which express less than 0.90 similarity between the constructs and thus satisfy the HTMT criterion.

The hypotheses were analysed with the statistical software of SmartPLS bootstrapping method with 5000 sub-samples (Joe F. Hair et al., 2011). Direct path coefficients indicate a positively significant impact of IR on VS (H1, β = .441, t = 8.700) and AEC (H2, β = .663, t = 19.061) accepting hypotheses H1 and H2. The indirect path coefficient expresses that AEC significantly and positively mediate the relation between IR and VS, and thus, hypothesis H3 was also accepted (H3, β = .222, t = 6.775).

Table 4
Hypotheses Testing

	Hypotheses	Path coefficients	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	
Direct Effects						
H1:	IR -> VS	0.441	0.045	7.454	0.000	
H2:	IR->AEC	0.663	0.035	19.061	0.000	
Specific Indirect Effects						
Н3:	IR -> AEC -> VS	0.222	0.033	6.775	0.000	
Total Effects						
	AEC -> VS	0.335	0.045	7.454	0.000	
	IR -> AEC	0.663	0.035	19.061	0.000	
	IR -> VS	0.663	0.038	17.535	0.000	

Notes: AEC: Altruistic Environmental Concerns; IR: Intrinsic Religiosity; VS: Voluntary Simplicity.

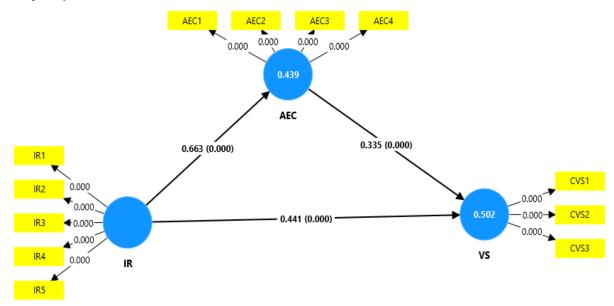


Figure 2: Structural Model-SmartPLS

Conclusion

The present study found that IR is a significant and positive predictor of Pakistani Muslim consumers' AEC. IR is also a significant predictor of VS behaviour. The findings are in line with the study of Chowdhury (2018), which found a positive association between IR and VS behaviour. The interesting result was the significant mediation by AEC in explaining the impact of IR on the VS behaviour of Mulsim consumers. It aligns with the Islamic teachings of environmental care, moderation and simplicity in routine life consumption behaviours and the preachings about resource conservation. The

intrinsically religious Muslim consumers who incorporate VS in their behaviour follow the Islamic directions about avoiding the waste of resources. However, they are still consumers and may not like to possess excess materials but the necessary products and services which are high in quality and with consume less but consume better ideology. The research puts forth some interesting and important findings about the positive impact of IR on AEC and VS. Muslim consumers are a major market worldwide with specific product choice preferences according to their religious values, e.g., Halal. The consumer behaviour of Muslims is distinguishable due to the strong influence of Islamic interventions on their lifestyles. Their sustainable consumption practices can contribute to achieving sustainability goals and strategies by governments and businesses. The present article extends the area of research by filling significant voids in the literature about sustainable anti-consumption behaviour and drives attention towards the role of Islam and Muslims' religiosity in achieving sustainable development.

Recommendations

Marketers should carefully target Muslim consumers with products and services that do not contradict their religious values. In this context, customised offerings highlighting the sustainable values of simplicity and environmental care should be promoted that the products or services can offer. As sustainability is a Western concept, policymakers and businesses can achieve the objectives with the help of Islamic value integration so that the Muslim consumer can relate to the notion by aligning their religiosity and consumption patterns for the betterment of society, environment and economy. They can achieve sustainability in consumption patterns by adopting VS, aligning with their Islamic moderate-consumption doctrines. Thus, while targeting Muslim consumers, marketers and policymakers should focus on the significance of environmental issues by highlighting the Islamic values and principles about the value of the environment and responsibility towards nature and others. Managers in Muslim markets should focus their strategies on targeting consumers with high-quality and simple products rather than more in quantity, avoiding excessive resource wastage.

Furthermore, future researchers can take fruitful insights from the present study. However, a detailed examination of the association between other dimensions of religiosity and VS is also suggested, evidence for which is limited in this area of literature. Studying religions-specific behaviours through quantitative research is recommended because religious people distinguish themselves based on their religious affiliations. Thus, mixed samples can yield ambiguous findings. In contrast, religion-specific studies can provide better insights that would help customise strategies and marketing mix according to the values and norms of religious consumers for better and sustainable development.

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