Religion’s influence on consumer response to moral vs. justice message appeals

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Abstract
Building from past research on religion and self-construal, this research is the first known research to explore the relationships among religion (Western vs. Eastern vs. nonreligious), moral vs. justice message appeals, and ethical consumption. In two studies utilizing the context of Fair Trade products, we show differences in the effectiveness of moral and justice message appeals to encourage ethical consumption based on one’s religious or nonreligious affiliation. Study 1 uses an Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) sample of 197 adults, finding through MANOVAs that moral (justice) appeals are the most effective at increasing purchase intentions for ethical goods among Western (nonreligious) consumers. Study 2 extends these questions to Western and Eastern religious consumers using a Qualtrics panel sample of 279 adults, finding through MANOVAs that moral (justice) appeals are more effective for Western (Eastern) religious consumers. Equally important, Study 2 results show that these effects occur regardless of religiosity level, emphasizing the need to understand consumers’ religious affiliation more so than religiosity level. Results from both studies also show that change efficacy positively influences Fair Trade purchase intentions which, surprisingly, encourages ethical disengagement. Results also examine the purchase motives of customers, finding nonreligious and Eastern religious consumers to be motivated by concern for others, while Western religious consumers are motivated out of concern for self. In sum, marketing practitioners designing to encourage ethical consumption should use self-based moral appeals (e.g., “do this because it is the right thing to do for yourself”) when targeting Western religious consumers or countries with predominantly Western religious followers, while using others-based justice appeals (e.g., “do this because it is the fair thing to do for others”) when targeting Eastern or nonreligious consumers or countries mostly representing these affiliates.

KEYWORDS
change efficacy, Eastern vs. Western religion, ethical consumption, ethical disengagement, Fair Trade, moral vs. justice appeals
Developed by Marketers, these products are designed to highlight ethically-conscious product attributes, including environmental friendliness and ethical production standards (Chang, Zhang, & Xie, 2015; Diehl, Tertlutter, & Mueller, 2016). This growing trend in marketing practice has been slow to examine consumer characteristics, particularly religion, to inform one’s response to such appeals, as well as the potential negative effects that may result from consumption of ethical goods. Accordingly, the current research focuses on the important and influential consumer characteristic of religion that potentially determines response to ethical product appeals. Religion provides a source of core consumer values and beliefs that serve a foundational role in ethical consumption behavior and decision making (Mathras et al., 2016), and prior research shows that religion should be a key consideration component to a company’s marketing efforts (Minton, 2015; Taylor, Halstead, & Haynes, 2010).

The heart of the convergence of religion and ethical behavior are the topics of fairness and reciprocity, whereby individuals make judgments as to the basic rights afforded others, which in turn influence the individual’s decision-making process (McGregor, 2006). We build on this inherent connection between religion and ethics to explore response to marketing focused on ethical consumption aimed at reconciling social and environmental injustice. We specifically focus on the relationship between religion and response to Fair Trade marketing efforts, which encompasses an alternative market arrangement with distinct ethical implications (Doran & Natale, 2011; Komarova-Loureiro et al., 2016). Although there is a clear link between religious values and ethical behavior, there is a surprising lack of research examining religious beliefs as an explanatory factor in ethical consumption behavior, particularly in response to Fair Trade marketing efforts. Indeed, Doran and Natale (2011) stand as the lone piece to investigate this question from a consumer perspective. These authors establish a connection between religion and Fair Trade consumption by finding a weak relationship between religion and Fair Trade behavior. Our research builds upon the work of Doran and Natale (2011) and others (c.f., Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005) by exploring the role of ethical message appeals toward encouraging use of Fair Trade products for consumers of differing religious backgrounds.

We contribute novel insight to prior research by (1) providing a more detailed account of the effect of religious beliefs through comparison of Eastern, Western, and nonreligious consumers on the decision to purchase Fair Trade products, (2) examining differences between Western, Eastern, and nonreligious consumers in response to moral versus justice appeals, (3) identifying the underlying process (change efficacy) through which these appeals operate, and (4) drawing on the self-regulation literature to provide novel exploration into the potential negative effects (e.g., increased ethical disengagement) of purchasing ethical products. In so doing, we fulfill recent calls for research linking the under-researched topic of religion with consumer behavior and marketing (Choi, Kale, & Shin, 2010; Komarova-Loureiro et al., 2016; Mathras et al., 2016; Minton, 2016; Tang & Li, 2015). While a number of distinct message appeals are available for marketers to use in attempts to change behavior, the two that stand to be most relevant for encouraging ethical consumption are moral and justice appeals (Baron, 1999). Both moral and justice appeals similarly contribute to ethical behavior in that they “facilitate social interaction, coordination, and cooperation” (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2016, p. 407). While these two concepts are similar to one another, they differ in reasoning such that justice appeals develop more from social change-focused roots (e.g., “Disadvantaged producers need to be treated fairly”), while moral appeals develop more out of self-focused roots (e.g., “I need to do the right thing”) (Baron, 1999). Additionally, moral appeals draw upon a consumer’s broad reasoning of right and wrong behavior, while justice appeals focus on specific evaluations of fairness (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2016). However, a moral transgression does not immediately lead to evaluations of fairness. Thus, marketers have the potential to highlight a moral (i.e., right vs. wrong) or justice (i.e., fair vs. unfair) nature to help influence consumer evaluations and response to ethical issues and products, such as Fair Trade.

White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012) suggest that justice motives influence ethical consumption and product evaluations. Perceived justice of company actions, whether procedural or distributive justice, also influences consumer trust (Ferguson, Ellen, & Bearden, 2014). Justice represents fairness and the ideology that consumers will receive the rewards and/or punishments that they deserve (Lerner, 2003). Justice also seeks to identify response options to counter-normative behavior, such as those behaviors of companies using labor and supplier practices that are not deemed ethical. While White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012) examine generalized belief in a just world as the underlying perspective influencing justice motives, we add to their work by exploring religion as a factor underlying such just world beliefs. Additionally, other research shows that consumers seek justice for their self in situations of service failure or marketplace inequity (Aggarwal & Larrick, 2012), but research examining how consumers respond to marketplace issues when justice outcomes are not affecting the consumer is limited. Thus, justice appeals could be used in marketing messages to highlight the need for fairness and enhance evaluations and consumption of ethical Fair Trade products.

Whereas justice appeals focus on fairness, morality appeals focus on right and wrong. Morality appeals can lead to greater variation in interpretation since definitions of right and wrong can vary greatly from one consumer to another based on each consumer’s background in such important areas as religion, while justice appeals can be more easily and universally understood as fairness/equality among individuals (Opotow, 1990). Wooten (2009) found that behavior consistent with a moral appeal (or, on the negative side, transgressions) causes a greater fluctuation in brand attitudes in comparison to product attribute adjustments (or attribute transgressions). Thus, moral appeals could also be used in marketing messages to highlight the need to do what is
right and enhance evaluations and purchase of ethical Fair Trade products. We next discuss proposed differences in response to these appeals on the basis of the important and under-studied individual difference of religion.

2 | RELIGION AND JUSTICE VS. MORAL APPEALS

When faced with ethical dilemmas, it is widely accepted that consumers draw from differing moral philosophies that determine likelihood of action and the decision reached (Ferrell, Gresham, & Fraedrich, 1989). These moral philosophies consist of two basic dimensions (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977) upon which consumers can differ: idealism and relativism, where idealism refers to "the degree to which an individual adheres to moral absolutes" (Singhapakdi et al., 2000, p. 307) and relativism refers to "the degree to which an individual rejects universal moral rules when making ethical judgments" (Singhapakdi et al., 2000, p. 307). We build from these dimensions of moral philosophies to address the proposed differences among religious and nonreligious groups in response to appeals encouraging the use of ethical, Fair Trade goods. For clarity, we use the term religion throughout this paper to refer to "a commonly held set of beliefs ... that guide external behavior and internal search for meaning" (Minton & Kahle, 2014, p. 14).

As opposed to religious individuals whose scriptures explicitly outline the moral principles that guide one's value system, nonreligious consumers tend to view moral principles as more relativistic, and are less idealistic in their moral judgment (Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996). This is not to state or imply that nonreligious consumers are less moral than religious consumers but, rather, that nonreligious consumers are less likely to interpret moral principles as universally right and wrong, and are more likely to believe that moral principles are defined by the individual and dependent upon the nature of the situation (Forsyth, 1992). In addition, research in evolutionary psychology suggests that fairness desires stem from a need for sustained cooperation from other beings for species to survive (Brosnan & de Waal, 2014). For nonreligious consumers that are more relativistic in their moral standards and maintain a tendency of relying on other individuals instead of a higher power, there is reason to believe that greater concern will be assumed to ensuring that fair outcomes are reached for other individuals.

Given the differing ideals for moral judgment and what constitutes right and wrong among nonreligious consumers, it is reasonable to assume that nonreligious consumers will not view ethical behavior as ubiquitous across all individuals; instead, it is expected that judgments of morality and ethics will vary to a greater degree than among religious consumers. As a result, appeals emphasizing “right versus wrong” and framing Fair Trade consumption as a matter of morality should be less effective in encouraging Fair Trade consumption among nonreligious consumers in comparison to justice/fairness-based appeals. Rather, such justice/fairness-based appeals emphasizing fair outcomes for all individuals involved in exchange should be prioritized for the nonreligious, given the focus on cooperation among individuals to achieve positive outcomes. Thus we predict that:

H1: Justice appeals will be more effective for encouraging (a) positive product attitudes, (b) purchase intentions, and (c) willingness-to-pay for ethical (i.e., Fair Trade) goods for non-religious consumers than Western religious consumers.

Further, acknowledging nonreligious consumers should be influenced more by appeals emphasizing justice and fairness to others, we also predict that their motives for purchasing ethical products should be driven more out of concern for others than themselves:

H1d: Non-religious consumers will display stronger other-driven motives when purchasing ethical (i.e. Fair Trade) products than Western religious consumers.

Next we turn to discuss differences among religious consumers. We categorize these differences based on two major divisions within religious affiliations: Western religions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam) and Eastern religions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism) (Schmidt et al., 2014). As such an important part of modern society, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the differences between religions. Notably, James (1902) and Sarre (1995) describe that Western religions follow a monotheistic perspective by viewing their key person as a prophet, with obeying this prophet the key to achieving the goal of heavenly life. Further, Western religious scriptures teach that God created nature, and, therefore, God and man hold a superior position to nature. In contrast, Eastern religions follow a pantheistic (i.e., many gods) or nontheistic perspective, viewing their key person as an awakened one. Eastern teachings view life as a process of seeking, with an end-life goal of enlightenment, and that God is in and through all elements of nature. Among religious consumers, there are also differences in how consumers view the self and others which, in turn, should influence response to appeals for ethical products.

For Western religions in particular, following moral principles is more commonly discussed as an individual concept with individual responsibility, while justice is more often described as something that will come at the end of times from a higher being (Schmidt et al., 2014). For example, Western religious scripture highlights God saying in Deuteronomy 32:35, “Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay,” with similar references across all Western religious doctrine (Schmidt et al., 2014). Here the emphasis is on a higher being judging rather than the individual. In contrast, Western religious scripture highlights moral principles (more often described as “doing what is right”) as an individual commandment with both the benefit of prosperous outcomes if moral principles are followed as well as negative consequences if moral principles are not followed.
This focus on the individual as central in Western religions is supported in the cultural psychology research on self-construal. This research shows that all individuals have a cognitive awareness of themselves as distinct and separate from other people. However, the emphasis on the centrality of the individual to one’s self-construal differs across Western and Eastern cultures, derived in part from the religious perspectives present in the culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Western individuals, for instance, tend to follow an independent construal in which one’s sense of self is a function of one’s uniqueness and sense of self apart from others.

Given these examples of the principles set forth in Western scripture emphasizing the role of the individual in moral issues, in addition to the independent construal of the self in Western culture, it is probable that moral appeals framing ethical behavior as right versus wrong should drive the desire to obey more so than justice appeals that emphasize fairness. In this manner, the individual would fulfill their moral obligation with God by utilizing ethical products. Therefore:

H2: Moral appeals will be more effective for encouraging (a) positive product attitudes, (b) purchase intentions, and (c) willingness-to-pay for ethical (i.e., Fair Trade) goods for Western religious consumers than nonreligious and Eastern religious consumers.

With Western religious consumers more likely to assume a focus on the self through an independent self-construal, we anticipate that Western religious consumers will express greater motives for the self when purchasing ethical products when compared to nonreligious and Eastern religious consumers:

H2d: Western religious consumers will display stronger self-driven motives when purchasing ethical (i.e., Fair Trade) products than non-religious and Eastern religious consumers.

While Western religious scriptures place greater focus on right and wrong, Eastern religions place greater emphasis on justice and fairness. For instance, the notion of dharma (righteousness) is central in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, an ancient story based on the war between Pandavas and Kauravas for the throne. Bhagwat Gita, one of the most important scriptures of Hinduism, illustrates that dharma does not involve “outwardly visible deeds” (Trikha, 2006, p. 121) but rather “inner, subjective attitudes and dispositions such as, generosity, friendliness, self-control, avoiding resentment, [and] not being self-centered and proud” (Trikha, 2006, p. 121). According to Eastern religious scripture, humans should strive to adhere to their dharma “even at the risk of his life” (Sivananada, 2016)). Protecting the environment and treating the world as one family are also considered a part of one’s dharma, because according to other Hindu scriptures, such as Vedas and Upanishads, “five great elements (space, air, fire, water and earth) that constitute the environment are all derived from prakriti, the primal energy, and that these elements are interconnected and interdependent” (Jain, 2011). Similarly, the notion of harmony and justice is central to Buddhism. According to Vajiragnana (1992), Buddha explained reciprocal duties existing between different relationships, and that these reciprocal duties are “sacred duties, for- if observed – they can create a just, peaceful, and harmonious society” (p. 2).

Additionally, the research on self-construal again supports an Eastern cultural focus on the collective and the elements of justice and fairness toward others. Through an interdependent self-construal, Eastern cultures emphasize the “fundamental connectedness” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227) of one individual to another. In this manner, the relationship between the self and others is allocentric in nature, leading to the determination that an individual disconnected from the larger collective cannot properly function (Phillips, 1976). With regard to justice and fairness, research shows that an interdependent self-construal is related more to justice concerns as opposed an independent construal, and those with an interdependent self-construal display stronger emotional reactions to injustice and social concerns (Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007). Accordingly, given the emphasis on the collective in Eastern scripture, we anticipate that Eastern religious individuals (who are more likely to display an interdependent self-construal) will respond more favorably to appeals framing ethical behavior as a matter of justice and fairness. Thus:

H3: Justice appeals will be more effective for encouraging (a) positive product attitudes, (b) purchase intentions, and (c) willingness-to-pay for ethical (i.e., Fair Trade) goods for Eastern religious consumers than Western religious consumers.

Finally, the focus on the collective and interdependent self-construal of Eastern religious consumers implies that these consumers will display a greater sense of concern for others when purchasing ethical products:

H3d: Eastern religious consumers will display stronger other-driven motives when purchasing ethical (i.e. Fair Trade) products than Western religious consumers.

3 | PERCEIVED CHANGE EFFICACY AND ETHICAL DISENAGEMENT

Beyond examining differences among Western, Eastern, and non-religious consumers on purchase intentions and evaluations of Fair Trade products using various appeals, we also seek to identify an underlying process to the effectiveness of these appeals. To do so, we introduce the concept of perceived change efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between appeal type and ethical product evaluation. Additionally, we desire to identify the psychological consequences resulting from the belief that one’s ethical purchase behavior makes a difference on social problems by exploring the effect
of perceived change efficacy resulting from an ethical action on ethical disengagement.

3.1 | Perceived change efficacy

Building from the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), perceived change efficacy suggests that as the likelihood that a specific behavior can make a difference increases, so does the motivation to act. We argue that perceived change efficacy stands to be an important factor underlying the effectiveness of message appeals aimed at increasing purchase intentions and evaluation of ethical Fair Trade products. For example, White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012) show that efficacy beliefs play an important role in ethical consumption, finding that when consumers believe their use of ethical products can redress social injustice, they are more likely to choose such products among alternatives. Similarly, Leary, Vann, Mittelstaedt, Murphy, and Sherry (2014), Leary, Vann, and Mittelstaedt (2017), in their work on perceived marketplace influence, show that ethical choice (arguably including response to ethical marketing efforts) is impacted by its perceived influence on the actions of others.

Consistent with this existing research, we define "change efficacy" as a subjective sense of power experienced by consumers when they believe that their marketplace behavior will make a difference, either on a problem or on other marketplace actors. We predict that change efficacy beliefs will influence the likelihood of purchasing Fair Trade products, and serve as an underlying process in response to Fair Trade marketing efforts featuring moral or justice appeals. This relationship is important in that it provides a mechanism facilitating the effectiveness of appeals encouraging ethical consumption. By understanding this underlying process, marketers have the potential to encourage Fair Trade behavior by making consumers feel as if their actions are making a difference on social problems. Thus, we propose:

\[ H4: \text{Change efficacy beliefs mediate the relationship between appeal type (moral vs. justice) and ethical (i.e., Fair Trade) product evaluations.} \]

3.2 | Ethical disengagement

Finally, in addition to the influence of moral/justice appeal type and efficacy on ethical product evaluations, we also explore the psychological consequences of believing that personal actions are making a difference by investigating ethical disengagement. Moore, Detert, Klebe, Baker, and Mayer (2012) describe ethical disengagement as cognitively processing situations in such a way that one does not experience distress associated with divergence from ethical principles and participation in unethical behavior. Limited research has explored how ethical disengagement influences consumers (Egan, Hughes, & Palmer, 2015). This previous research shows that consumers express decreased desire to act ethically under certain circumstances. What is not as well known, however, is how engaging in ethical behavior, in addition to consumer's core religious values, influences ethical disengagement.

Research on self-regulation (c.f., Khan & Dhar, 2006) finds that a positive action boosts one's self-concept which, in turn, gives one the freedom to engage in a self-indulgent choice. Similarly, we suggest that the increased self-concept resulting from the perceptions that actions are making a difference on social problems (i.e., change efficacy) can actually increase the likelihood of ethical disengagement among various religious consumers. Stated differently, it is likely that one's belief of efficacy (initiated through the purchase of ethical Fair Trade goods) should lead to enhanced levels of ethical disengagement. Thus, we propose that change efficacy will mediate the relationship between the interaction between religion and appeal type and ethical disengagement:

\[ H5: \text{Change efficacy beliefs mediate the relationship between the religion (non-religious, Western, Eastern) x appeal type (moral vs. justice) interaction and ethical disengagement} \]

4 | OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We conduct two studies to test our proposed relationships. Study 1 uses a Mechanical Turk sample to experimentally examine the influence of moral/justice message appeal type on ethical product evaluations and ethical disengagement between Western religious and nonreligious consumers. This study also explores differences in ethical purchase motives among these groups of consumers. Study 2 expands the generalizability of Study 1 results to a professionally-managed Qualtrics sample of Eastern and Western religious consumers, while controlling for religiosity. In examining these relationships, we also build on our earlier discussion to test that justice appeals do in fact produce more social/other-focused behavioral motives, while moral appeals target more self-focused behavioral motives (Baron, 1999).

5 | STUDY 1: MORAL VS. JUSTICE APPEALS AMONG WESTERN AND NON-RELIGIOUS CONSUMERS

This study tests the influence of moral appeals and justice message appeals on Fair Trade product evaluations for Western religious versus nonreligious consumers (H1a,b,c,d and H2a,b,c,d) as well as the mediating role of change efficacy (H4) and effects on ethical disengagement (H5).

5.1 | Method

One hundred and ninetyseven US adults (n = 197; M\text{Age} = 33.85 [SD = 10.55], 49.2% female) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, which is
valued for academic research and a source of high-quality data (Lowry et al., 2016), participated in this study in exchange for a small cash incentive. Prior work shows that Mechanical Turk data compare favorably with other academic data sources for behavioral research, such as student samples and other consumer panels, as long as proper attention checks and controls are implemented (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). The specific breakdown of participants’ religion was as follows: 32.5% Protestant, 14.7% Catholic, 1.5% Jewish, 1.0% Muslim, 23.4% Agnostic, 26.9% Atheist, 6.5% Spiritual but not Religious, and 3.6% other, for a total of 49.7% religious and 50.3% nonreligious respondents. This study utilized a 2 (religion: Western, nonreligious) x 2 (appeal type: moral, justice) between-subjects design. Participants were first divided based on religious affiliation (or lack thereof) and then randomly assigned to a moral or justice appeal condition. After exposure to the appeal type condition, participants evaluated a set of Fair Trade advertisements before answering questions regarding ethical disengagement, purchase motives, change efficacy, and an instructional check.

5.1.1 | Independent variables

Appeal type (moral or justice) was manipulated using mock advertisements for three common Fair Trade products: ice cream, a hoodie, and tea; see the Appendix for example stimuli. Products were selected across three categories that have commonly available Fair Trade alternatives: food (ice cream), clothing (hooded sweatshirt), and beverage (tea). In the moral (justice) appeal condition, advertisement text read: “You should purchase our ice cream/hoodie/tea because it is the right (fair) thing to do.” Religious condition was based on participant’s identified affiliation with Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims representing Western religious consumers, while the lack of affiliation represented the nonreligious condition.

5.1.2 | Dependent variables

Product evaluations were measured with three scales to assess overall attitude, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay. Each question was asked three times, once after exposure to each product (ice cream, hoodie, tea). Composite scores for both attitude and intention were formed by averaging responses to the three products. Overall attitude was measured with three items on a 7-point bipolar scale (endpoints: Unfavorable/Favorable, Bad/Good, Dislike/Like; \( \alpha = 0.943 \)). Purchase intentions were measured with three items using the same scale but different endpoints (Unlikely/Likely, Definitely would not/Definitely would, Not probable/Probable; \( \alpha = 0.963 \)).

To measure willingness to pay (WTP), the average price was determined for the three Fair Trade-certified products in this study using the Minimum Price and Price Premium Information available on Fair Trade International (2016) website. After determining the average price for Fair Trade-certified goods, the price premium was deducted from this average price to attain the price for common nonFair Trade goods, thereby serving as the baseline for our WTP measure. Understanding that the base price of Fair Tradecertified goods is not readily comparable (e.g., a sweatshirt costs more than a container of ice cream), a percentage-based system was used to measure WTP. For each product, the value 200% greater than the average price for the nonFair Tradecertified product was calculated, giving respondents a sliding bar to indicate the price they would be willing to pay for the Fair Trade product. Accordingly, participants were able to indicate their willingness to pay for Fair Trade products within a range of no more than a nonFair Trade product in that category, up to 200% greater. We formed a WTP index measure by averaging the percentages across the Fair Trade products (\( \mu = 0.903 \)).

Ethical disengagement was measured with 16 items from Moore et al. (2012) on a 7-point scale (Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; \( \mu = 0.937 \)). Questions assessed the consumer’s likelihood to disregard moral guidelines for certain behaviors. Purchase motives were measured using an 8-item scale (\( \mu = 0.723 \)) developed for the purpose of this study to examine self- versus other-motives in consumer ethical behavior. Questions were measured on a 5-point scale (endpoints: None at all/A great deal) and assessed the consumer’s likelihood to engage in ethical behavior to benefit themselves (versus others) and in a way that portrays an intended identity. Lastly, as an instructional check, participants were asked whether the advertisements they saw mentioned that they should purchase the product because it was the "right" or "fair" thing to do.

Mediator. Change efficacy was measured using four adapted items on 7-point scales (Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree) from White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012), asking participants their belief that purchase of Fair Trade goods could make a difference on social inequities (\( \mu = 0.821 \)).

5.2 | Results

All participants answered the instructional check question correctly. A MANOVA was run with product attitude, purchase intentions, and willingness-to-pay as dependent variables. Results indicated a significant main effect for religion (\( F_{(3,191)} = 6.19, p < 0.001 \)), with religion a significant predictor of all three dependent variables (\( p's < 0.05 \)). MANOVA results also revealed a significant interaction effect between religion and appeal type \( F_{(3,191)} = 5.04, p < 0.01 \). Additional analyses revealed that this interaction significantly predicted Fair Trade product attitude (\( p < 0.01 \)) and willingness to pay (\( p < 0.05 \)), with a marginally significant effect on purchase intentions (\( p < 0.1 \)).

We found support for the effectiveness of appeal type on religious association, as there were significant differences between groups on purchase intentions \( F_{(3,193)} = 6.32, p < 0.001 \), product attitudes \( F_{(3,193)} = 9.21, p < 0.001 \), and willingness to pay \( F_{(3,193)} = 3.38, p < 0.05 \). Specifically, we found that Western religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal \( M_{\text{attitude}} = 6.91 \) reported greater purchase intentions for Fair Trade products than nonreligious consumers \( M_{\text{attitude}} = 5.89 \).

Similarly, Western religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal had higher product attitudes and expressed greater willingness to pay \( M_{\text{attitude}} = 7.62, M_{\text{willingness-to-pay}} = 39.84\% \) than nonreligious consumers viewing the moral appeal \( M_{\text{attitude}} = 6.53, M_{\text{willingness-to-pay}} = 21.52\% \). Conversely, nonreligious consumers exposed to the justice...
appeal reported higher evaluations of Fair Trade products across all dependent variables ($M_{\text{Intent}} = 6.57; M_{\text{Attitude}} = 7.34; M_{\text{Willingness-to-Pay}} = 29.25\%) in comparison to nonreligious consumers viewing the moral appeal. These results provide support for H1a,b,c and initial support for H2a,b,c. See Figure 1 for Fair Trade intent and attitude differences amongst Western religious and nonreligious consumers.

We also tested Fair Trade purchase motives to determine if there were any differences across religious groups, finding a significant difference between Western religious consumers and nonreligious consumers ($F_{\text{[2,195]}} = 14.53, p < 0.001$). Interestingly, Western religious consumers were more motivated to engage in ethical Fair Trade behavior out of concern for the self ($M = 2.91$) in comparison to nonreligious consumers ($M = 2.42$). These results support H1d and H2d, which predict that nonreligious consumers will display other-driven motives in ethical purchasing decisions, while Western religious consumers will have self-driven motives.

In addition to the differences between the religious and nonreligious on Fair Trade behavior, we also tested the role of justice efficacy as an underlying process for the effectiveness of these appeals. To examine these effects, we used the PROCESS macro (model 4) from Preacher and Hayes (2008) with bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) and 10,000 bootstrapped samples. We found support for our prediction that change efficacy intervenes in the relationship between the independent variable of appeal type and the dependent variable of purchase intentions. In the final mediation model, the mediator of change efficacy positively and significantly predicted purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.40[ t = 4.18], p < 0.001; 95\%\text{CI}: 0.21, 0.59$), while appeal type did not ($\beta = 0.26[ t = 1.37], p = 0.17; 95\%\text{CI}: -0.17, 0.64$). This result provides preliminary support for H4.

Finally, we investigated the influence of the religion x appeal type interaction as well as change efficacy on ethical disengagement to illustrate other potential effects of engaging in ethical behavior. Results confirmed the expectation that perceptions that personal actions can make a difference influence ethical disengagement, as change efficacy significantly predicted ethical disengagement ($\beta = 0.44[ t = 6.87], p < 0.001$). We next ran PROCESS mediation (model 4) with the religion x appeal type interaction term as the independent variable, change efficacy as mediator, and ethical disengagement as the dependent variable. The final mediation model showed that change efficacy positively and significantly predicted ethical disengagement ($\beta = 0.50[ t = 6.86], p < 0.001; 95\%\text{CI}: 0.36, 0.64$) while the religion x appeal type interaction did not ($\beta = 0.04[ t = 0.42], p = 0.68; 95\%\text{CI}: -0.14, 0.21$). Thus, we find that change efficacy mediates the relationship between the religion x appeal type interaction and ethical disengagement, providing initial support for H5.

5.3 | Discussion

Study 1 provides a contrast between Western religious and nonreligious consumers on ethical Fair Trade behavior. Results show that justice appeals are more motivating for ethical consumption outcomes for nonreligious consumers than moral appeals, thereby supporting H1a,b,c,d. In contrast, Western religious consumers are more likely to positively evaluate Fair Trade products when the product is partnered with a moral appeal rather than a justice appeal, thereby supporting H2a,b,c,d. Additionally, we show that change efficacy mediates this relationship, and that Western religious (nonreligious) consumers are more (less) influenced by self-focused motives for ethical behavior, thereby providing initial support for H4. Finally, one’s perceptions of change efficacy are shown to lead to the outcome of ethical disengagement, preliminarily supporting H5.

6 | STUDY 2: MORALITY VS. JUSTICE APPEALS AMONG WESTERN AND EASTERN RELIGIOUS CONSUMERS

Study 2 extends Study 1 by examining Western and Eastern religious consumers to identify differences among these groups on the effectiveness of justice and moral message appeals (H2a,b,c,d and H3a,b,c,d) as well as the effects of change efficacy and ethical disengagement (H4 and H5).

6.1 | Method

Participants for this study were recruited from a US Qualtrics Consumer Panel with a final sample of 279 adults ($M_{\text{Age}} = 39.08, SD = 14.54, 57.7\% \text{female}$), proportionally spread across demographic categories. Participants were provided a small cash incentive in return for their time to complete the survey. This quota sample was professionally monitored to ensure that half of the respondents were affiliated with a Western religion, while the other half of respondents were affiliated with an Eastern religion. The specific breakdown of participants’ religion was as follows: 26.2% Buddhist, 23.3% Protestant, 19.7% Catholic, 12.5% Hindu, 7.2% Jewish, 4.3% Taoist, 3.2% Shinto,
1.4% Sikh, 1.1% Confucianist, 0.4% Muslim, and 0.4% Jainist for a total of 50.9% Western and 49.1% Eastern religious consumers. We should note that all of the participants in the study resided in the United States. While there are potential acculturation effects, religion’s role as a set of guiding beliefs for one’s actions should remain prominent, regardless of physical location, especially when controlling for religiosity. Mathras et al. (2016) address this point between religion and culture, stating that it is beneficial to restrict religious participants to a single national culture in order to isolate the effects of religion on behavior.

This study utilized a 2 (religion: Western, Eastern) x 2 (appeal type: moral, justice) between-subjects design. Participants were first divided based on religious affiliation (Western, Eastern) and then randomly assigned to a moral or justice appeal condition. Religious condition was based on participant’s identified affiliation with Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims representing Western religious consumers, and Buddhists, Hindus, Jainists, Confucianists, Taoists, Shintoists, and Sikhs representing Eastern religious followers. Participants were asked to identify their religious affiliation for quota purposes and then evaluated Fair Trade products before answering questions regarding change efficacy with Fair Trade purchase, ethical disengagement likelihood, and an instructional check. Given the use of an entire sample of religious consumers in Study 2, we control for religiosity to ensure that observed effects are the result of religious affiliation and not the degree of their religiosity.

### 6.1.1 Independent variables

Appeal type (moral or justice) was manipulated using mock advertisements for three common Fair Trade products: chocolate, a t-shirt, and coffee. Stimuli were the same as in Study 1, except product visuals and descriptions were changed to reflect new product types. Additionally, products were chosen to reflect the same product categories as in Study 1 (one food item (chocolate), one clothing item (t-shirt), and one beverage (coffee)).

### 6.1.2 Dependent variables

Product evaluations were measured using the same method and scales from Study 1 (product attitudes $\alpha = 0.960$, purchase intentions $\alpha = 0.969$, willingness to pay $\alpha = 0.894$). Additionally, the same measures for ethical disengagement ($\alpha = 0.992$) and purchase motives ($\alpha = 0.821$) as used in Study 1 were also used in Study 2. Lastly, participants were asked whether the advertisements they saw mentioned they should purchase the product because it was the “right” or “fair” thing to do as an instructional check.

**Mediator.** Change efficacy was measured using the same 4-item scale adapted from White, MacDonnell, and Ellard (2012) as used in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.860$).

Control. We control for religiosity in Study 2 using a shortened 3-item version of the Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive religiosity scale ($\alpha = 0.752$) from Minton (2015).

### 6.2 Results

All participants answered the instructional check question correctly. A MANOVA was run with Fair Trade product attitudes, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay as dependent variables. After controlling for religiosity, results showed a significant main effect for both religion ($F_{(3,270)} = 4.96, p < 0.01$) and appeal type ($F_{(3,270)} = 8.78, p < 0.001$). Further analyses showed that religion significantly influenced all three dependent variables ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, appeal type significantly influenced purchase intentions ($p < 0.01$) and willingness to pay ($p < 0.001$), with a marginally significant influence on product attitudes ($p < 0.1$). A significant interaction between religion and appeal type also emerged ($F_{(3,270)} = 9.70, p < 0.001$), with a significant influence on all three dependent variables ($p < 0.001$).

Similar to Study 1, we find support for the effectiveness of appeal type on Western/Eastern religious association. Specifically, there was a significant difference between religious groups on purchase intentions ($F_{(3,275)} = 10.67, p < 0.001$), with Western religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal ($M = 7.39$) expressing higher purchase intentions than Eastern religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal ($M = 6.13$). Conversely, we find that Western religious consumers express lower purchase intentions when exposed to the justice appeal ($M_{\text{Intention}} = 5.93$) than Eastern religious consumers exposed to the justice appeal ($M_{\text{Intention}} = 6.30$). See Figure 2 for Fair Trade intent and attitude differences amongst Western and Eastern religious consumers.

The same pattern emerges for product attitudes ($F_{(3,275)} = 10.52, p < 0.001$) and willingness to pay ($F_{(3,275)} = 16.18, p < 0.001$). Across both dependent variables, we find that Western religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal reported higher Fair Trade product evaluations ($M_{\text{Attitude}} = 7.78; M_{\text{Willingness-to-Pay}} = 67.98\%$) in comparison to Eastern religious consumers exposed to the moral appeal ($M_{\text{Attitude}} = 6.51; M_{\text{Willingness-to-Pay}} = 35.77\%$). Similarly, Eastern
religious consumers exposed to the justice appeal reported higher Fair Trade product evaluations \( (M_{\text{Attitude}} = 7.02; M_{\text{Willingness-to-Pay}} = 30.15\%) \) in comparison to Western religious consumers \( (M_{\text{Attitude}} = 6.70; M_{\text{Willingness-to-Pay}} = 28.67\%) \). These results provide support for H2a,b,c and H3a,b,c.

Similar to Study 1, we also tested for differences between Western and Eastern religious consumers on their ethical purchase motives. Results showed a significant difference \( F(3,1277) = 4.15, p < 0.05 \), with Western religious consumers again expressing a greater motive for self \( (M = 3.10) \) in comparison to Eastern religious consumers \( (M = 2.83) \). In support of H2d and H3d, these findings lend further evidence to our prediction that Western religious consumers (who are more likely to have an independent self-construal) maintain a greater concern for the self than the nonreligious and Eastern religious consumers, which manifests itself in their purchase motivation.

The mediating effect of change efficacy on purchase intentions was examined using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) PROCESS macro (model 4) with bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) and 10,000 bootstrapped samples. After controlling for religiosity, results showed that change efficacy mediated the relationship between the religion x appeal interaction term and purchase intentions. The final mediation model revealed that change efficacy significantly influenced purchase intentions \( (\beta = 0.74; t = 7.83), p < 0.001; 95\%CI: 0.56, 0.93 \) leading the religion x appeal type interaction to become nonsignificant \( (\beta = -0.04; t = -0.42), p = 0.67; 95\%CI: -0.21, 0.14) \). Thus across two studies, we find that change efficacy intervenes in the relationship between the religion x appeal type interaction and Fair Trade purchase intentions (H4).

Finally, we tested the effect of change efficacy on ethical disengagement. Similar to Study 1, results showed that change efficacy significantly predicted ethical disengagement \( (\beta = 0.15; t = 2.51), p < 0.01 \). A mediation model was run using the PROCESS macro (model 4) with the religion x appeal type interaction as the independent variable, change efficacy as the mediator, ethical disengagement as the dependent variable, and religiosity as a control variable. The final mediation model showed that change efficacy positively influenced ethical disengagement \( (\beta = 0.20; t = 2.01), p < 0.05; 95\%CI: 0.01, 0.39 \) leading the religion x appeal type interaction and ethical disengagement relationship to become nonsignificant \( (\beta = -0.17; t = -1.82), p > 0.05; 95\%CI: -0.35, 0.01) \). This result provides further support for H5.

6.3 Discussion

Similar to Study 1, Western religious consumers were more motivated to purchase Fair Trade products when exposed to moral appeals and self-focused concerns, thereby further supporting H2a,b,c,d. We also find that Eastern religious consumers are motivated by justice-based appeals and other-focused actions, thereby supporting H3a,b,c,d. Also similar to Study 1, there was a positive effect of moral appeal exposure on change efficacy and ethical disengagement likelihood, thereby supporting H4 and H5. However, in contrast to Study 1 that only examined Western religious consumers, we show here that appeal type influences change efficacy and ethical disengagement likelihood for both Western and Eastern religious consumers, regardless of religiosity level.

7 General Discussion

Two studies explore the effect of religion on ethical consumption evaluations and response to marketing efforts featuring moral and justice appeals. This research provides novel contributions to the literature by providing one of the first examinations of nonreligious consumers in addition to Western and Eastern religious consumer perspectives on the use of moral and justice appeals to encourage ethical, Fair Trade consumption. Additionally, more novel and interesting results emerge as to how religion and consumption of ethical goods can actually increase ethical disengagement, thereby extending this paper to more than just confirmatory framing research. These findings also generally highlight the importance of understanding religion as a core consumer characteristic that influences behavior in the marketplace.

In addition to broad findings, these studies address the four purposes outlined in the introduction to this paper. First, Western religious consumers were influenced more by moral appeals in the evaluation of ethical products in Study 1, while nonreligious consumers responded more positively to justice appeals. Next, differences between consumers adhering to Western and Eastern faiths were found in showing that moral appeals were more effective at increasing ethical consumption for Western religious consumers, whereas justice appeals tended to be more effective at increasing ethical consumption for Eastern religious consumers. Thus, moral (justice) appeals can potentially be used to encourage ethical consumption for Western (Eastern) religious consumers. Lastly, the perception that one’s Fair Trade actions were making a difference was shown to lead to increased intention to purchase ethical products. Additionally, this research supports belief congruence (Rokeach, 1960) and behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) in showing that religious beliefs influence marketplace behavior.

In addition to theoretical contributions, this research provides practical implications for marketers. Especially in the religiously fragmented societies of today, finding ways that marketers can target different religious groups without explicit reference to these faiths is beneficial and necessary to effectively target religious consumers while at the same time not repelling nonreligious consumers (Minton, 2015, 2016, 2015, 2016). For example, marketers can use a moral or justice appeal when knowing their target market is predominately composed of Western, Eastern, or nonreligious consumers. Additionally, given the intervening role of efficacy in evaluation of ethical products and ethical disengagement, marketers can consider emphasizing efficacy in communications (e.g., saying that “you have the ability to make the right decision and help others”). Marketers can also develop programs to encourage efficacy, such as in-store donation programs, providing a product mix that contains a sufficient variety of ethical products, and ethical response...
initiatives (e.g., lobbying sign-up sheets, recycling containers, foods for a charity, etc.). In such situations, marketers may consider integrating religious belief cues in marketing efforts to increase ethical consumption practices as well.

Importantly, this research is also the first known study to investigate the potential negative psychological consequences of the perception that our actions are making a difference by showing that such perceptions enhance the likelihood of ethical disengagement. Building from the self-regulation literature (c.f., Khan & Dhar, 2006), the current work shows that consumers might give themselves a license to engage in behavior that they typically would not, after expressing the belief that their actions can make a difference on social problems. Though potentially complicating the benefits of targeting consumers for ethical behavior through the use of efficacy-based appeals, we think it is important to note the possible downstream effect of doing so. While not offering a prescriptive solution for how to combat this consequence of perceptions of influence, marketers should be aware of both the benefits and drawbacks of encouraging ethical consumption through efficacy-relevant marketing efforts.

Further, this research allows us to identify factors that underlie consumers’ willingness to pay a price premium for ethical goods. Across Studies 1 and 2, we find that moral appeals (as opposed to justice appeals) generated a higher willingness to pay among consumers, regardless of religious affiliation. This provides guidance to marketers attempting to generate acceptance and adoption for ethical products, even in the face of the price premiums commanded by these products. The finding that change efficacy is also an important variable influencing willingness to pay informs marketers, again underscoring the need to highlight an individual’s ability to make a difference through his or her ethical purchasing behavior.

Looking forward, there are many avenues for further research to better understand the role of religion and moral versus justice appeals in ethical consumption. For example, this research assessed ethical consumption in the form of Fair Trade consumption. Additionally, with such limited research examining Western versus Eastern religious consumers, more research needs to examine consumer behavior in general, and more specifically ethical consumption, with Eastern religious consumers. Additional research could also explore what the words “right” and “fair” (used to represent morality and justice, respectively) mean to consumers to better understand message response. Research also needs to identify other mediators and moderators influencing ethical consumption. In the studies herein, efficacy (mediator) and appeal type (moderator) were examined. Future research could consider the role of self-esteem, perceived persuasion, and social awareness as potential influencers to this relationship.

Also, while this research took a relatively comprehensive examination of message appeal type (moral vs. justice) on ethical product evaluations and ethical disengagement with different sample sources (MTurk panel, Qualtrics panel), future research could replicate the findings of the studies herein with other sample sources (e.g., a student sample or field study). This research is also limited by the use of mock stimuli, and as such, future research should replicate our findings with real marketing stimuli. Additionally, this research was conducted in the US, which means that findings are limited to one cultural context. The mono-culture focus of this research is a particularly important area for future research to address and expand upon given potentially muddy distinctions between culture (e.g., Western culture) and religious affiliations (e.g., Western religious affiliations). Further research needs to examine how cultural orientation (e.g., independent vs. interdependent or high vs. low context) influences religious consumers’ response to marketers’ use of moral and justice appeals.

In closing, religious institutions are an indelible force in contemporary society from both a social and political perspective. Given that the values derived from one’s religion significantly influences the actions and behaviors of an individual, religion is a core part of one’s being that permeates many facets of life. This research explores religious differences among consumers. We show that religious consumers vary in their responses to marketing messages featuring justice and moral appeals, which should influence the marketing of ethical goods.

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