



Consumer religious commitment's influence on ecocentric attitudes and behavior[☆]

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ABSTRACT

A host of environmental issues are now of concern to many consumers, though efforts by marketing practitioners, researchers, and public policy officials to affect behavioral change among consumers have been marginal. Further, research investigating the influence of consumers' general religiosity as an antecedent to ecocentric attitudes and behaviors yields mixed results. In this study, the authors examine the antecedent role of a specific form of religiosity, intrapersonal religious commitment, on a specific environmental worldview, ecocentric attitude, and six wide-ranging environmental consumer behaviors from a socio-psychological viewpoint. Findings negate the long standing notion of a strictly negative relationship between the Judeo-Christian faith and disregard for the environment. Among Judeo-Christians, when age, gender, and urban/rural profile are controlled, intrapersonal religious commitment has no impact on ecocentric attitudes and behaviors. Thus, highly religious consumers appear to be no less receptive to pro-environmental messages or less likely to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors than other consumers. Consistent with prior research, ecocentric attitudes evidence a relatively weak link with various pro-environmental behaviors. This research has implications for marketing researchers and practitioners. Directions for future research are also provided.

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1. Introduction

As environmental issues now receive widespread attention and concern in the public arena, marketing researchers and practitioners now devote an increasing amount of effort toward green marketing and finding the antecedents to ecologically minded consumption behaviors (e.g., Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; McCarty & Shrum, 2001; Milfont, Duckitt, & Cameron, 2006). Despite the known impact that religion has on certain consumption related attitudes and behaviors (Bailey & Sood, 1993; Essoo & Dibb, 2004; Hirschman, 1982; Sood & Nasu, 1995; Swimberghe, Sharma, & Flurry, 2009), research investigating the influence of consumers' religion as an antecedent to environmental attitudes and behaviors yields mixed results. While a thorough review of all of the religiosity measures used in prior research is beyond the scope of this manuscript, the use of general, single-item, categorical, or multi-item measures lacking psychometrically sound properties may affect, in part, the widely varying findings in this field.

This study attempts to overcome these issues and is unique in two ways. First, rather than treating religion as a categorical variable indicated by religious affiliation, this study utilizes a multi-item measure

of intrapersonal religious commitment (IaRC), the degree to which consumers' religious beliefs influence their daily approach to life. Since significant variance exists in individual religious followers' manifestation of their faith, this approach may provide a more realistic examination of religiosity's impact on environmentally oriented attitudes and behaviors. Second, this research investigates the impact of IaRC on ecocentric attitudes (EcA) and environmental behaviors both with and without the inclusion of several relevant control variables. By illustrating the differences that this manipulation can have on the results, this study provides evidence as to why prior research in this area has produced such inconsistent findings.

The rest of the manuscript is laid out as follows. First, literature relevant to the interrelationships between IaRC, EcA, and pro-environmental behaviors is used to formulate several hypotheses. Next, the authors discuss the methods used to test the hypotheses and provide the results. Lastly, the authors provide a discussion of the findings, research implications, and future research directions.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Ecocentric attitudes and environmentally responsible behaviors

The study of environmental attitudes and behavior is a well-documented field of research with a rich history in the social and behavioral sciences (Fernández-Manzanal, Rodríguez-Barreiro, & Carrasquer, 2007; Naito et al., 2010; Robinot & Giannelloni, 2009; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999; Stern & Dietz, 1995). Research typically finds weak or modest relationships between environmental attitudes

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Table 1
Key empirical findings identifying the demographic antecedents of ecocentric attitudes and behaviors.

Demographic antecedent	General impact on ecocentric attitudes and behaviors	Source(s)
Age	Mixed	Casey and Scott (2006); Guth et al. (1995)
Education	Positive	Casey and Scott (2006); Fernández-Manzanal et al. (2007)
Gender	Females have more favorable environmental attitudes and are more likely to engage in environmental behaviors.	Casey and Scott (2006); Dietz, Kalof, and Stern (2002); Fernández-Manzanal et al. (2007); Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, and Oskamp (1997)
Household size	Positive	Gatersleben, Steg, and Vlek (2002)
Rural/urban profile	Urban consumers have more favorable environmental attitudes and are more likely to engage in environmental behaviors.	Guth et al. (1995)
Socio-psychological antecedent	General impact on ecocentric behaviors	Sources
Ecocentric attitudes	Positive	Abdul-Muhmin (2007); Dunlap et al. (2000); Fernández-Manzanal et al. (2007); Milfont et al. (2006); Robinot and Giannelloni (2009); Thapa (1999, 2010)
Value orientations	Altruism, empathy, perceived efficacy, regret toward a facet of the environment, worry about global issues, and self-fulfillment are positively related to ecocentric attitudes and behaviors. Traditionalism and religiosity are negatively related to ecocentric attitudes and behaviors.	Abdul-Muhmin (2007); Berenguer (2007); Deng et al. (2006); Dietz et al. (2002); Fernández-Manzanal et al. (2007); Fraj & Martinez (2006); García-Mira, Real, and Romay (2005); Gupta and Ogden (2009); Milfont et al. (2006); Naito et al. (2010); Oreg & Katz-Gerro (2006); Schwartz & Huismans (1995); Wilson (2003)

and behaviors (e.g. Thapa, 1999). As knowledge and consciousness about important environmental issues increase, environmentally friendly attitudes are generally formed (Abdul-Muhmin, 2007; Kinnear, Taylor, & Ahmed, 1974; Milfont et al., 2006; Thapa, 1999, 2010), which may lead to environmentally responsible behaviors (Casey & Scott, 2006; Fraj & Martinez, 2006).

In an attempt to go beyond the notion of a general attitude toward the environment and discover a stronger link between environmental attitudes and behaviors, some research seeks to understand the sub-structures that comprise individuals' environmental worldviews, assuming that while certain worldviews may be rooted in unchangeable suppositions, other worldviews may be rooted in beliefs that can be molded and matured through awareness and educational mechanisms. Inherent to the environmental worldview is the idea of ecocentrism, referring to consumers' recognition of their role in relation to the nature, social forces in the world around them, reciprocal threats from environmental deterioration, ecological limits, imbalances in nature, and ecological catastrophes (Abdul-Muhmin, 2007; Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000; Fernández-Manzanal et al., 2007; Milfont et al., 2006; Robinot & Giannelloni, 2009; Thapa, 1999, 2010). O'Riordan (1981) summarizes ecocentrism as follows: "[ecocentrism] preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care; ecocentrism argues for low impact technology (but is not anti-technological); it decries bigness and impersonality in all forms (but especially in the city); and demands a code of behavior that seeks permanence and stability based upon ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis" (p. 1).

Of interest in this study are ecocentric attitudes (EcA), which are defined as beliefs that "the environment is in a precarious position, and the impact of humans can be detrimental to the survival of humankind" (Thapa, 1999, p. 432). Consumers with strong EcA tend to believe that human intervention is necessary to protect nature for future generations (Abdul-Muhmin, 2007; Thapa, 2010). Ecocentric attitudes themselves are shown to be significantly but weakly related to behavioral indices comprised of multiple behaviors in categories such as green consumerism, political activism, and environmental education (Thapa, 2010). Table 1 provides a summary of key findings of research in this field, particularly with regard to the antecedents of EcA and behaviors pertinent to this study.

Environmental behaviors are defined as "voluntary actions that are intended to benefit nature or the natural environment in terms of its maintenance and growth" (Naito et al., 2010, p. 995). Recent research suggests that the use of summated behavioral indices may obfuscate the attitude-behavior link and recommends separate analysis for each behavior. Altogether, this serves as the basis for H1, which relates to a

wide variety of environmental behaviors studied in prior research (e.g. Thapa, 2010).

H1. Among Judeo-Christians, ecocentric attitudes (EcA) are positively related to (a) voting for a public official due to his/her record on protecting the environment; (b) donating money and/or paying membership dues to environmental/conservation organizations; (c) recycling glass bottles, jars, or aluminum cans; (d) watching TV programs about the environment; (e) switching products because of environmental issues; and (f) buying products made from recycled materials.

2.2. Religious commitment, ecocentric attitudes, and environmentally responsible behaviors

The theoretical connection between the Judeo-Christian religion and anti-environmentalism develops from a transformational and debated work by White (1967). White's thesis posits that Western Christianity is strongly rooted in the Biblically literal directive stating that man is to have dominion over the earth and, consequently, humankind's needs should be placed over nature's, regardless of the consequences (an anthropocentric worldview). In this sense, anthropocentric beliefs are a primarily non-flexible fixture in a person's religious schema. Of the world religions, White (1967) asserts Judeo-Christianity to be the "most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (1205).

Some research supports White's thesis (Eckberg & Blocker, 1989; Hand & Van Liere, 1984), though other research provides alternative explanations for the lower scores that Judeo-Christians display on most environmental measures (Hand & Van Liere, 1984; Shaiko, 1987). In support of White's thesis, worldviews of non-Judeo-Christians evidence support for the environment and support for White's theory. For example, Muslims and Hindus are not opposed to environmental concern (Lal, 1995), and secular individuals' ideologies are more likely to place importance on quality of life, including maintenance of the environment (Inglehart, 1990). Atheists often view mankind as the caretaker of nature (Bramwell, 1989), and those who are environmentally active are generally less likely to be involved in religious activities (Shaiko, 1987). Key empirical findings concerning the relationship between religiosity and environmentalism are shown in Table 2.

A very wide range of measures are used as proxies to assess religiosity, including, but not limited to: religious affiliation (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Jewish), frequency of church or synagogue attendance, church salience, frequency of prayer, Bible literacy, belief in God, sectarianism, Christian orthodoxy, and scriptural literalism, among others, with religious affiliation being the most commonly utilized measure. Some argue that one

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