

## Religion and Media Usage: A Detailed Analysis Using a Representative Longitudinal Panel from the Netherlands

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**Abstract.** *The aim of this study is to address part of the need for research in the area of religion and consumer behavior by analyzing the relationship between religion, certain aspects of religiosity (religious involvement) and media usage behavior. A detailed analysis of media usage behavior and its relationship with religious affiliation and religiosity was conducted using a representative longitudinal panel from the Netherlands. The results of this study have determined that there might be a relationship between religion, religiosity and the way in which individuals use media. The strength of this relationship differs across media channels, time spent using media, age groups and religious affiliations and it is the most prominent among adolescents and young adults.*

**Keywords:** *religion, religiosity, consumer behavior, media usage.*

### Introduction

#### *The importance of religion*

The world around us is ever changing yet one crucial aspect seems to remain a constant, and that is religion. Most of the greatest but also the worst events in the world had religion in their constituency, if not the underlying factor. Even the way we count time (i.e., B.C. and A.D.) is based on religion. The view on religion has most of the times been two folded. For example, Marx (1887/2004) presented religion as a placebo used by the ruling class to suppress and repress the lower class. On the other hand, Weber (1930) portrayed religion, specifically Protestant Christian denominations as responsible for the rise of capitalism in the United States and Europe. According to him, Protestants were religiously obliged to follow their vocation with devotion and hard work and consequently, people living this way were more likely to accrue money.

Some scientist (Barber, 2012) portrayed that religion will lose its appeal and people who are religiously unaffiliated will be more numerous than those who are religious. But the reality and also the projections paint a different picture. Worldwide, 84% of people identify with a religious group ("The Global Religious Landscape," 2012) and the numbers are on the rise. It is estimated that by 2050, the number of individuals unaffiliated with a religious group will drop from 16% in 2010 to 13% in 2050 (Lipka & Posts, 2015). Also, the composition of religious groups is fluid and volatile, with almost 28% of Americans leaving the faith in which they were raised for another religious group or no religion at all ("Religious Landscape Study," 2015). So it appears that we live and will still live in a world that is dominated by religion.

Religion, being a key component of culture can be defined as a "belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God" (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990, p. 110). Prominent researchers have studied the influence of religion on culture and how it shapes individual's norms, values and decisions (Delener, 1990b; Khenfer & Roux, 2012; Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, 2005). Religion is also a key construct of understanding fundamental human nature and behavior. In "The Varieties of Religious Experience," James (1902) suggests that studying how religion shapes the individual has the potential of understanding fundamental human psychology. Value based theories such as the values-attitudes-behavior hierarchy (Homer & Kahle, 1988) show that values, also religious values are a key determinant in a person's consumption attitudes, which eventually influence also consumer's behavior. Another important reason for understanding the effects of religion on consumer behavior is that people interact with others and communicate their religious beliefs, which is also reflected in their consumption choices (Minkler & Cosgel, 2004).

### ***Religion and consumer behavior***

Religion also affects consumers since their choices are uniquely related to their social context and they need to be understood in this broad sense. Culture is the 'prism' through which people view products and try to make sense of their own and other people's consumer behavior (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006, p.498). Research in social psychology has shown that culture shapes the way individuals perceive the world and that this perception has a direct impact on their choices (Shweder, 1991). Many studies have also established that culture is a key determinant for understanding consumer behaviour. According to de Mooij (2010), culture is one of the forces that shape personality which in turn shapes the way consumers make decisions. She also states that personality and culture are inextricably bound together.

Even though religion is a key component of understanding human behaviour it has been under analyzed in the marketing research literature. Most studies have dealt with the topic of segmentation, which divides the market based on religious affiliation or religious commitment (Minton & Kahle, 2013). Some examples would be the avoidance of advertising products that do not comply to Jewish or Muslim kosher and halal religious laws (Ahmad, Rustam, & Dent, 2011; Alserhan, 2010; Shafie & Othman, 2006). Other research topics have dealt with the influence of religion on media preferences (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012), store patronage (Mokhlis, 2006), shopping behaviour (Essoo & Dibb, 2004), ethics (Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Patwardhan, Keith, & Vitell, 2012) and sustainable consumption (Minton, 2013).

Even with the studies undertaken so far, the topic of religion and its influence on consumer behavior is still unclear at best. Prominent scholars call the need for further analysis on this very important issue. For example, according to E. A. Minton et al. (2016), the coalescence of religion and consumer behavior is still under researched and poorly understood. Also, according to Mathras et al. (2016), studies on the effects of religion on consumer psychology and behavior are scattered and have yet to be systematized, and much more remains to be discovered and explained. The above mentioned authors have identified how many articles mentioning "religion" were published in peer reviewed marketing journals (Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Marketing, and Marketing Science) from 1992 to 2014. According to them, only 180 articles were published in 22 years, and just a small fraction of them featured religion as the main research topic.

One important aspect of the religious construct is religiosity which is "the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices, and uses them in daily live" (Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Berry, & O'Connor, 2003). According to McDaniel & Burnett (1990), religiosity has two dimensions: cognitive (intrapersonal) and behavioral (interpersonal). The intrapersonal dimension relates to individual's belief in their religion while the interpersonal dimension relates to the level of practice of religion by individuals such as weekly church attendance, worship meetings and so on. The research conducted so far has clearly demonstrated the value of the religiosity construct as a consumer behaviour predictor. It is related to aspects of consumer behavior such as: lifestyle, retail patronage, shopping behaviour, attitudes towards advertising, purchase intentions of high involvement products and media usage (Delener, 1990a, 1990b, 1994; Delener & Schiffman, 1988; Hirschman, 1981; LaBarbera, 1987; 1990; Mokhlis, 2006).

Alongside the rising of religion, one other force that is shaping our society is media. According to Pew Research (2015), one in five Americans are using the internet almost constantly, a term which is a premiere for Pew Research. The rising of social media and the widespread internet coverage in the world are all aspects that are shaping our society, as well as the religious landscape. Researchers found that individuals from different religious affiliations and with different levels of religiosity have a very different media usage pattern (Delener, 1990b; Hirschman, 1985; LaBarbera, 1987; McDaniel & Burnett, 1991). Some authors go even further with the relationship between religion and media. For example, Horsfield (2015) states that Christianity and media need to be researched as a "symbiotic cultural phenomena that inform and are integral to each other" (2015, p.8).

The aim of this study is to address part of the need for research in the area of religion and consumer behaviour by analyzing the relationship between religion, certain aspects of religiosity (religious involvement) and media usage behaviour. A detailed analysis of media usage behaviour and its relationship with religious affiliation and religiosity was conducted using a representative longitudinal panel from the Netherlands. The study examined over three thousand five hundred cases comprised of respondents either

affiliated with one of the major religious groups or unaffiliated. Regarding media usage, the rich panel data available gave us the opportunity to analyze time spent on different media channels such as TV, internet, and so on. Moreover, we could also analyze what type of media content was used by respondents, ranging from social media to video streaming.

## Method

### Conceptual model

This study is using a holistic conceptual model for analyzing religions influence on individuals as a whole with the focus on their consumer behaviour. The model is composed of three main blocks, each of which composed of sub-blocks which in turn are composed of certain variables. The underlying logic behind this construction is that there are certain premises that influence religion and the process of religious experience and that, as a consequence influences certain outcomes. The "Premises" block includes the followings sub-blocks: Health, Direct influences and Production of goods and services. The "Process" block includes: Endogenous influences, Religion and Exogenous influences. And finally, the "Results" block includes: Health outcomes, Ethics and morality and Buyers decision process. The construction of this conceptual model is strongly based in the theory of religion's influence on consumer behaviour (Minton & Kahle, 2016).

For the current research, the analysis will focus on discovering if there is a relationship between individuals age, religious affiliation, certain aspects of religiosity, and information sources. Going back to the model, the variables that will be tested are A1 Demographic factors, E1 Religious affiliation, E3 Cognitive religiosity (certain aspects), E5 Behavioral religiosity (certain aspects) and H2 Information search. The current literature has analyzed the relationship between religion and media usage but the number of studies on this topic are rather small and since media is such an integral part of people's lives, the current research will add new insight into the topic.

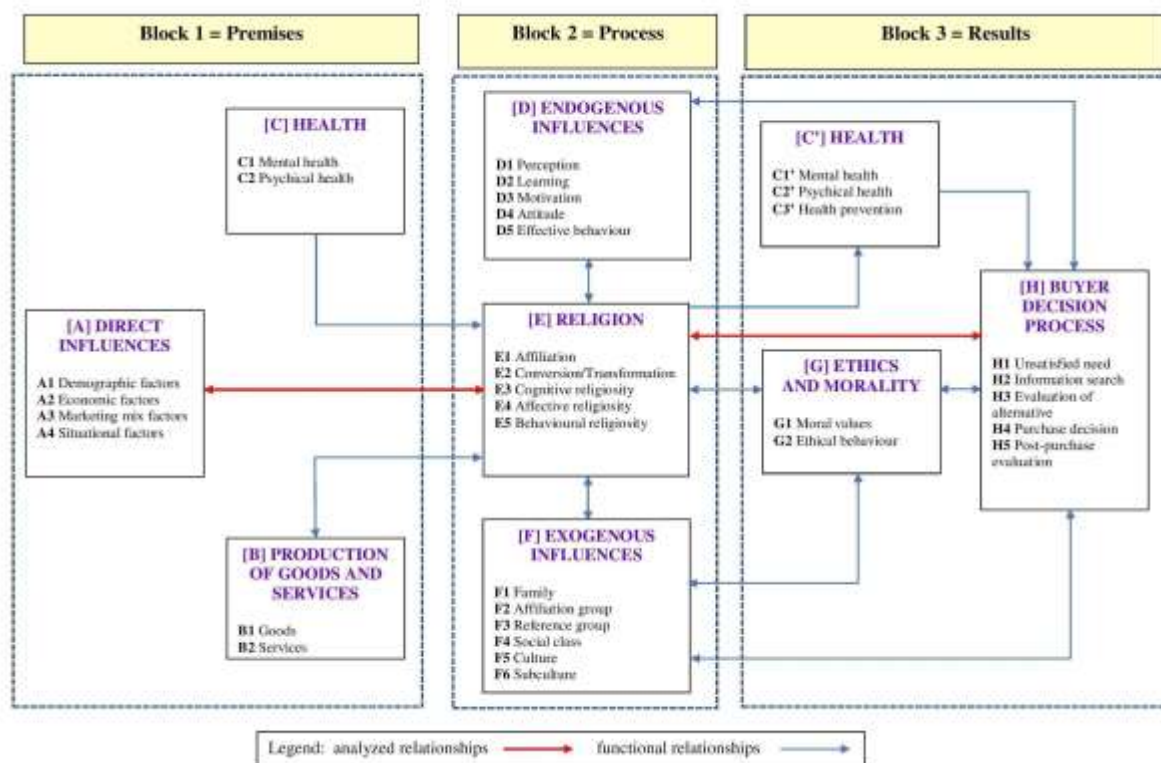


Figure 1. Author's conceptual model

### ***Participants***

In this paper we make use of data provided by LISS Panel Data Archive (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences), panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands). The LISS panel is a representative sample of Dutch individuals who participate in monthly Internet surveys. The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register. Households that could not otherwise participate are provided with a computer and Internet connection. A longitudinal survey is fielded in the panel every year, covering a large variety of domains including work, education, income, housing, time use, political views, values and personality. The author did not have access to any identifying information about the participants as the data were anonymized and de-identified prior to author access.

For this study, the tenth wave (most recent) of the LISS data panel was used. The number of respondents was initially 10117, out of which 4967 men (49.1%) and 5150 women (50.9%). The age breakdown of the sample was as follows: 14 years and younger 1316 (13%), 15-24 years 1262 (12.5%), 25-34 years 1286 (12.7%), 35-44 years 1186 (11.7%), 45-54 years 1362 (13.5%), 55-64 years 1514 (15%) and 65 years and older 2191 (21.7%). After inquiring how many individuals from the sample consider themselves members of a certain religion or church community, the sample number changed due to missing values, as follows: 1936 respondents (19.1%) considered themselves members of a religion, 3759 respondents (37.2%) do not consider themselves members of a religion, 97 respondents (1%) do not know and 4325 (42.7%) individuals did not answer. Hence for, the final sample used comprises of 5792 respondents, out of which 1936 respondents (33.4%) were religiously affiliated, 3759 respondents (64.9%) were not religiously affiliated and 97 respondents (1.7%) did not know if they were religiously affiliated or not.

### ***Measures***

Respondents answered questions regarding their religion, which are part of the Religion and ethnicity core studies from the LISS panel. Regarding religious affiliation, the respondents were asked if they considered themselves member of a certain religions or church community. They also answered questions regarding the Bible and if they considered it to be the word of God or not. Moreover, participants answered questions regarding media usage and time spent using certain media channels and devices, variables found in the Social integrations and leisure core studies. The questions regarding media usage referred to time spent watching television, using smartphones, using the internet and also detailing how they were using the internet. This included questions regarding product information, purchasing items online, using internet banking, watching movies online, using social media, etc. Hence for, the questions about media usage covered a wide array of media channels and content. For the purpose of this study, the underlying premises is that there will be significant differences regarding media usage between respondents based on age. Since the younger generations are using technology from their youngest ages, the time spent and also the content used might differ based on age criterions. For this reason, age was also used in analyzing the relationship between religion and media usage.

### ***Procedures and results***

For analyzing the relationship between age, religion and media usage, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 19 was used on a Windows computer using Windows 10, 64 bits operating system. With regards to the statistical treatment used, the procedure applied was two ways between groups analysis of variance. This technique allowed the researcher to 'look at the individual and joint effect of two independent variables on one dependent variable' (Pallant, 2007, p.257).

## Results

Table 1 presents the main results of the statistical analysis performed.

**Table 1.** Research results

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Dependent variables</i>	<i>Results</i>	<i>Details</i>
1. Age group * member of a religious group	Watching TV (min.)	unsupported	
2. Age group * member of a religious group	Watching video streaming channels (min.)	unsupported	
3. Age group * member of a religious group	Internet use on a smartphone (min.)	partially supported	Part of the religiously affiliated respondents reported fewer minutes using a smartphone for browsing the internet. The difference found was in the 15-24 years old group, as follows: respondents religiously affiliated spend approx. 16h 21 min using the smartphone per week whereas respondents religiously unaffiliated spend approx. 20h using the smartphone/week.
4. Age group * member of a religious group	Purchasing items via internet (min.)	unsupported	
5. Age group * member of a religious group	Reading and viewing social media (hours/week)	partially supported	Part of the religiously affiliated respondents reported fewer hours spent on social media. The difference found was in the 15-24 years old group, as follows: respondents religiously affiliated spend approx. 5h and 32 min on social media and respondents religiously unaffiliated spend approx. 7h and 32 min on social media.
6. Age group * Bible as the word of God	Watching TV (min.)	unsupported	
7. Age group * Bible as the word of God	Watching video streaming channels (min.)	unsupported	
8. Age group * Bible as the word of God	Internet use on a smartphone (min.)	partially supported	The respondents in the 15-24 years old age group who believed the Bible is the word of God spend less time using a smartphone (15 h and 30 min) than respondents from the same age group who declared they did not believe the Bible is the word of God (20 h and 34 min.)
9. Age group * Bible as the word of God	Purchasing items via internet (min.)	unsupported	
10. Age group * Bible as the word of God	Reading and viewing social media (hours/week)	partially supported	The respondents in the 15-24 years old age group who believed the Bible is the word of God spend less time on social media (5 h and 28 min) than respondents from the same age group who declared they did not believe the Bible is the word of God (7 h and 17 min.)

## Discussion

The goal of this exploratory research was to analyze the relationships between certain aspects of religion, age and aspects concerning media usage. For the most part, the results after analyzing the data showed no clear relationship between religion, age and media usage. There was one age group though, respondents between 15-24 years old that showed different results based on religious affiliation and religiosity. It appears that respondents in this age group who are religiously affiliated and who believe that the Bible is the word of God tend to spend less time watching video streaming channels such as Netflix, spend less time using their smartphone and also spend less time using social media.

From the current analysis, the relationship between age, religion and media usage seems to be most salient among members of generation Z, adolescents and young adults between 15 and 24 years old. One potential explanation regarding these results might be that adolescents might still live with their parents, who can influence some form of media control over them. Another explanation might come from the religious conversion or spiritual transformation phenomenon since most of these come into place in adolescence and young adulthood (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). There might also be other motives at play, which are interesting avenues for further research.

The current research has a number of limitations, one of them being the limited number of variables used for analysis, partly due to the structure of the panel data used. Also, other demographic aspects might be researched such as income levels, education, etc. and their relationship with religious variables. Moreover, the results discovered cannot simply be generalized and they might be specific to the Netherlands and the sample used for analysis. Nonetheless, the correlation between religion and media usage remains a topic for further research which could analyze the relationships between religion, generations and different aspects of consumer behaviour. Also, more detailed and refined variables for measuring religion could be applied in future studies.

This study has direct implications for the marketing practice, analyzing the relationship between religion, age and media usage. Assessing the time spent on certain media channels offers an interesting insight into the media consumption habits of individuals. Decreasing the time spent on media channels can have a meaningful impact on the number of ads people are exposed to which can have implications for the advertising industry since less ads might lead to less money. Interestingly, religious young people spend less time on their smartphones, a device crucial to the advertising industry.

Regarding the implications of this paper to the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, simply adding to the under researched topic of religion and marketing is a worthy contribution. Also, using for analysis a detailed representative panel from a western industrialized country, (i.e. the Netherlands) where religion's influence is slowly decreasing offers interesting insight into the topic. Moreover, the Netherlands is a country where prostitution and soft drug use are permitted by law and many churches are transformed into bookstores and night clubs, aspects contrary to religious beliefs.

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