Impulse buying, indulgence in sweets, response to advertisements, and other similar consumer behaviors are well documented outcomes of low self-control (c.f., Gillespie, Joireman, & Muehling, 2012; Moore & Lee, 2012; Trudel & Murray, 2013; Vohs, 2006). Marketers regularly employ tactics to encourage these behaviors, such as advertisements emphasizing the indulgent nature of foods or point of purchase displays featuring impulse items. Additionally, policy makers frequently develop initiatives and campaigns designed to encourage self-control, such as restricting the calorie content of kid's meals with toys (Strom, 2011) as well as trying to ban purchase of large size sodas (Conlay, 2015) or sodas with unlimited refills (John, 2017). While research has extensively explored consumer self-control and factors that reduce or enhance self-control, consumer research has yet to adequately examine the role of religiosity and monitoring in understanding self-control (Minton, 2015, 2018; Taylor, Halstead, & Haynes, 2010) as well as means for influencing such self-control (e.g., through priming), and how these factors differ when self-control resources are restricted.

Religiosity is a particularly worthy construct to explore in relation to self-controlled consumption behaviors because over 70% of people in the world are religious (Hunt & Penwell, 2008), and religion serves as a core source of values for many consumers (Minton & Kahle, 2014). If marketers are able to identify the motivators behind consumer self-control (e.g., religiosity), then they have the potential to encourage purchase of products assisting with a consumer's self-controlled action and assist consumers in living a healthier lifestyle. Additionally, knowledge in this area would help facilitate actions taken by policy makers and other consumer advocacy groups to encourage self-controlled consumption practices.

Research in psychology has identified religiosity as a key trait that influences self-control (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012; Geyer & Baumeister, 2005; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). According to the monitoring model of self-control, various sources of monitoring (self-monitoring, monitoring by others, or monitoring by God) influence self-control. As such, examination of monitoring builds off the literature on social influence and may help to explain...
how consumers’ self-controlled behaviors are different in social consumption settings (e.g., in a physical retail store, with friends at group-based service environments) as compared to nonsocial consumption settings (e.g., when shopping online, at a service experience where consumers do not see or engage with one another).

Prior research suggests that religious consumers feel a need to self-monitor or exhibit awareness of God or others monitoring what they do, thereby leading to behavioral regulation (Rounding et al., 2012). These monitoring needs likely originate from religious scripture references to a God or spirits monitoring the behavior of followers as well as accompanying social norms (Schmidt et al., 2014), thereby leading to a need to monitor one’s own actions to be in alignment with scriptural prescriptions and related social norms. Additionally, such monitoring references may lead to the perception that others are also monitoring their behaviors. Here, the question arises—is there a way to prime such monitoring behaviors in marketing messaging to encourage beneficial, self-controlled consumption behaviors?

Prior research suggests that one’s available self-control resources (i.e., self-control depletion; Trudel & Murray, 2013) and the general importance of behavior to one’s self (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Saroglou, 2011) are also relevant factors to take into consideration with self-control research, and therefore are studied here in the unique context of religion and consumer self-control. Understanding self-control depletion in religiosity’s influence on consumer self-control is particularly important given that prior research shows differences between religious and nonreligious consumers after resources have been depleted given that religious consumers have built up more self-control during their lifetime of religious practice and related regulation activities (e.g., following scriptural prescriptions) (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Friese & Wänke, 2014; Watterson & Giesler, 2012). However, research has yet to examine how depletion and monitoring interact to influence consumer self-control, which is a necessary area of further study given the prominence of resource depletion when consumers make decisions in the marketplace and the potential for monitoring primes to be used in marketing communications to facilitate consumer choice that contributes positively to one’s well-being.

In addition to exploring monitoring and depletion together, the research herein adds novel insight to this prior research from psychology to understand self-control in the context of consumer behavior where potential persuasive perceptions of marketing may skew consumers’ self-controlled responses. It could be presumed that monitoring would be greater when trust may be lower as a result of the persuasive context of marketing. Additionally, prior research has not adequately examined how policy makers and marketers may be able to influence consumers’ self-control by priming different forms of monitoring (e.g., monitoring by God, self, or others). Thus, the research herein contributes theoretical insight to the monitoring model of self-control and fills a gap in the literature by identifying how a consumer’s level of regulation importance, depleting self-control, and priming monitoring moderate the relationship between a consumer’s level of religiosity and self-controlled behaviors. Stated another way, this paper explores the influence of religiosity (IV) on consumer self-control (DV), as moderated by regulation importance and depletion as well as mediated by monitoring.

In examining these relationships, this research fulfills calls for further research on the relationship between religiosity and consumer self-control (Mathras et al., 2016). More specifically, this paper builds on the monitoring model of self-control to accomplish three purposes: (1) examine consumers’ perceived monitoring by others, self, and God as mediators between religiosity and consumer self-control, (2) test whether or not self-control depletion and regulation importance moderates these relationships, and (3) identify whether or not priming monitoring (others, self, and God) interacts with religiosity to influence consumer self-control and potentially provide policy makers and marketers a way to influence consumer self-control. Additionally, this research seeks to provide specific tactics that marketers, policy makers, and consumer advocacy groups can employ to encourage consumer engagement in and purchase of products related to self-controlled consumption practices. The sections to follow review the literature supporting each of these purposes before a conceptual model is developed to detail the proposed relationships among key constructs.

1 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

1.1 | Religiosity and consumer self-control

Self-regulation theory, in its most general sense, states that consumers try to control or restrict their behaviors (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012). McCullough and Willoughby (2009) define self-control as “the process by which a system uses information about its present state to change that state” (p. 71). In more detail, this theory describes that self-control (also sometimes referred to as self-regulation) involves inputs to identify the current situation, a comparator that compares the current situation to one’s goals or ideals (i.e., a form of monitoring behaviors), and outputs that represent the behavior that is performed to help match the current situation to one’s goals or ideals.

Research in marketing has extensively explored self-control. For example, higher self-control abilities can increase healthy consumption choices (Hassan, Shiu, & Michaelidou, 2010), improve financial decision making (Hernandez, Jonker, & Kosse, 2017; Howlett, Kees, & Kemp, 2008), and enhances following of doctor’s orders (Makarem et al., 2014). However, prior research assesses religiosity’s influence on broad self-controlled behavior.

Research specifically in the context of consumer self-control should differ from prior research on broad behaviors because consumer self-control often involves judgments of authenticity and trust of marketing communications in situations where monitoring by self and others is particularly prominent (Becherer & Richard, 1978). However, consumer self-control may differ based on available self-control resources, with religious consumers potentially having more self-control resources from religious practice (Baumeister,
showing that religiosity is positively correlated with self-monitoring and Carver (2012) provide evidence for this line of reasoning when religion fulfills a consumer's need for belonging, and religious institutions are a provider of social norms and consumers' behavioral expectations (Gebauer & Maio, 2012). However, other research shows that consumers who are motivated by external, social-based factors are less likely to follow many religious prescriptions or have these prescriptions influence actual behavior (Allport & Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985; Saroglou, 2002). Therefore, religiosity may positively influence self-monitoring and monitoring by God, while negatively influencing monitoring by others.

The monitoring model of self-control also coalesces with evolutionary theories of religion where religion is hypothesized as a tool to control and bring order to human behavior (Durkheim, 1912; Malinowski, 1935), with monitoring behaviors (whether self-monitoring, monitoring by others, or monitoring by God) helping to bring awareness and order to behavior. In sum, religious prescriptions may necessitate greater self-monitoring (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012), may lead to a lower susceptibility to social influence (i.e., monitoring by others; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), or may lead to a greater awareness of a God or divine being watching one's actions (i.e., monitoring by God; Rounding et al., 2012). While some researchers have found that monitoring by others or by God can then influence self-monitoring (cf., Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012, McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), it is expected that each type of monitoring directly influences behavior because individual processing capabilities (inclusive of religion) are used to assess potentially persuasive messages (Friestad & Wright, 1995). Additionally, many marketing messages are self-focused (Ferguson, Lau, & Phau, 2016), and, as such, marketing messages often trigger consumer monitoring (Becherer & Richard, 1978; Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; Graeff, 1996; Hogg, Cox, & Keeling, 2000; Kurt, Inman, & Argu, 2011; O’Cass, 2000). Despite this research on monitoring in consumer behavior, such consumer behavior research has yet to examine how religiosity might be driving these effects, nor differences between different forms of monitoring (monitoring by god, others, self) and various moderating effects. It is also expected that priming various types of monitoring will only strengthen this relationship, as consumers seek to behave in prime-consistent ways (Minton, Cornwell, & Kahle, 2016). Thus:

1.2 Religiosity and the monitoring model of self-control

According to the monitoring model of self-control, religious scripture contains many commandments that require self-monitoring to fulfill, thereby leading to greater self-control abilities (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012; Geyer & Baumeister, 2005). Carter, McCullough, and Carver (2012) provide evidence for this line of reasoning when showing that religiosity is positively correlated with self-monitoring, which is then positively correlated with self-control. Similarly, Rounding et al. (2012) discuss that religiosity may produce greater self-control because of beliefs in an ever-watching divine being (i.e., monitoring by God), leading religious consumers to exercise self-control to avoid punishment by such an omniscient being. In addition to self-monitoring and monitoring by God, a more social-oriented form of monitoring (monitoring by others) can also influence self-control. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) explain the positive relationship between religiosity and self-control by the many social sanctions within religious congregations that address one's failure to control their actions as well as recognition of these social sanctions requiring awareness of monitoring by others. This social-oriented explanation of monitoring fits with the research showing that religion fulfills a consumer's need for belonging, and religious institutions are a provider of social norms and consumers' behavioral expectations (Gebauer & Maio, 2012). However, other research shows that consumers who are motivated by external, social-based factors are less likely to follow many religious prescriptions or have these prescriptions influence actual behavior (Allport & Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985; Saroglou, 2002). Therefore, religiosity may positively influence self-monitoring and monitoring by God, while negatively influencing monitoring by others.

H1: Religiosity positively influences self-monitoring (H1a) and monitoring by God (H1b), while negatively influences monitoring by others (H1c). All forms of monitoring (H1a-c) then positively influences consumer self-control.

H2: The relationship between religiosity and all types of monitoring is stronger after exposure to respective monitoring primes.
1.3 | Moderating influence of available self-control resources and regulation importance

Consumers’ reliance on monitoring is likely to be altered by their available self-control resources (with greater monitoring when more resources are available; Trudel & Murray, 2013) and the importance of behavioral regulation (with more monitoring for more important behaviors; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). With regard to self-control depletion, research has shown that depleting self-control generally leads to more indulgent consumer decision making (Trudel & Murray, 2013). While consumer research has not examined interactions between depletion and religiosity, research in psychology shows that more religious consumers are more persistent in an unsolvable anagram task after self-control resources are depleted (Watterson & Giesler 2012). In contrast, no significant differences are found between high and low religiosity consumers when self-control resources are not depleted.

Consumers higher in religiosity likely exhibit more self-control after depletion due to continued awareness of God’s watching and a need for self-monitoring with the centrality of religious beliefs for these individuals. Additionally, research has shown that consistent practice at self-control (e.g., through continually following religious prescriptions) can increase an individual’s self-control capabilities (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Friese & Wänke, 2014; Watterson & Giesler 2012). More specifically, religious scripture dictates behaviors that need to be self-controlled by religious followers that are not otherwise communicated to the general public through social norms or other cultural standards (e.g., lusting after others), thereby potentially building self-control resources (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Muraven, Baumeister, and Tice (1999) provide evidence for this idea of practiced self-control by showing that two weeks of self-control exercises resulted in improved performance on self-control tasks. This idea of practiced self-control also fits with the literature on automaticity (Wood & Neal, 2009), such that continual participation in self-control activities produces habit strength (e.g., increased automaticity of self-controlled behavior).

More self-controlled behaviors are expected from consumers higher in religiosity more so than consumers less or not religious because they exhibit more devotion to their faith (i.e., religiosity) leading to a desire to follow monitoring-based scripture and participate in religious practices that facilitates growth of self-control resources. Given that all consumers, regardless of religiosity, have at least some level of self-control resources, differences in self-controlled behaviors among religiosity levels are expected to be the greatest after self-control has been depleted. This expectation is a result of less or nonreligious consumers potentially having all self-control resources gone after the depletion activity, while consumers higher in religiosity having extra self-control resources gained through strict adherence to monitoring prescriptions or from additional reserves gained through self-control-based religious practice (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012).

From a marketing standpoint, if monitoring and resulting self-control can be grown, then there is potential for policy or federally funded programs to burgeon self-control for all consumers. Additionally, this research on self-control growth suggests that consumers higher in religiosity should exhibit more self-controlled behaviors after depletion in comparison to consumers lower in religiosity (or not at all religious), and thereby have more resources for monitoring as well. However, given that a negative relationship between religiosity and monitoring by others is proposed in H1, religious consumers are only expected to have higher levels of self-monitoring and monitoring by God after depletion. Thus:

**H3:** Consumers higher in religiosity report higher self-monitoring (H3a) and monitoring by God (H3b) after self-control depletion in comparison to consumers lower in religiosity (or not at all religious).

In addition to the moderating influence of available self-control resources, perceived regulation importance is also likely to influence consumers’ behavioral monitoring and self-control. Prior research shows that some behaviors are regulated more and/or are more important to regulate (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Saroglou, 2011). In addition, a key component of self-control is motivation, which regulation importance influences (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). This reasoning fits with prior research showing that motivation is an important component of self-control, such that higher motivation leads to resistance to self-control depletion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Trudel & Murray, 2013; Walsh, 2014). Additionally, research suggests that regulation importance may help to explain motives behind consumer self-control. Relating regulation importance to the earlier discussion on self-control depletion, it could be expected that when self-control is depleted (and therefore cognitive resources are limited), a consumer’s leftover self-control is used to regulate behaviors that are deemed as more important to regulate (Gillespie, Joreman, & Muehling, 2012; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Trudel & Murray, 2013). While prior research has examined religiosity and monitoring (c.f., Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012), this research was conducted in one context with consumer self-control and perseverance. Thus, the relationship between regulation importance, religiosity, and monitoring has yet to be explored. Given earlier theorizing, consumers higher in religiosity are expected to exhibit greater monitoring (particularly for self-monitoring and monitoring by God) and self-control, after resource depletion (Watterson & Giesler 2012). Arguably, this pattern of effects should be stronger for behaviors deemed as important to regulate. Thus:

**H4:** Regulation importance moderates the relationship between religiosity and monitoring, such that behaviors that are more (less) important to regulate produce more (less) self-monitoring and monitoring by God, especially for consumers higher in religiosity and when self-control is depleted.

To test these hypotheses, thereby filling a gap in the literature and contributing novel insight to the monitoring model of self-control and the literature on self-control depletion, Studies 1 and 2 examine how...
religiosity (IV) influences self-monitoring, monitoring by others, and monitoring by God (mediators) and resulting consumer self-control (DV). These studies also examine the moderating influence of available self-control resources and regulation importance. Specifically, Study 1 will examine religiosity’s influence on monitoring and consumer self-control (H1), as moderated by available self-control resources (H3) and regulation importance (H4). Study 2 will then examine how the influence of religiosity on consumer self-control is moderated by monitoring primes (H2) and self-control depletion (H3). Stated simply, Studies 1 and 2 examine religiosity (IV) as a determinant to self-controlled consumption behaviors (DV). See Figure 1 for a conceptual diagram. Broadly, these studies seek to contribute to self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control with unique insight as to how depletion and monitoring interact, how monitoring can be primed, and how regulation importance interacts with these dimensions to influence self-control in the unique context of consumption behavior where skepticism is likely to be higher than previously studied contexts outside of marketing. Additionally, the findings from these studies provide the basis for suggestions for marketers, policy makers, and consumer advocacy groups as to ways to encourage purchase of and engagement in self-control-related consumption practices.

2 | STUDY 1: RELIGIOSITY AND CONSUMER SELF-CONTROL AS MEDIATED BY MONITORING

This study seeks to understand the influence of religiosity on self-monitoring (H1a), monitoring by God (H1b), and monitoring by others (H1c) as well as moderating effects with self-control depletion (H3) and regulation importance (H4).

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Two-hundred and one U.S. adults ($M_{age} = 35.87, SD = 12.41; 46.3\%$ female) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk participated in this study in exchange for a small cash incentive. The religious breakdown of participants was: 24.3% Protestant, 20.3% Catholic, 1.5% Muslim, 2.5% Buddhist, 8.9% Spiritual, 20.8% Agnostic, 16.8% Atheist, and 5.0% other. Ethnic diversity of the sample consisted of participants that were 74.5% Caucasian, 11.0% Hispanic or Latino, 9.0% Asian, 4.5% African American or Black, 0.5% Native American or Native Alaska, and 0.5% Middle Eastern. Additionally, demographic information revealed that 56.5% of participants had completed an undergraduate degree, 47% had an average household income exceeding $50,000, and 40.0% were married. An additional three participants started the survey but dropped out before any meaningful data was collected, and therefore their data is not included as part of this study.

2.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one condition of a 2 (self-control depletion: yes, no) x 2 (regulation importance: high—over-spending, low—eating unhealthy) x continuous (religiosity) between subjects design. Note that for both Studies 1 and 2, the design used is not truly random in that participants’ religiosity was measured and not manipulated (i.e., not randomly assigned). Participants were told at the beginning of the survey as well as in recruitment messaging that they were completing a survey on their behaviors and thoughts of advertisements as well as psychological factors. Each participant responded to purchase intention, monitoring, self-control, instructional check, religiosity, and demographic questions, in that order.

2.1.3 | Measures

Self-control depletion was manipulated using a procedure developed by Rounding et al. (2012). Participants in the depletion condition were asked to copy three sentences of text from a picture into a text box, omitting every letter “e,” “s,” and space. Participants in the no depletion condition were asked to copy the same three sentences of text exactly as pictured into a text box. A passage of text on Zebras was used given that it was not related to self-control, religion, or self-controlled consumption behaviors. Awareness of condition was
assessed with an instructional check asking participants whether or not they were told to omit letters and spaces from the text copying exercise at the beginning of the study.

High (overspending) and low (unhealthy eating) importance of behavioral regulation was manipulated using advertisements and surrounding text. Eating unhealthy and overspending were pre-tested to show that they significantly differed in the importance of limiting the behavior (five-point scales, endpoints: not important/important), $M_{eat} = 3.63$, $SD = 1.35$, $M_{spend} = 4.12$, $SD = 1.26$, $t(29) = 3.21$, $p = 0.003$, but did not differ in other behavior characteristics (perceived social sanctions, sinfulness, and consequences).

In both the high and low importance of behavioral regulation conditions, participants were instructed to, “Imagine that you are standing in the magazine aisle of the grocery store. You are flipping through a magazine and see the ad below.” To assess unhealthy eating (low regulation importance), participants were shown an ad for cupcakes. To assess overspending (high regulation importance), participants were shown an ad for fruit cups along with supplemental text telling the participant to, “Take into consideration that you have already used your preset budget for groceries for the week.” Resisting purchase of the unhealthy cupcakes or overspending on fruit cups represents self-controlled behavior because consumers must resist the temptation to eat unhealthy (cupcakes) or spend beyond means (fruit cups with set budget). Product type (food) was maintained consistent across conditions to reduce potential confounds. See Figure 2 for mock stimuli.

**FIGURE 2** Mock advertisements by regulation importance (Study 1)
between the products featured in the ads, participants were asked their perceptions of the product (either cupcakes or fruit cups) on five, seven-point bipolar scales (endpoints: cheap/expensive, not desirable/desirable, dislike/like, untasty/tasty, unhealthy/healthy). As expected, there were no significant differences between foods, except for healthiness perceptions, \( M_{\text{cupcakes}} = 6.28, \; SD = 1.03, \; M_{\text{fruit cups}} = 2.31, \; SD = 1.50, \; t(199) = 3.97, \; p < 0.001 \).

Scales of self-monitoring (\( \alpha = 0.896 \)), monitoring by others (\( \alpha = 0.971 \)), and monitoring by God (\( \alpha = 0.984 \)) were adapted from Carter, McCullough, and Carver (2012) to represent monitoring in relation to a purchase consideration, with each item being measured on a nine-point scale ranging from not at all to very true. For example, one of the monitoring by others statements was changed from “I often feel as though I am being evaluated by others” to “In considering purchasing the food in the ad, I would feel as though my decisions are being evaluated by other people.” Additionally, three items (measured on seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) were developed to measure consumers’ self-controlled behaviors: (1) I feel like I have the self-control to resist buying the food in the ad, (2) Right now, I feel like I have strong self-control abilities, and (3) I feel that I can resist indulgences right now; \( \alpha = 0.880 \). Finally, a scale of purchase intentions was used to assess participation in a regulated behavior. Purchase intentions were measured with four items on seven-point bipolar scales: not interested/interested, unlikely/likely, definitely would not/definitely would, and not probable/probable; \( \alpha = 0.973 \).

Religiosity was measured using Minton’s (2015) religiosity scale, which was chosen for this research because it includes questions that assess a consumer’s affective (e.g., feelings of personal closeness with a divine being), behavioral (e.g., religious service attendance), and cognitive (e.g., beliefs about the inerrancy of scripture) religiosity. These dimensions match the original dimensions of religiosity conceptualized by Stark and Glock (1968). More specifically, Minton’s (2015) religiosity scale consists of twelve questions generally measured on seven-point Likert scales, with five affective religiosity questions (e.g., “My relationship with God is an important part of my life”), three behavioral religiosity questions (e.g., “How often do you attend religious services”), and four cognitive religiosity questions (e.g., “The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God”). Given that all dimensions can be related to self-control with no significant differences between dimensions, religiosity in both Study 1 and 2 is examined as a single scale (\( \alpha = 0.976 \)). In addition, age, gender, and income were included as control variables because these variables have been shown to be potential correlates in religiosity and consumption research (Bailey & Sood, 1993; Minton, Kahle, Jiano, & Timby, 2016).

### 2.2 Results

Only one participant missed the product instructional check, and no participants missed the depletion instructional check, leaving 200 participants in the dataset for further analysis.

Next, analyses were conducted to assess the influence of religiosity (independent variable) on types of monitoring (mediator) and resulting effects on consumer self-control (dependent variable), thereby testing H1. Additionally, the moderators of self-control depletion (H2) and regulation importance (H3) were tested. To assess mediation with self-monitoring (H1a), monitoring by God (H1b), and monitoring by others (H1c) through consumers’ self-controlled behaviors to purchase intentions, Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro model 6 was used with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals. Three models were run to assess mediation through (1) self-monitoring, (2) monitoring by others, and (3) monitoring by God. Note that for all model statistics, a confidence interval not containing zero represents significance at a 95% confidence level. See Table 1 for the mean values on the mediator and dependent variables by religiosity level and condition (depleted vs. not depleted and high vs. low regulation importance).

Before exploring moderating effects, main effects were tested from religiosity to consumers’ self-controlled behaviors, as mediated by depletion and regulation importance, condition, religiosity level, and outcome measures (study 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation importance</th>
<th>Purchase intentions</th>
<th>Self-monitor</th>
<th>Others monitor</th>
<th>God-monitor</th>
<th>Self-control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High religiosity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes depletion</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No depletion</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low religiosity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes depletion</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No depletion</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For the purposes of generating this table, a spotlight analysis was used at ± one standard deviation from the mean for religiosity (\( M = 3.51, \; SD = 2.08 \)) to generate low and high religiosity values. High regulation importance represents overspending and low regulation importance represents unhealthy eating.
by the three types of monitoring. Significant mediating effects through self-monitoring (effect = 0.0289, CI: 0.0056–0.0664) and monitoring by others (effect = –0.0173, CI: –0.0512 to –0.0020) were found. Specifically, religiosity was positively correlated with both types of monitoring, and then self-monitoring (monitoring by others) led to higher (lower) self-control, thereby supporting H1a (self-monitoring) and H1c (monitoring by others). There were no significant mediating effects through monitoring by God (effect = –0.0332, CI: –0.0831 to 0.0248), thereby not supporting H1b (monitoring by god). Analyses then proceeded to examine moderating effects with depletion and regulation importance.

To better understand how conditions and religiosity influenced monitoring by others and monitoring by God, linear regression was conducted. The model was significant when including religiosity and the two-way interaction between depletion and regulation importance conditions in predicting monitoring by others, F(7, 193) = 4.07, p < 0.001, and monitoring by God, F(7, 193) = 14.13, p < 0.001. For monitoring by others, the two-way interaction (b = 1.57, p = 0.013) and religiosity (b = 0.22, p = 0.006) both positively influenced monitoring. Additionally, for monitoring by God, the two-way interaction (b = 1.37, p = 0.010) and religiosity (b = 0.60, p < 0.001) both positively influenced monitoring. Similar to the results for consumers higher in religiosity and self-monitoring, depletion led to higher monitoring for the advertisement featuring a behavior that was more important to regulate (overspending) and lower monitoring for the advertisement featuring a behavior that was less important to regulate (unhealthy eating).

Interestingly, the two-way interaction between religiosity and depletion condition was not significant for any form of monitoring, thereby not supporting H2; however, the expected pattern of effects (i.e., highly religious people having greater monitoring after depletion) occurred with the three-way interaction for high regulation importance behaviors, thereby supporting H3a and H3b. Stated more concisely, behaviors that were more important to regulate (overspending) and lower monitoring for the advertisement featuring a behavior that was less important to regulate (unhealthy eating).

For self-monitoring, the three-way interaction among depletion condition (H2), regulation importance condition (H3), and religiosity had a significant indirect effect through self-monitoring and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (effect = –0.0462, CI: –0.1277 to –0.0102). Specifically, the three-way interaction significantly influenced self-monitoring (b = 0.86, p = 0.004), self-monitoring significantly influenced consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (b = 0.10, p = 0.016), and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors significantly influenced purchase intentions (b = –0.52, p < 0.001). A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean for religiosity (M = 3.51, SD = 2.08) was conducted for self-monitoring to examine this interaction; see Figure 3. Results showed that consumers higher (lower) in religiosity were more likely to self-monitor in response to an advertisement featuring a behavior higher in regulation importance (overspending) when self-control was (was not) depleted. In contrast, consumers higher (lower) in religiosity were more likely to self-monitor in response to an advertisement featuring a behavior lower in regulation importance (unhealthy eating) when self-control was not (was) depleted. Higher self-monitoring then led to higher self-controlled behaviors, which resulted in lower purchase intentions.

The indirect effects on purchase intentions for conditions, religiosity, or the interactions among these were not significant through monitoring by others or monitoring by God, mostly due to weak correlations between monitoring by others/god and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (r_monitoring by others = –0.138, r_monitoring by God = –0.146, p = 0.048). Interestingly, these weak correlations were in the opposite direction of correlations for self-monitoring. Specifically, high self-monitoring was positively correlated with consumers’ self-controlled behaviors, while high monitoring by others or by God was negatively correlated with consumers’ self-controlled behaviors. Mediation models were run to assess the possibility of further serial mediation from monitoring by God or monitoring by others to self-monitoring, and none of these serial models were significant.

### 2.3 Discussion

Providing support for the monitoring model of self-control, results from this study show that high self-monitoring leads to higher self-control and higher regulated consumer decision making, thereby supporting H1a. In contrast, perceptions of being monitored by others or God reduces self-control, which leads to less self-control,
thereby supporting H1c but not H1b. This negative relationship was expected for monitoring by others (H1c) given the focus on external, social-based motives for behavior (Donahue, 1985, Saroglou, 2002, Allport and Ross 1967); however, this pattern of effects was not expected for monitoring by God (H1b). The negative relationship with monitoring by God could be due to it being associated with public self-consciousness, which is positively correlated with anxiety and negatively correlated with self-control (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012). Alternatively, research on the locus of control could be used to explain the negative relationship between monitoring by God and self-control. Specifically, an internal locus of control should produce more internal monitoring mechanisms (i.e., self-monitoring), while an external locus of control should produce more external monitoring mechanisms (i.e., monitoring by God and also monitoring by others). Merging together the literature on self-control and consumption sacredness (c.f., Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989), it is also possible that consumers are reacting to the possibility that the sacred (monitoring by God) is integrated into the secular (consumption practices). This latter explanation is particularly worthy of marketer attention in the case that consumers may not want to see reference to the sacred within secular marketing communications. In any case, these findings suggest a boundary condition to the overlap of self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control, such that monitoring by God does not always influence self-controlled behaviors.

Results from this study show a three-way interaction among religiosity, depletion condition, and regulation importance condition. While consumers higher in religiosity reported less self-monitoring (resulting in lower self-control) for the advertisement featuring a low regulation importance behavior (unhealthy eating) after self-control resources were depleted, consumers lower in religiosity (or not at all religious) reported the opposite. Specifically, consumers lower in religiosity reported lower self-monitoring for the advertisement featuring the low regulation importance when self-control was not depleted, thereby not supporting H2 but supporting H3. Interestingly, consumers higher in religiosity reported higher self-monitoring of overspending (resulting in higher self-control), a behavior deemed as more important to regulate, after depletion. In contrast, consumers lower in religiosity (or not at all religious) reported the opposite. However, the finding that consumers higher in religiosity exhibit more self-controlled responses to advertising regardless of depletion contradicts prior research on religiosity and self-control depletion, which suggests that differences in self-control should be evident only after depletion (c.f., Watterson & Giesler 2012). These differences could be due to the context of marketing producing a more evaluative mindset or evoking persuasion knowledge (Frierstad & Wright, 1995), leading to greater self-control than when not exposed to such advertising.

To make these findings more relevant for marketers, policy makers, and consumer advocacy groups, it is beneficial to identify ways that monitoring can be primed to increase consumers’ self-controlled behaviors. Prior research has shown that priming specific self-control goals or information processing focus can influence self-controlled consumption behaviors with implications for public policy (Haws, Davis, & Dholakia, 2016; Trudel & Murray, 2013; Walsh, 2014); however, research has yet to examine how priming various types of monitoring influences consumer self-control and associated policy outcomes. Exploring monitoring primes is especially important because priming provides policy makers and marketers a way to potentially encourage consumer self-control and evaluation of self-control-related goods and services. For example, a marketer could create an ad that asks a question about the last time the consumer self-monitored how their behavior influences their well-being, how others’ observation of their behavior influences their decision making, or how God would respond if seeing one’s personal consumption behaviors (again the latter perhaps not as advisable given the negative relationship between monitoring by God and self-controlled consumption behaviors found in this study).

It is expected that consumers will act in prime consistent ways, such that being primed with any type of monitoring leads to greater perceptions of that type of monitoring, which should produce greater consumer self-control. Thus, Study 2 proceeds to examine religiosity’s relationship with consumer self-control, as moderated by monitoring primes and self-control depletion. Regulation importance is not included as a third moderator to simplify the study design as well as identify if monitoring primes can be used to increase consumer self-control specifically in a behavior with low regulation importance (an area hypothesized as having lower self-control in comparison to high regulation importance behaviors).

2.4 Study 2: Religiosity and consumer self-control as influenced by monitoring primes

This study seeks to understand how religiosity’s influence on consumer self-control is mediated by monitoring (testing H1 and confirming the results from Study 1), is influenced by priming self-monitoring, monitoring by others, or monitoring by God (testing H2), especially when consumers’ self-control is depleted (testing H3).

2.5 Method

Participants. Four hundred and two U.S. adults ($M_{age} = 35.82$, SD = 12.18; 55.2% female) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk participated in this study in exchange for a small cash incentive. The religious breakdown of participants was: 36.3% Protestant, 15.9% Catholic, 0.7% Muslim, 2.0% Buddhist, 7.2% Spiritual, 15.7% Agnostic, 16.7% Atheist, and 5.7% other. Ethnic diversity of the sample consisted of participants that were 74.7% Caucasian, 6.8% Hispanic or Latino, 6.6% Asian, 10.9% African American or Black, 0.3% Native American or Native Alaska, and 0.8% Middle Eastern. Additionally, demographic information revealed that 62.7% of participants had completed an undergraduate degree, 49.1% had an average household income exceeding $50,000%, and 42.5% were married. An additional 28 participants started the survey but dropped out before any meaningful data was collected, and therefore their data is not included as part of this study.
2.5.1 | Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one condition of a 2 (self-control depletion: yes, no) x 4 (monitoring prime: none, self, others, God) x continuous (religiosity) between subjects design. Similar to Study 1, participants were told both at the beginning of the survey and in the survey recruitment materials that they were completing a survey on their behaviors and thoughts of advertisements as well as psychological factors. Each participant saw a depletion condition followed by a monitoring prime before seeing an advertisement and responding to purchase intention, monitoring, self-control, instructional check, religiosity, and demographic questions, in that order.

2.5.2 | Measures

Self-control depletion was manipulated using the same procedure as used in Study 1, and the same instructional check was also used. Monitoring was primed using a sentence writing task asking participants to write at least three sentences about “how you monitor your actions throughout the day” (self-monitoring prime), “how you feel like other people monitor your actions throughout the day” (monitoring by others prime), “how you feel like God monitors your actions throughout the day” (monitoring by God prime), or “your day so far” (control condition). To measure awareness of this manipulation, an instructional check question asked participants at the end of the study what they wrote about at the beginning of the study with the four monitoring choices (self-monitoring, monitoring by others, monitoring by God, or your day so far).

The same scales as used in Study 1 were also used in Study 2 to measure religiosity ($\alpha = 0.976$), self-monitoring ($\alpha = 0.874$), monitoring by others ($\alpha = 0.959$), monitoring by God ($\alpha = 0.965$), consumers’ self-controlled behaviors ($\alpha = 0.938$), and purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.968$). All participants responded to purchase intentions and other dependent variables for an advertisement for an ice cream shop. The behavior of less importance to regulate (unhealthy eating) was chosen for the context for Study 2 to identify if monitoring primes can be used to increase consumer self-control in an area where self-control may not normally be exhibited given its lower importance. Similar to Study 1, age and gender were included as controls.

2.6 | Results

Four participants missed the monitoring instructional check, and an additional three participants missed the depletion instructional check, leaving 395 participants in the dataset for further analysis.

Similar to Study 1, analyses were conducted to assess the influence of religiosity (independent variable) through types of monitoring (mediator) on consumer self-control and purchase intentions (dependent variables). Additionally, moderators of depletion condition and monitoring primes were explored. First, direct effects of religiosity and moderators on purchase intentions were examined. The full model including all control variables, main effects, two-way interaction effects, and three-way interaction effects was significant, $F(17, 377) = 2.43, p = 0.001$. Only the three-way interaction among religiosity, monitoring by others prime condition, and depletion condition was marginally significant ($b = 0.45, p = 0.067$). A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean for religiosity ($M = 3.88, SD = 2.08$) was conducted to examine this three-way interaction effect; see Figure 4. Note that while direct effects were not significant for self-monitoring and monitoring by God, these conditions are displayed in Figure 4 for visual comparison. A spotlight analysis revealed that for consumers higher in religiosity, the monitoring by others prime increased purchase intentions, regardless of depletion condition. However, for consumers lower in religiosity, self-control depletion (no depletion) increased purchase intentions in the control (monitoring by others prime) condition. A similar pattern of effects occurred for consumers’ self-controlled behaviors.

To assess mediation to consumers’ self-controlled behaviors and purchase intentions through self-monitoring, monitoring by others, and monitoring by God, Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro (model 6) was used with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals. Monitoring primes were treated as dummy coded conditions in comparison to the no monitoring prime condition, such that there were three dummy codes (self-monitoring vs. control, monitoring by God vs. control, monitoring by others vs. control). Three models were run to assess mediation through (1) self-monitoring, (2) monitoring by others, and (3) monitoring by God. Note that

![Figure 4](image-url)
for all model statistics, a confidence interval not containing zero represents significance at a 95% confidence level. See Table 2 for mean values by condition and religiosity level for each type of monitoring, consumers’ self-controlled behaviors, and purchase intentions.

Similar to Study 1, mediation of the main effect from religiosity to consumer self-control was first examined before moderating hypotheses were tested. A significant mediating effect through self-monitoring (effect = 0.0086, CI: 0.0003–0.0262) was found, while nonsignificant effects that followed the pattern of results expected were found for monitoring by others (effect = –0.0047, CI: –0.0175 to 0.0023) and monitoring by god (effect = –0.0340, CI: –0.0782 to 0.0063). These findings support H1a but not H1b or H1c as well as show the importance of examining moderating effects. Thus, the next set of analyses tested the moderating influence of monitoring prime condition and self-control depletion.

For self-monitoring, the two-way interaction among depletion condition and religiosity had a significant indirect effect through self-monitoring and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (effect = –0.0100, CI: –0.0272 to –0.0013), thereby supporting H2. Specifically, the two-way interaction significantly influenced self-monitoring (b = 0.30, p = 0.007), self-monitoring significantly influenced consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (b = 0.08, p = 0.014), and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors significantly influenced purchase intentions (b = –0.43, p < 0.001). The direct effect of the two-way interaction on purchase intentions was not significant (effect = –0.1144, CI: –0.2761 to 0.0473). Additionally, participants in the self-monitoring prime condition were marginally more likely to self-monitor than those in the control condition (b = 0.76, p = 0.053).

A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean for religiosity for self-monitoring was conducted to examine this interaction. Results showed that consumers higher (lower) in religiosity were more likely to self-monitor when self-control was (was not) depleted, regardless of monitoring prime condition, thereby supporting H3a. Similar to Study 1, there were no significant indirect effects on purchase intentions through monitoring by God, thereby not supporting H3b.

Additionally, for monitoring by others, there were significant indirect effects on purchase intentions for religiosity (effect = 0.0032, CI: 0.0002 to 0.0103) and the monitoring by others prime (effect = 0.0227, CI: 0.0020 to 0.0666). The direct effect of religiosity on purchase intentions was significant (b = 0.18, p < 0.001), but the direct effect of the monitoring by others prime condition was not significant (b = 0.11, p = 0.61). Specifically, religiosity (b = 0.12, p = 0.033) and the monitoring by others prime (b = 0.81, p = 0.003) positively influenced monitoring by others. This monitoring then negatively influenced consumers’ self-controlled behaviors (b = −0.07, p = 0.041), and consumers’ self-control behaviors then negatively influenced purchase intentions (b = −0.42, p < 0.001), thereby supporting H2. Simply, higher religiosity or exposure to the monitoring by others prime led to lower consumer self-control, evidenced by higher ice cream purchase intentions.

### 2.7 Discussion

Similar to Study 1, self-monitoring (monitoring by others) positively (negatively) influenced consumer self-control, thereby supporting
H1a and H1b. Unlike Study 1, monitoring by God did not influence self-control, thereby not supporting H1c; however, this relationship was weak in Study 1 with a significant correlation but no significant indirect effects on purchase intentions, so the nonsignificant relationship in Study 2 is not surprising. Additionally, religiosity interacts with depletion to influence self-monitoring and resulting self-controlled behaviors, thereby supporting H3a. Similar to Study 1, the moderating effect of depletion condition does not influence monitoring by god, thereby not supporting H3b.

Of greater interest than simple correlations is the influence of monitoring primes on consumer self-control, monitoring, and resulting indulgent purchase intentions. Both the monitoring primes for self-monitoring and monitoring by others increased subsequent perceived monitoring, thereby supporting H2. Similar to the measured variable for monitoring by God, the monitoring by God prime had no significant effects. Most interestingly, the only three-way interaction to emerge among monitoring prime condition, depletion condition, and religiosity was for the monitoring by others prime on purchase intentions. For consumers lower in religiosity, exposure to the control condition (monitoring by others prime condition) produced higher (lower) purchase intentions when self-control was depleted. This finding could be due to self-monitoring already being higher than other types of monitoring in response to marketing messages, allowing for greater change in perceptions of monitoring by others in response to monitoring primes. Additionally, several studies show that perceived monitoring by God is weak or nonexistent in general daily behaviors (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012). These findings again provide a unique boundary condition to self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control to show that monitoring by God may not always be effective at increasing self-controlled behavior, particularly in marketing contexts where skepticism over marketing practices is higher (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005).

Given that purchase intentions is an indicator of indulgence (i.e., purchase likelihood for ice cream), the study results show that depletion reduces consumers’ self-controlled behaviors for consumers lower in religiosity, as suggested by prior research on resource depletion (Gillespie, Joireman, & Muehling, 2012; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Trudel & Murray, 2013). These findings also highlight the necessity of marketer intervention (or public service campaigns by policy makers or consumer advocacy groups) to use monitoring primes in messaging to encourage self-controlled consumption behaviors in settings where it is already well known that consumers lack regulatory resources from the sheer quantity of inputs received in consumption environments (Wansink & Sobal, 2007).

3 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Religiosity, monitoring, and self-control depletion play important roles in understanding consumer self-control, thereby contributing novel theoretical insight to self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 2001) and the monitoring model of self-control (Rounding et al., 2012). The studies herein show that while religiosity is positively correlated with consumers’ self-controlled behaviors, many other factors including monitoring primes, self-control depletion, and regulation importance need to be considered in a comprehensive model depicting the relationship between religiosity and consumer self-control. More broadly, these studies fulfill the three purposes set forth in the introduction as well as the recent call for more research examining the relationship between religiosity and consumer self-control (Mathras et al., 2016). In doing so, this research fulfills a gap in the literature with understanding how monitoring primes can influence the relationship between religiosity and self-control as well as extensions to the context of consumer behavior.

First, consumers’ perceived monitoring during response to marketing communications was measured to find that self-monitoring led to greater self-control, while monitoring by others or monitoring by God led to lower self-control (or sometimes a nonsignificant relationship for monitoring by God). This finding is particularly interesting in that it shows a boundary condition to the merging of self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control, such that monitoring by God is not always effective at increasing self-controlled behaviors, particularly in a consumption environment that is filled with higher skepticism (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005), lower cognitive resource availability (Wansink & Sobal, 2007), and possibly reservation about the sacred and secular being mixed together (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Minton, 2016).

Second, moderators of self-control depletion and regulation importance were tested, with results showing that when faced with self-control depletion, religious consumers, in particular, exhibited greater self-control in response to marketing communications featuring behaviors deemed as more important to regulate. This finding is beneficial for marketing practitioners in showing that priming monitoring may be a way to facilitate consumers to make positive choices in the marketplace.

Lastly, the influence of monitoring primes on consumer self-control were tested, showing that the most influential prime consisted of a monitoring by others prime for consumers lower in religiosity (or those not at all religious). This finding again provides beneficial insight to marketing practitioners desiring to increase purchase of self-control-related products as well as policy makers or consumer advocacy groups desiring to promote self-controlled consumption practices.

3.1 | Theoretical implications

In addressing these purposes, this research builds on self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 2001) and the monitoring model of self-control (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012; Geyer & Baumeister, 2005), particularly in showing that self-monitoring and monitoring by others represent important factors in understanding the relationship between religiosity and self-control. Whether
monitoring is measured or manipulated, the findings from Studies 1 and 2 show a consistent relationship between monitoring and consumer self-control. Though interestingly, the findings from the studies herein highlight a boundary condition to the merging of self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control, such that monitoring by God may actually decrease self-controlled behavior in the context of the marketplace, following the reasoning described earlier.

Also of interest, past research suggested that both self-monitoring and monitoring by others should lead to increased self-control through a need for greater awareness of one’s actions in relation to religious rules and tenets (c.f., Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012) as well as awareness of social sanctions for not fulfilling such rules and tenets (c.f., McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). The results from Studies 1 and 2 confirm and extend this prior research to show a negative influence of monitoring by others on self-control, which is moderated by regulation importance and self-control depletion. Again, these findings highlight another boundary condition when extending self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control to a consumption environment. As such, this research contributes to the monitoring model of self-control to show that monitoring can be primed, is heightened with high regulation importance behaviors, and is influenced by self-control depletion.

Interestingly, the largest changes in self-monitoring occur for consumers higher in religiosity. Thus, it could be assumed that consumers higher in religiosity are focusing self-control resources so that response to advertisements featuring behaviors more in need of regulation (overspending) are insured to be monitored, even in times of limited self-control. In contrast, response to advertisements featuring behaviors that are less important to regulate (e.g., unhealthy eating) can be given into. This reasoning fits with prior research that suggests that motivation is a component of self-control, such that higher motivation (e.g., for a behavior deemed as important to regulate) can compensate for self-control depletion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Trudel & Murray, 2013). Specifically, Trudel and Murray (2013) describe that “consumers might actively conserve resources and perhaps even choose to fail when less motivated, in order to ensure that resources are available for other self-regulatory tasks” (p. 72). These findings highlight the need for a new model of self-control (building off self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control) in the consumption domain that incorporates regulation importance, religiosity, and factors unique to the marketplace environment—namely, skepticism, cognitive resource availability, and mixing of the sacred and secular.

### 3.2 Contributions for practitioners and policymakers

In addition to theoretical contributions and consumers’ individual increased awareness of their own monitoring behaviors, the results from the studies herein provide insight for marketers, policy makers, and consumer advocacy groups. First, it is important for any marketer or policy maker to understand the demographic and psychographic composition of their target market. If marketing specifically to a religious audience or to a geographic region known to be more religious, references to the importance of or even scripture related to regulating certain types of behaviors (e.g., not overspending) could be used in advertisements in an effort to increase adoption of self-control-related policies or improve attitudes toward relevant products and services (e.g., for a budgeting program or the sale of wallets). As mentioned earlier, policy makers frequently try to find support for initiatives that encourage consumer self-control, such as restricting toys in high calorie kid’s meals (Strom, 2011) or various bans on sugary sodas (Conlay, 2015; John, 2017). Given the greatest influence of self-monitoring on consumer self-control behaviors, policy makers should consider ways to integrate self-monitoring vocabulary in press releases regarding policy as well as devise self-monitoring awareness programs alongside self-control oriented policies. However, our findings suggest that God monitoring primes would not be an effective way to encourage self-control, perhaps because of hesitation regarding mixing the sacred (religion) and the secular (consumption) (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Minton, 2016). Instead, marketers should seek use self-monitoring primes most, and other-monitoring primes second.

In addition, the studies herein provide insight as to how depleted consumers make decisions differently than nondepleted consumers, which is especially pertinent given the abundance of information in the marketplace and the ease of consumer self-control becoming depleted. In scenarios of likely self-control depletion (e.g., a trade show, casino, crowded grocery store), religious consumers are likely to shift resources to more important behaviors to regulate, leading to increased impulsive purchasing of products related to less important behaviors to regulate (e.g., unhealthy eating). Marketers could take advantage of this by placing advertisements and associated items of least importance to regulate (e.g., cake) near impulse areas in the store, or better yet, assisting consumers in making better decisions by placing marketing communications and associated items of more importance to regulate (e.g., gift cards) in the same areas. Related to this, products and services related to regulation (e.g., self-help books, mindfulness activities, weight loss groups, or a myriad of products with New Year’s resolution messaging) could incorporate subtle religious or monitoring messaging to increase product or service adoption.

Policy makers could also seek ways to encourage self-monitoring in public service announcements or consumer awareness initiatives. Targeted messages to encourage self-monitoring to religious versus nonreligious consumers is easier now with the increase use of social media and consumers self-selecting into religious-based online social groups (Minton & Kahle, 2014). As such, marketers and policy makers can design ads to encourage self-monitoring that are displayed specifically for people belonging to religious or nonreligious based social media groups. Additionally, religious institutions could benefit from this research in offering sermons, support groups, and workshops on how to meditate on God’s omniscient monitoring, both during times of resource surplus and depletion. Religious-based
educational institutions both at the K-12 level and in higher education would benefit from similar programs, particularly in helping to deter negative behaviors that are subject to high peer pressure (e.g., drugs, alcohol, unprotected sex).

3.3 | Future research and limitations

Future research should build off the studies herein to examine differences among self-controlled consumption behaviors that are self-focused, others-focused, and God-focused to see if religiosity interacts with different types of monitoring to influence consumers’ regulation of such self-controlled consumption behaviors. Additionally, the relationship between other religiosity dimensions (e.g., fundamentalism, intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity, affective/behavioral/cognitive religiosity) could be tested. Research could also explore how religiosity and self-control together influence sacred versus secular attributions in the marketplace (Minton, 2016). Given that this research uses a religiosity scale mentioning God, further research is also needed to examine the relationship between religion’s that do not associate with one God (e.g., eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism; Schmidt et al., 2014) and participation in different types of monitoring as well as resulting effects on consumers’ self-controlled behaviors.

This research is limited by the product categories, types of primes, and forms of instructional checks used in the studies herein as well as no studies assessing actual behavior. Future research should replicate this research with other product categories and actual behavioral measures as well as stronger manipulation checks to increase generalizability to the marketplace and reduce the potential for demand effects. For example, potential confounds exist in examining food consumption and overspending in one study (Study 2), and further research would benefit from better teasing apart these relationships.

Also, research is needed to better understand the processes and mechanisms that lead to behavioral monitoring in the context of consumption as well as why conflicting findings can occur regarding the relationship between religiosity and consumers’ self-controlled behaviors. For example, nutrition motivation, knowledge, or BMI could influence response to monitoring for food products, and religious consumers can vary from nonreligious consumers on such factors. Further research should also replicate the results from the studies herein with other sample sources besides Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Specifically, research needs to replicate the findings herein with countries outside the US and with more diverse religious samples, as adherence to Christianity is declining and other religions, such as Islam, show increasing tendencies (Newport, 2016; Pew, 2014). As such, future research with Islamic or Eastern religions (Hinduism or Buddhism) would be warranted areas for examination. Additionally, the recruitment messaging used for Amazon’s Mechanical Turk in mentioning a survey on psychological factors but not about religion could have induced survey bias, misunderstanding, or subjective views in unexpected ways, and thus further research should seek how different recruitment materials or religion question ordering influences findings.

In addition, other methods for priming self-monitoring, monitoring by others, and monitoring by God could be used, such as monitoring references in policy advocacy communications or advertising. New monitoring prime tasks would be especially beneficial for the monitoring by God prime where consumers lower in religiosity simply respond that they do not feel monitored by a God because of limited or nonbelief in a God. Further research in this area would benefit from exploring how the moral nature of self-controlled consumption influences perceptions of monitoring by God. Also, other tasks for depleting self-control should be examined, especially tasks that are more representative of actual marketplace situations than the letter-omission typing task (Rounding et al., 2012) used in the studies herein.

4 | CONCLUSION

Marketers are regularly developing strategies to encourage consumers to indulge in sweets and buy products on impulse, while policy makers frequently design policies to encourage consumer self-control. Additionally, consumers are regularly seeking out ways to exercise greater self-control to participate in more self-controlled consumption behaviors. Prior research has shown that giving into these temptations is, in part, a result of reduced self-control (Haws, Davis, & Dholakia, 2016; Scammon et al., 2011; Siemens & Kopp, 2011). What has been left out of this discussion is the role of religiosity in consumer self-control, especially in understanding how the monitoring model of self-control provides insight into consumer self-control. While prior research has almost unanimously shown that religiosity is positively correlated with self-control (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012; Geyer & Baumeister, 2005; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), the results from the studies herein show that this is not always true. Other factors such as the importance of behavioral regulation, depletion of self-control resources, or priming awareness of monitoring can alter the direction of this relationship.

As such, this research contributes novel insight into boundary conditions of applying self-regulation theory and the monitoring model of self-control to a consumption context that is unique from other contexts in featuring high levels of skepticism (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005), low cognitive resource availability (Wansink & Sobal, 2007), and a mixing of the sacred and secular (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Minton, 2016). Understanding these factors is important to maximize consumers’ ability to exercise self-control in the marketplace.

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