The Impact of Religious Conformity, Peer Presence, and Self-Monitoring on Donation Behavior

By

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Abstract

This study examines the three-way interaction between religious conformity[1], peer presence[2], and self-monitoring[3] in their influence on consumers' donation behavior. While past studies have focused on the relationship between religion and charity, findings remain mixed regarding whether religious individuals are more likely to donate to religious or secular causes, especially when they donate in non-private settings. This study tries to fill this gap by examining how the religious conformity of the donor affects their donation behavior.

We investigated our hypotheses through two studies. Study 1 focuses on the effect of the religious conformity of donors (high vs. low religious conformity) on their preference to donate to religious versus nonreligious causes. In Study 2, we introduce the presence of an observer while individuals are donating to different causes. Specifically, we show that religious conformists shift their donation preferences toward nonreligious causes when they are being observed by a person they know as being nonreligious compared to an observer they know as being religious. In addition, our results indicate that changes in donation choices are more significant for religious conformists with higher levels of self-monitoring.

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. It provides insights into the roles of religious conformity and visibility of the donation in charitable giving, particularly in the presence of social influence. It also offers important contributions to marketing and charitable fundraising strategies as it shows how religious conformity and the need to retain religious identity shape donation behaviors in a public setting.

Key words: Religious conformity, donation behavior, social influence, self-monitoring

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[1] The extent to which people align their behaviors with norms, expectations, and values of their religious community

[2] "Any influence on our cognitions, emotions, or actions due to the real, implied, or imagined presence of other individuals" Otterbring, T. (2021). Peer presence promotes popular choices: A "Spicy" field study on social influence and brand choice. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *61*, 102594.

[3] "The extent to which individuals adjust their self-presentation or their self-image according to social cues" Snyder, M. (1974). Self-monitoring of expressive behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *30*(4), 526.

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Introduction

Research has demonstrated that religious and nonreligious people see themselves as distinctive from outgroup members (nonreligious and religious people, respectively), and try to avoid the same behavior or holding the same attitudes as them (Van Cappellen & LaBouff, 2022; Van Tongeren et al., 2023). Religious people indicate their religious identity through their commitment to the consumption norms of their religious community. Conversely, they can also show their commitment to the religion by choosing and acting based on those consumption norms (Coşgel & Minkler, 2004). Based on reports "… 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group" (Deshmukh, 2022) and when people belong to a bigger social group, they try to adjust their actions and behaviors to the values and norms which are acceptable in the sociocultural group they are a member of (Cleveland & Chang, 2009).

Religion can affect many consumer behaviors including consumer-brand connections, product choice, and pro-social actions (Mathras et al., 2016). The relationship between religion and pro-sociality, altruism, and donation behavior has been extensively researched in the literature. In the donation context, findings have shown several reasons for religious people to give. Donation can be used as a strategy to increase religious people's self-esteem, a reparation for transgressing from religious orders and therefore preserving identity, shaping individuals' moral compasses and elevating their concern for the welfare of others (Jamal et al., 2019), or regaining the sense of inclusion in case of being rejected by the community (Mathras et al., 2016). Religious people can also give only because the "supernatural power" or their religion has commanded them to (Vaidyanathan & Snell, 2011).

Although it is estimated that half of donations in the United States go to religious charitable giving, studies have shown that giving to nonreligious charitable causes by religious people is also possible (Hill & Vaidyanathan, 2011). Most religions encourage their adherents to be generous and help needy people, regardless of the distance they feel to the person. This idea encourages religious people to donate to nonreligious causes (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007). However, it is not always the case that religious individuals contribute to both religious and secular causes and in fact, it has been shown by some researchers that they contribute the least to nonreligious causes (Dilmaghani, 2018) . Because past research has mixed results about whether religious people give to nonreligious causes, we need to look into this more closely to understand what really influences their giving in different social settings. Additionally, despite past research that has focused on how religious organizations may exert social pressure to give (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007; Simpson et al., 2018), there remains a gap in understanding how the presence of observers from different religious backgrounds influences donation behavior. The psychology of religious individuals suggests a complex relationship between religious identity and prosocial behavior. Intrinsically religious individuals may prioritize self-perception over altruism, exhibiting ingroup preferences and reluctance to assist perceived outgroups (Batson et al., 1993). In contrast, as mentioned earlier, concern about how they look to others might lead religious donors to behave differently. (Srnka et al., 2003). While they may typically adhere to ingroup preferences regarding charitable giving, they may show opposite behaviors if they perceive a threat to their social identity. Indeed, individuals may align with outgroup behaviors as a means of mitigating identity threats (White et al., 2012). The feeling of identity threat may arise when a member of a social group, such as a religious adherent, intends to conduct an action in the presence of an outgroup member, such as an individual from a nonreligious group. Consequently, more research is needed to better understand how being around people with different religious identities affects behavior. In this research, we examine how donation behaviors of religious conformists are impacted by the presence of ingroup members (religious people) or outgroup members (nonreligious people) during the donation.

This research aims to fill these gaps by conducting two studies. Study 1 investigates the effect of religious conformity on donations to religious versus nonreligious causes by using a hypothetical donation task, predicting that highly religious conformists are more likely to donate to religious causes while low religious conformists are more likely to prefer nonreligious causes. While many studies use the concept of religiosity to explore religious influence on behavior, our research focuses instead on religious conformity - that is, the degree to which individuals align their actions with the behavioral norms and expectations of their religious community. This definition is adapted from the work of Bizer et al. (2014) on social norm. Religious conformity is more appropriate for our research because we are interested in how religious people behave in the presence of others, especially those who may not share the same beliefs. Research shows that it is not just belief in religion that shapes behavior, but also the influence of being part of a group and wanting to fit in with others (DeCamp & Smith, 2019; Sumter et al., 2018). In public situations like making a visible donation (e.g., store clerk at checkout asking if you would like to add a donation to a local charity to your bill), people might act differently based on who is around them. Therefore, instead of focusing on private belief (religiosity), we look at how people try to match their actions with what their religious community expects (religious conformity), especially when they feel their identity is being judged or challenged.

In Study 2, we first measure the participant's level of religious conformity. Then, we examine how their donation behavior is influenced by being observed by a peer whose religiosity is described in the scenario as either religious, nonreligious, or is unspecified. Specifically, randomly assigned participants read about a scenario they are asked to imagine themselves in either religious observer, nonreligious observer, or a control condition, following which they would be asked to choose from several donation choices. We expect that the presence of an observer perceived as an outgroup member influences their choice of donation compared to the situation where an observer is an ingroup member, that is, belongs to the same religiosity. Since this research explores how people may shift their donation behavior in public settings, self-monitoring, which is defined as the extent to which individuals adjust their self-presentation or their self-image according to social cues (Snyder, 1974) helps us understand who is more likely to change their behavior in response to social influence. Moreover, past research has shown that religion may play a dual role in shaping self-monitoring by both encouraging moral consistency and promoting concern about social image (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). By including self-monitoring as a moderator, we can explore whether individuals who are more sensitive to social evaluation are also more likely to adjust their donation behavior when their identity is potentially being threatened. Therefore, participants' extent of self-monitoring is measured in Study 2, prior to reading about the donation scenario.

This research makes several contributions. First, it provides a deeper understanding of consumers' motivations, values, and preferences by providing insight into how individuals with different levels of religious conformity make donation decisions when their donation is visible. In fact, public recognition is known as an appeal which might increase donation likelihood by individuals (Kristofferson et al., 2014; White & Peloza, 2009). Maybe not as common as private donation, there are several situations in which donation can be visible to others. Fundraising events in the form of charity galas and auctions may use ways such as bidding or public pledges. Sometimes the names of donors along with the amount of money contributed to a special charity cause could be listed publicly on the wall of a building or it can be shown on a crowd-funding website such as GoFundMe. This research specifically examines the role of social influence in a non-private donation context. Second, by emphasizing the impact of outgroup observers, this study challenges the traditional idea that people always favor their ingroup. Instead, it demonstrates how social influence from outside one's group can shape donation behaviors. This understanding of how people make decisions about giving can be invaluable for future research in consumer behavior, marketing, and fundraising. Third, it advances other studies in consumer decision-making and donation research by incorporating different factors, such as group dynamics and personality traits, which reflect the complexity of consumer decision-making in the real world. Fourth, as evidenced by demographic projections, the number of individuals identifying as "unaffiliated" with religion including atheism, agnosticism, secular humanism, and spirituality is on the rise globally, particularly among younger adults (Mathras et al., 2016). Thus, in a diverse population, understanding how the presence of nonreligious individuals influences the donation decisions of religious people is essential for a comprehensive understanding of charitable-giving behavior.

Literature Review

Charitable causes

In the donation context, different factors influence individuals' choice of giving to charitable causes. Subjective factors like the degree to which individuals feel compassion and empathy for others, the level of trust in charitable organizations, religious practices, and resources like education and income determine which causes the person would donate to (Neumayr & Handy, 2019). Charitable giving, in various religious traditions, is deeply encouraged. For instance, in Islam, *Zakat* which is considered one of the main pillars of the Islamic foundation, requires Muslims to contribute around 2.5 percent of their wealth (Lincoln et al., 2008). In Christianity, religious people practice the *tithe*, which is equivalent to giving ten percent of their income to those in need (Vaidyanathan & Snell, 2011). These practices underscore the relationship between religion and the act of giving whether it is time, talent, or money (Lincoln et al., 2008).

In 2022, Canadians donated $11.4 billion, over 19 percent of which went to religion (RBC Wealth Management, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023). In the USA, religious contributions accounted for $128.17 billion (Giving USA, 2020) which is twice as much as giving to educational causes (Yasin et al., 2020). However, scholars argue that the majority of donations remain inside the religious community and help its associated individuals rather than the general welfare of the larger society (Yasin et al., 2020). Indeed, results are not entirely consistent on the effect of religion on secular giving. While some research supports the positive effect of religion on donating to nonreligious causes, others have found negative or no effect at all. Religious individuals might contribute to nonreligious causes through major mechanisms (Yasin et al., 2020). First, through religious teachings, norms, values, and beliefs. And second, through community engagement and social influence for self-signaling or reinforcing the faith. Researchers have leveraged the influence of social signalling on donation behavior. Many prosocial behaviors are driven by the need to convey positive information about oneself to others. Public recognition is also known to enhance charitable giving, especially in the presence of important ingroup members. However, research on how religious donors react in the presence of outgroup (nonreligious) members is lacking. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand what factors motivate religious people to donate to different religious and nonreligious causes.

In the next section, we review literature on regulation of one's behavior in public versus private settings.

Public vs. Private self-presentation

Impression management plays a significant role in shaping how individuals behave in public versus private settings. In public settings, individuals are often more conscious of the social norms, expectations, and the potential judgments of others. As a result, they may engage in strategic self-presentation, adjusting their behavior to align with social norms and the desired image they wish to convey (Goffman, 2016). In contrast, in private settings where social scrutiny is reduced, individuals may feel more at ease to express their genuine preferences, attitudes, and behaviors without the same level of concern for external evaluations. The shifts in behavior between public and private contexts are influenced by the desire to manage the impressions others form about them in different social situations (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). There are conditions for individuals to be motivated to engage in impression management. First, they should find the goal relevant to themselves and the goal should seem valuable enough in their view (Leary, 2019). In addition, there should be a discrepancy between how they want to be perceived by others versus how they think they are perceived (Leary, 2019).

Previous studies have extensively examined the impact of the presence of others on changing behaviors in prosocial and consumption behaviors. For example, people are more likely to make different or varied choices when they know others will see what they choose in public settings. (Ratner & Kahn, 2002). In retail studies, others' presence affects consumer brand choice, purchase behavior, and product evaluations. Peer presence increases individuals' likelihood of choosing popular brands, time spent, and interaction with products up to the point of selection (Otterbring, 2021). Yan and Lotz (2009) indicate that the presence of others, whether they are someone that the consumer knows or does not know, influences customer complaint behavior based on the level of acquaintance and type of social presence. In the donation context, when individuals perceive the act of donation as being observable by others, they tend to be more altruistic and donate more to indicate a more positive self-image (Ariely et al., 2009; Smith & Bird, 2000).

It is the anxiety of being assessed by others in terms of performance or behavior that influences attitudes and actions (Cottrell, 1972). In other words, it is not just the mere presence of others which induces behavioral modification, but the perception that one is being evaluated by others. Consumers want to be approved and accepted by other consumers (Gaumer & LaFief, 2005). For example, while one is shopping in-store for an electronic product, overhearing the enthusiastic conversation between two customers about a specific brand may prompt one to choose that brand because of the tendency for social approval.

In the dynamics of ingroup and outgroup interactions, members of one group also believe that members of an outgroup make evaluations about their group, a concept which is called meta-stereotype (Vorauer et al., 1998). Meta-stereotypes are different from the personal beliefs that someone holds about their ingroup (self-stereotype), rather it is about the beliefs that someone holds about how their group is perceived by another specific group (outgroup). On average, meta-stereotypes tend to be more negative in their content (Vorauer et al., 1998). In other words, people might perceive that other groups hold more negative views about their group. It is straightforward to recognize that meta-stereotype affects the way individuals respond to interactions with members of the outgroup. When individuals believe others hold negative or conflicting views about them, these beliefs significantly impact their interactions with those individuals. People's sense of self-worth should be seriously threatened by feeling stereotyped, not just because it makes them believe that they have socially undesirable qualities, but also because it makes them wonder if they really do (Vorauer et al., 1998). Meta-stereotype could lead to negative feelings like anxiety to engage in intergroup interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Vorauer et al., 1998). This anxiety comes from the fear of being negatively evaluated or being uncertain about proper behavior when interacting with outgroup members. When people know there's a common negative stereotype about their group, they might try to show their best side and hide any traits that could be perceived negatively when interacting with outgroup members (Klein & Azzi, 2001). However, when talking to people from their group, they do not feel the need to do this because they do not expect them to believe those stereotypes (Klein & Azzi, 2001). Meta-stereotype has also been investigated in other areas like marketing and consumption behavior. Consumers are shown to be sensitive to their food choices when they think that they could be judged negatively by outgroup members (Touré-Tillery et al., 2022). They select healthier options when outgroup individuals are present. In prosocial studies, Hopkins et al. (2007) show that when members of one group are informed about negative stereotypes and beliefs held by outgroup members about their ingroup, they are more willing to indicate helping behaviors. Showing helping behavior is to reduce or refute negative stereotypes about one’s group to maintain a positive image of the group. In tourism research, being aware of a meta-stereotype, Tung (2019) illustrates how residents' adherence to meta-stereotypes influences their tendency to engage in prosocial behaviors towards tourists – those residents who perceived a negative evaluation by tourists were more willing to help the tourist find their way.

In studies involving intergroup interactions, ingroup bias plays an important role. Ingroup bias is defined as “the tendency to over-evaluate or favor one's group (the ingroup) and/or to under-evaluate or derogate a group to which one does not belong (the outgroup)” (Scheepers et al., 2006, p. 359). Several works have shown that consumers are more willing to purchase products from an ingroup, forgive a conflict when confronting an ingroup service employee, and prefer home-sharing services from an ingroup host (Long et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2019; Watkins & Liu, 1996). Self-categorization theory holds that a person's identity is linked to the social ingroups that they identify with (Turner et al., 1987). The theory suggests that people tend to adopt the traits of familiar social ingroups to strengthen their identity with the group, which encourages them to follow its standards. To maintain the sense of identifying the self with a social ingroup, individuals try to conform to ingroup social norms and avoid conforming to the norms of outgroups (Hogg et al., 1990). Some outgroups are considered to be dissociative, but not necessarily all of them. The term "dissociative" adds a layer of emphasis on the psychological or emotional separation from a specific outgroup. A dissociative group is one that an individual actively distances themselves from because they do not wish to be associated with it (White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). Dissociative outgroups can have a more notable influence on consumer choices and preferences compared to other outgroups, especially if consumers need to present their identity in a public situation (White & Dahl, 2006). Consumers tend to avoid or dislike products or behaviors which are associated with dissociative outgroups (Berger & Heath, 2007; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). Huang et al. (2022) suggest that how people judge a product linked to another group depends on the type of group – whether it is seen as dissociative or neutral. The desire to avoid being associated with a dissociative group strengthens the distinction between groups. People often change their views about a product linked to a dissociative group by going against their initial impressions, because their emotional state, especially positive feelings, can strongly influence how they judge the product's quality.

Nevertheless, certain studies have demonstrated that individuals do not consistently adhere to norms within their ingroup and may not always refrain from expressing preferences associated with outgroups. Although some studies have not supported the idea that goes against self-categorization theory (Cruwys et al., 2012; Krizan & Baron, 2007), those often relied on just one or a few outgroup members to test whether the popularity of a task among outgroups could lead ingroup members to follow the outgroup's choice. In fact, there are some situations in which individuals do not conform to the ingroup norms and preferences or they prefer to preserve their self-image. A study by Pryor et al. (2019) contradicted the self-categorization theory such that when provided with an alternate option that was favoured by the outgroup descriptive norm, participants changed their preferences away from the option that was favoured by their ingroup. These results imply that people prioritize adopting the more widely accepted behavior overall, which suggests that self-categorization theory may not adequately account for the descriptive norm effect. In addition, when their social identity feels threatened, people with a more independent sense of self tend to focus more on protecting their self-worth. In these situations, people often try to disassociate themselves from the identity that is being negatively viewed, for example, by avoiding goods linked to the part of their identity that is under threat (White et al., 2012). People who have an independent sense of self do this to improve their self-image and perceive themselves more favorably. Avoiding products associated with one's identity becomes a tactic to protect one's sense of value against threats to one's social identity.

Sometimes, conforming to the outgroup is not only for preserving one's self-image but also for keeping one's ingroup image positive. Studies have shown that even with the dissociative outgroup that consumers avoid self-identifying with, there are instances that they conform to the outgroup. A customer is more likely to react favorably to a positive action in the same domain when they discover that a dissociative outgroup member engages in that behavior (White et al., 2014). This happens because when a dissociative outgroup performs well in public, it can feel threatening to the consumer's social group. As a result, the consumer becomes motivated to protect their group's image and project it in a more positive way. When consumers feel authentic pride, that is, genuine pride from their own accomplishments, they tend to have a more positive attitude toward brands linked with dissociative outgroups. This is because authentic pride strengthens their support for values like fairness and equality, which in turn makes them more open and favorable toward those brands (Lu et al., 2022). Also, brands that are less well-known and connected to dissociative outgroups are more likely to be preferred by customers with high dissociative desire who tend to dissociate themselves from a particular group or social identity (Raimondo et al., 2022). Consumers tend to react differently depending on how closely they feel connected to the dissociative group. They're generally less willing to buy a product linked to a group they see as closely related or 'near,' compared to one associated with a more distant, unrelated group (Wen & Guo, 2021). This is because consumers tend to focus on the concrete and detailed aspects of the product when it is associated with a closer event, which may lead to negative evaluations (Wen & Guo, 2021). These all are instances that show consumers in certain situations prefer to follow the dissociative outgroup rather than their ingroup. Here, we focus on the sense of one's social identity being under threat as an indicator of outgroup conformity.

Research indicates individuals tend to uphold positive self-worth (Dunning, 2007). People often avoid social identities that have gained negative associations, even if only temporarily. In short, they try to distance themselves from groups that are seen in a negative light in order to protect their self-esteem, both as individuals and as members of society (Tajfel et al., 1979). People may show a decreased preference for actions that are consistent with their identity when they feel threatened by preconceptions that have come to life (White & Argo, 2009). For example, Steele and Aronson (1995) show that under stereotype threat, black participants said they enjoyed things like watching sports, listening to rap music, and being a "lazy couch potato" less than when they were not under stereotype threat. Customers prefer to avoid things that are directly associated with a certain identity (such as products specifically tied to their gender) when they feel threatened or learn negative information about that particular feature of their social identity, such as their gender group (White & Argo, 2009). In summary, the research shows that when people feel at risk of being stereotyped, they avoid actions that might reinforce those negative stereotypes about themselves.

Self-monitoring and consumer behavior

Self-monitoring, as a psychological construct, has been extensively discussed in various areas of human behavior. Self-monitoring is the extent to which individuals adjust their self-presentation or their self-image according to social cues (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors, therefore, are those who are more sensitive and cautious in their self-presentation in social settings and try to adapt behaviors matching the social situation they are confronted with. In contrast, low self-monitors are those who are not concerned about projecting an image that is based on social cues, rather they preserve the congruency between their behaviors and their attitudes, values, and beliefs. Therefore, attitude and values are good predictors of behaviors for low self-monitors but not for high self-monitors.

Research on the effect of self-monitoring on consumer behavior is diverse, e.g., self-monitoring and food consumption and diet (Guidetti et al., 2016), self-monitoring and materialism (Cass, 2001), and self-monitoring and product/brand evaluation (Hogg et al., 2000)). In fact, it has been shown that consumers try to maintain or improve their self-concept through products (Graeff, 1996). Self-monitoring can strengthen the sensitivity of the match between the self-image and brand image on brand evaluation when the brand involves public consumption. In other words, for publicly consumed brands, there is a greater effect of congruency between self-image and brand image on brand evaluation for high self-monitors while there is no such effect for low self-monitors or for privately consumed brands (Graeff, 1996). High self-monitors have a greater need for social conformity and a preference for high brand prominence (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018). A study by Yang et al. (2015) indicates that when high self-monitors engage in the activity of choosing a product which is intended to be shared with a partner, they tend to take into account their partner's interests and preferences as well. However, this effect is confined to the gender stereotype influences such that if the partner is not the same sex as the consumer (e.g., a male shares a product with a female and therefore has to accommodate femininity in the product), the preference adaptation would be limited. These results suggest that in such situations, impression management is shaped not only by self-monitoring but also by concerns about gender norms and possible social identity threat within that specific consumption context.

Self-monitoring has been also extended to ethical consumption and donation behavior. For instance, the type of monetary donation might differ depending on the level of self-monitoring for individuals. High self-monitors are more likely to engage in donation behaviors that are visible as it helps them preserve their positive self-image (Grace & Griffin, 2006). High self-monitors are also more likely to engage in ethical consumption because they are more inclined to change their choices based on the universal norms when a questionable situation arises (Kavak et al., 2009).

Social identity

Social identity and personal identity are two components of identity in social identity theory and social categorization theory (Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Social identity is connected to the groups that the person is a member of, and personal identity is connected to the person's sense of self. Particular facets of one's social identity or one's personal identity may be activated by situational demands. This activation shapes a person's thoughts, emotions, and actions in response to the situation, either in line with their social identity or their personal identity. The theories imply that an individual's responses might be influenced by context, depending on various aspects of their identity (Greenfield & Marks, 2007). All social categories can shape a person's self-concept, regardless of how broad or long-lasting they are, whether they relate to national or geopolitical identities, or smaller, temporary social groups (Greenfield & Marks, 2007). A social identity is created when people describe themselves in terms of their affiliation with a particular social group. Stated differently, it encompasses the recognition of one's belongingness to certain social categories, along with the emotional and value-related importance associated with being part of those particular groups (Tajfel et al., 1979).

Religious identity could relate to a person's sense of belonging to a religion and how significant this group membership is to their self-concept (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). In times of distress, certain group memberships play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's self-concept. Among these group ties, religious identity stands out by providing a strong sense of stability and support, especially when a person’s safety or security feels threatened (Muldoon et al., 2007). This importance may stem from well-organized support networks or the shared reliance on faith in a "higher power," providing a source of comfort and stability in challenging circumstances.

While people form their views of themselves and the world through a range of psychological and social influences, religion offers a distinct lens through which individuals interpret experiences and find meaning (Park, 2007). Compared to other sources of identity like gender, personality, or political views, religious affiliation not only shapes how people see themselves socially but also offers shared understanding about life and knowledge. These common beliefs can create a strong sense of unity and certainty among group members. While expressions of religiosity can vary across people and situations, many still deeply believe in the truth and value of their religious worldview (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). This can create a sense of moral or existential superiority over other groups, strengthening the role of religious identity in one's self-concept. While this feeling of superiority may strain relationships between religious groups, it can also provide comfort during times of uncertainty and serve as a powerful coping mechanism in difficult situations.

Religious social identity has extensively influenced consumers' behavior. Religion influences consumer behavior by shaping beliefs, rituals, values, and a sense of community, all of which play a key role in how religious individuals think, feel, and act as consumers (Mathras et al., 2016). Religious consumers are more likely to purchase products that are consistent with their religious norms. Making consumer choices is often closely tied to religious practices, especially during times of reflection, rituals, festivals, and celebrations, when specific behaviors and purchases hold deeper meaning (Zeqiri et al., 2022). Religious practices may include wearing specific clothing, preparing or offering special foods, and taking part in gift-giving. Religious affiliation stands out as a valuable predictor of consumer behavior, and high religiosity has been associated with increased ethical sensitivity, influencing commitments to sustainability (Singh et al., 2021). In addition, high religiosity consumers have been indicated to be thriftier, less impulsive, and greater quality seekers (Mokhlis, 2006).

Given the significant influence of religious social identity on consumer behavior, it is crucial to explore how social identity threats, particularly religious threats, may shape individuals' responses in consumer contexts. The term "social identity threat" describes the feeling of worry or tension that someone has when they believe their social identity is being threatened or negatively viewed (George et al., 2023). It can occur when an individual perceives that their social identity is being negatively evaluated or threatened by others, or when they perceive that their social identity is not being valued or respected. A threatened identity can affect consumption behaviors. For example, White and Argo (2009) found that consumers with high collective self-esteem are more inclined to buy products linked with their identity when their social identity is endangered, a phenomenon known as identity affirmation effect. Conversely, consumers with low collective self-esteem are more likely to show identity avoidance effects, which indicates that when their identity is in threat, they are more inclined to stay away from products connected to their social identity. Goffman (2009) has introduced religion as an area through which an individual could be stigmatized because of their religious group membership. Before exploring religious threat, it is necessary to understand what religion is and who we define as religious. In the following sections, we discuss how religion can influence behaviors, following which we present a definition of religion which aligns with our intention in this research.

Religion and conformity: definition of religion

Religion has been shown to reduce violating behavior and promote positive, prosocial actions. Its influence depends on how it is experienced, whether through traditional institutions or more personal expressions of faith. (DeCamp & Smith, 2019). Religion serves as a foundation for moral direction and social assistance, protecting individuals from engaging in violating behaviors such as drinking alcohol or drug abuse. Yet, the research reveals that certain groups (e.g., teenagers) identifying with religious affiliations do not necessarily exhibit decreased involvement in misbehaviors when accounting for protective influences. Notably, certain protective factors such as parental or peer influence display substantial effects compared to religious association (DeCamp & Smith, 2019). More specifically, this is not religion or religiosity in and of itself which inhibits youth from violating behavior but the situation that religion provides like a religious social network which could act as a stress relief. Sumter et al. (2018) argue that based on the empirical literature on the relationship between religion and crime suppression, religion can reduce engaging in criminal activities through two mechanisms. First and at the micro level, it prevents individuals from wrongdoings through fostering self-control. Second, social control induced by religion such as group support and attendance to religious communities can decrease violating behavior. Therefore, it could be concluded that the impact of religiosity and religiousness does not occur in isolation and that social groups and contact with other people also plays a significant role. It seems that the relationship between religion and behavior is a function of the religious beliefs' interaction with social factors.

The most important question that might arise when working on a topic related to religion is what the definition of religion is. Answering this question is not easy, as there is no consensus on the definition of religion, neither among scholars of religion nor among researchers in the psychology of religion, which is the field that studies how religious beliefs, behaviors, and experiences relate to psychological processes (Casidy et al., 2021). Depending on the context of the study, different researchers have defined and operationalized different dimensions of religion. In consumer behavior research, these dimensions are mostly limited to beliefs, rituals, values, and community (Mathras et al., 2016). Some researchers have developed scales which measure a mix of these dimensions. For example, the Religious Commitment Inventory Scale (Worthington Jr et al., 2003) measures adhering to three dimensions of religion – beliefs, values, and behavior. Another example is the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967), which distinguishes between individuals who internalize religion as a guiding life principle (intrinsic) and those who engage with religion for social or personal benefit (extrinsic). The general conclusion is that each researcher uses a dimension or a combination of dimensions depending on the objectives of their research.

The main focus of this research is not on religion as a set of spiritual beliefs or abstract ideas about life and existence, but rather on how being part of a religious community affects social behavior, especially charitable giving. More specifically, this study looks at how religious conformists manage the expectations of their religious group while also responding to the norms of a broader, possibly nonreligious audience. This creates a tension between staying true to their religious community and adapting to social cues that may call for different behaviors.

Given this focus, the social-psychological process studied here cannot be fully understood by a definition of religion that only emphasizes beliefs in the divine, sacred texts, rituals, or spiritual experiences. The role of religious conformity, or the extent to which people align their behaviors with norms, expectations, and values of their religious community, is more pertinent to this study. This reorientation allows for a more behavior-focused and context-relevant definition of religion, one that looks directly at how people express their identity and follow social norms when they know they're being watched or judged. Religious norms can influence many aspects of life, such as public expression of charity, moral judgment, and interpersonal behavior (Mathras et al., 2016). In a religious community, when conformity to group norms is a salient aspect of one's identity, these norms are frequently internalized through socialization.

Based on the focus of this study, therefore, we define religion as *a shared set of behavioral norms and values that guide how people act by encouraging them to conform to the expectations of their group*. This conceptualization aligns with previous work viewing religion as a form of social identity (Ysseldyk et al., 2010) and is operationalized through the lens of norm espousal and behavioral alignment with group standards (Bizer et al., 2014). These expectations may show in any public behavior that signals adherence to one's religious community such as acts of charity or expressions of morality. There are two reasons why the idea that religion functions as a normative system is important. First, it presents religious identity as a social identity, which is similar to other group memberships in forcing the need for conformity to group norms. Second, it makes it possible to examine whether religious behaviors are subject to the condition that people may change their behavior depending on who is around them, and whether individuals may vary in the degree to which they conform to religious norms. By operationalizing religion in terms of religious conformity, we are able to better examine how religious behavior changes depending on the social environment, especially in public settings.

Religious threats and consumer behavior

Although research on social identity threat as a broader concept, and stereotype threat as a subset of that, has been widely explored, it has been expanded to religious identity threat recently. Rios (2021) has investigated the effect of Christianity-Science conflict on Christian people in western countries. The findings show that when Christian people were exposed to the belief that Christianity contradicts science, they showed poorer performance on scientific tasks. Religion and religiosity play dual roles, acting as forces that can either unite or divide communities and spark intergroup conflicts (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004; Putnam & Campbell, 2012). In places where a certain religion or being religious is looked down upon, people who identify with that faith may experience psychological stress or feel threatened (Pasek & Cook, 2019). Individuals can experience religious threat connected to their religion or religiosity, and the interplay of factors may contribute to this phenomenon. What feels threatening to someone's religious identity may vary from one religion to another. Religious minorities might primarily confront threats related to biases and discrimination (Pasek & Cook, 2019). Although the triggers may differ, the experience of feeling threatened is expected to follow a similar pattern once it is activated. Religious minorities, facing a disproportionate amount of prejudice, encounter a heightened religious threat, as indicated by hate crime statistics where Jews and Muslims, constituting 3% of the American population, are targeted in 74% of religious hate crimes, with rising incidents against religious minorities and potential underreporting due to trust issues in reporting authorities (Justice, 2016; Pasek & Cook, 2019). Moon et al. (2021) point out that negative stereotypes about religious individuals are not only common and deeply ingrained but also driven by distrust and often lead to discrimination. The study revealed that people often linked religious individuals with unfavorable characteristics, such as being narrow-minded, uninterested in science, or lacking a sense of fun. The authors suggest that these negative stereotypes about religious people are linked to the perception that religious people are less open-minded and less tolerant. Fiske (2017) suggests that religious stereotypes are more variable than shared stereotypes of gender and age.

This is because religious stereotypes are influenced by historical and situational factors and can vary across different cultural contexts.

Although, there is extensive research on the effect of identity threat and consumption behavior, few researchers have focused on religious identity threat and consumer behavior specifically. As the threat to belongingness can be accounted for by the threat to identity (Slepian & Jacoby-Senghor, 2021), individuals who experience exclusion or see their religious community belongingness under threat are more likely to spend money on consumption behaviors that can attenuate this feeling, such as purchasing items which assist them to fit in with their religious community (Mathras et al., 2016; Mead et al., 2011). However, as discussed before, identity threat can have a reverse effect on consumer behavior (White et al., 2012; White et al., 2014) such that instead of following one's religious group (ingroup) norms, the consumer will conform to nonreligious preferences (outgroup).

Religion and self-monitoring

Previous studies have shown that there is a relation between religiousness and one's self-consciousness in public (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Watson et al., 2002). McCullough and Willoughby (2009) consider three routes for the effect religion can have on self-monitoring. First, a religious mindset (often involving the idea that a God or supernatural being is watching and judging their actions) can lead individuals to align their behavior with their attitudes, values, and beliefs to reduce any inconsistencies. Similar to the experiment of the dictator game (Haley & Fessler, 2005) the perceived presence of an evaluative observer increases self-awareness and consequently influences behavior (in this game, students who saw an eyespot on the screen during the endowment activity gave more to a counterpart than those who did not have the eyespots on the screen). This illustrates how having religious concepts in mind or priming religious content can foster self-monitoring through which people adapt their behavior. Second, the religious community can play the role of an evaluative entity, a social environment with strong norms where people feel they could be judged by their religious peers. Religious settings often place stricter limits on behavior than other social contexts, highlighting the importance of self-control. Therefore, depending on the frequency of exposure to a religious community, religious individuals may engage more in self-monitoring, leading to adjusting behaviors based on the norms. The third way by which religious people foster their self-monitoring and then self-regulation is through religious rituals. These can serve as opportunities for individuals to compare their behaviors with religious standards and goals. Thinking about shortcomings in doing religious rituals can activate the willingness to engage in behaviors which could compensate for that and lead to personal religious growth. It is apparent that religion through different mechanisms can increase self-monitoring in individuals in social settings. Although not very widely studied, some authors have found a relationship between religiosity orientation and self-monitoring (e.g., Koç, 2008). Certain traits of extrinsic religiosity, like showiness and using religion for personal gain, resemble behaviors of high self-monitors, who adjust their actions to fit social norms so as to maintain a positive social image (Koç, 2008). This suggests that extrinsic religious people and high self-monitors share the same motivation in order to preserve their position in social networks.

To our knowledge, little research has investigated the role of self-monitoring on religious consumer behavior. Minton (2018) examined the mediating role of monitoring by self, others, and God in the relationship between religiosity and consumer self-control. While only self-monitoring is shown to mediate this relationship, priming monitoring by others moderated the purchase intention for low religiosity consumers when the source of self-control is depleted. This can help marketers and policymakers design messages that include subtle social monitoring cues, which may reduce indulgent purchases among consumers whose self-control has been drained by other consumption demands. Nevertheless, there is a notable gap in research on the behavior of religious consumers when they are being observed or monitored. In this research, we examine how consumers' behavior changes in a social setting when their donation is visible to a person they know as their associative ingroup (namely another religious person) versus a person they know as a member of the dissociative outgroup (a non-religious person). Further, we demonstrate how self-monitoring as a consumer personality trait moderates this effect.

Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

A religious donation cause is one in which the donations will be consumed mostly within the religious community and for religious purposes while a nonreligious donation cause will target the broader group in a society and its purpose is to develop the quality and welfare of the public in general (Yasin et al., 2020). Examining the interaction effect of religious conformity, peer presence, and self-monitoring on donation causes (religious versus nonreligious causes) first requires understanding how religious and nonreligious conformists differ in their donation behavior toward religious versus nonreligious causes.

Although it is supposed that religious people donate more regardless of religious or nonreligious causes (Yasin et al., 2020), some research shows different results. People higher in religiosity are less willing to donate to nonreligious causes (Dilmaghani, 2018). Thus, we intend to clarify the mixed results in the literature. As proposed by Galen (2012), the higher levels of giving might be often directed to religious causes rather than broader social welfare. He argues that in places where religion is strong, people are more likely to support giving money to help others. But often, this support is mainly for religious groups or places of worship rather than for everyone. This happens because religious people tend to prefer helping those who are part of their religious community, and how much they give depends on how connected they feel to their specific congregation (Galen, 2012). Therefore, while religious people might seem generous, their giving is often more about helping their own religious community rather than everyone in need (Galen, 2012). Since religious conformity measures the degree to which people try to live up to the behavioral expectations of their religious community, it follows that high religious conformists give priority to religious causes. This reinforces one's position within the religious community and goes beyond merely reflecting one's personal beliefs. This tendency to donate to the ingroup might be less for people who do not follow religious rules as much, and might be more willing to support causes outside of their religion. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: People who are high in religious conformity are more likely to donate to religious causes than low religious conformists.

While the cause for which one donates is of primary interest to us, it is important to consider the situation in which individuals are donating. People have different motivations for donating (Ariely et al., 2009). There are those who donate because of the benefits their donation would have for others – they give as they believe donation is a desirable action in and of itself. This is categorized as the intrinsic motivation for donation. On the other hand, some people donate due to external reasons such as the potential rewards that might be gained for them as a result of their donation, e.g., a tax benefit. A third category includes those givers who donate to indicate and preserve a positive self-image to others. Therefore, the presence of others may affect donation behavior differently depending on the underlying motivations of the individuals involved. Those who are concerned about self-image may be more influenced by the presence of others and act more pro-socially in social settings rather than in private (Ariely et al., 2009). Religious people, however, might act differently. While some religious individuals may choose to donate publicly to set an example and encourage others to give, others may prefer to give anonymously, following the teachings of their faith (Jamal et al., 2019). Based on the discussion above and the influence the presence of others can have on donation behavior, it is important to analyze the dynamics of change in donation behaviors among religious conformists. This thesis studies whether the donation behavior of religious conformists changes depending on by whom they are being observed. Specifically, we want to know if the observer is a person with another social identity (outgroup) makes any difference from an observer of the same social identity (ingroup). This is important to investigate because individuals usually obey the ingroup's norms to preserve the sense of belonging to their ingroup (Hogg et al., 1990), but sometimes they disobey the ingroup's norms and conversely conform to the outgroup's norm (White et al., 2014). They do so to preserve the positive image of their ingroup in case the action done by the outgroup is seen as more desirable than their ingroup's actions (White et al., 2014), the outgroup's action is considered as prevalent and more popular (Pryor et al., 2019), or if they feel their social identity is threatened and want to protect their positive self-image (White et al., 2012). Therefore, it is possible that religious conformists behave differently when they are donating in the presence of a religious observer as opposed to the presence of a nonreligious observer.

Building upon the insights coming from the preceding discussion, there is a noteworthy avenue for investigation concerning religious conformists' behaviors in the presence of nonreligious counterparts, notably atheists or agnostics. In a study by Van Tongeren et al. (2023), religious people identified nonreligious people as outgroup members and likewise, nonreligious people identified religious people as outgroup members. Within the framework of religious identity dynamics, it is possible that individuals adhering to religious norms might display behaviors incongruent with their religious identity when encountering nonreligious individuals. Similar to findings in research on dissociative outgroups, people may stray from their group's norms and preferences when they feel their religious identity is under threat. This deviation is related to the *stereotype threat* phenomenon observed by Steele and Aronson (1995), where individuals modify their preferences and behaviors when stereotypes associated with their identity are threatened. Here we assume that religious identity threat gets activated when religious donors are in the presence of nonreligious observers. Therefore, in the presence of religious stereotypes and religious threat, individuals may strategically distance themselves from certain aspects of their religious identity in the presence of nonreligious others, i.e., they try not to conform to their religious group charitable preferences and conversely align with the broader theme of donation behavior in response to identity-threatening circumstances. Consequently, this research aims to explore how religious conformists navigate their behaviors and preferences when encountering dissociative outgroups. By doing so, this research contributes to the understanding of identity dynamics, stereotype threat, and the complex interplay between religious and nonreligious affiliations in diverse social contexts. Based on the preceding discussion, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: When donating in the presence of a nonreligious observer, religious conformists are more likely to donate to nonreligious causes than when the observer is religious.

However, we argue that this assumption may not apply to all religious individuals. Not all people are sensitive to what others think about them in a social setting. Considering the intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-image motivations for donation outlined in the previous discussion, self-monitoring can significantly influence how individuals respond to the presence of others when donating. High self-monitors may be more inclined to adjust their donation behavior to conform to social expectations, particularly in the presence of observers. This may manifest differently among religious individuals, depending on their underlying motivations and identity dynamics.

Although religion is very powerful in shaping people's conceptions of truth and can promote feelings of superiority and self-worth based on the belief that their faith holds the ultimate truth (Ysseldyk et al., 2010), it can also strengthen people's tendency to monitor and adjust their behavior in social contexts (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Religious people may feel they are watched by a higher power, evaluated by their religious community, or expected to behave as per their religious rituals and standards (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Therefore, religion encourages self-monitoring, a trait that helps people adjust their behavior in different social situations. For religious conformists, the presence of others who belong to either the same religious group (ingroup) or another identity group like a nonreligious group (outgroup), may shape different responses influenced by one’s self-monitoring. In the presence of a religious observer, we expect high self-monitoring individuals to align their donation behavior with the expectations and norms of their religious community to maintain a positive self-image and maintain ingroup unity. In contrast, in the presence of a nonreligious observer, we predict that high self-monitoring religious conformists are likely to show flexibility in donation behavior, diversifying their donations to meet broader societal expectations and mitigate identity-threatening circumstances. Therefore, incorporating self-monitoring as a moderator in the relationship, we propose:

Hypothesis 3a: Among religious conformists, high self-monitors are less likely to donate to religious causes in the nonreligious observer condition compared to religious observer condition.

Hypothesis 3b: Among religious conformists, low self-monitors' donation likelihood is not significantly different in the religious versus nonreligious observer condition.

Research design and findings

Pretest

To ensure the validity of the measurement scale for the dependent variable (donation behavior), a pretest was conducted to evaluate whether participants perceive the donation options used in the study as religious or nonreligious. Nonreligious giving in general is defined as donation causes which do not have a specific religious purpose and are usually related to issues about education, environment, culture, international aid, poverty, sport and art, and human rights (Yasin et al., 2020). The categorization of these donation causes was based on our theoretical assumptions; therefore, it was important to empirically confirm that participants share a similar perception. This was crucial to ensure that items labeled as religious or nonreligious were indeed perceived as such by our target population. Pretest was also important to minimize the measurement bias by confirming that the donation items were interpreted the same across participants in terms of the extent of being religious.

Participants and procedure

Participants

The sample consisted of 114 participants from a subject pool comprising undergraduate students at the University of Manitoba. Students earned course credit for participation in this study as compensation. Eight participants were dropped as a result of being under 18 years old or not consenting to participate in the study. Therefore, the responses from 106 participants were used to analyze the data.

Procedure

First, participants read a consent form to participate in the pretest. Then, they were presented with ten causes, five of which were assumed by the researchers to be religious (e.g., supporting missionary outreach programs) and five nonreligious (e.g., renovation of local city library).

Participants were asked to rate how religious or non-religious they think each of the donation causes is on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = Very nonreligious to 7 = Very religious. The donation causes were displayed randomly to reduce potential order effects.

Results

A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted as a nonparametric test because the data violated the assumption of normality, as assessed through visual histograms and Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < .001$). As each participant rated both types of donation options, which is a repeated-measures design, and the data were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was utilized for analysis. Each participant's ratings were averaged separately for five religious and five nonreligious donation options, resulting in two variables: Religious_Mean and Nonreligious_Mean. Using the Wilcoxon test, we compared these paired scores to assess whether participants, rated religious items (as assumed by the researchers) as more religious than nonreligious ones.

The results revealed that participants rated researchers' assumed religious donation options as more religious compared to the researchers' nonreligious donation options ($M_{Religious} = 5.42$, $M_{Nonreligious} = 2.46$, $Z = -8.69$, $p <.001$). This confirms that participants generally shared the similar perception of the religious and nonreligious nature of the donation causes as the researchers.

To further evaluate whether each donation option was perceived as intended, a series of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests were conducted to compare the median religiosity rating of each donation item against the scale midpoint of 4 (neither religious nor nonreligious). This was done separately for donation items categorized as religious and nonreligious. All five religious donation items that we expected to be considered religious were rated significantly higher than the neutral midpoint, indicating that participants perceived them as religious in nature. The results are shown in Table 1. In addition, all five nonreligious items were rated significantly lower than the neutral midpoint of 4, indicating that participants did not perceive them as religious. These findings confirm that the categorization of donation causes was perceived as intended, and they could be utilized in our main study.

Table 1: Participants' perception of individual donation items

	Mean*	Median	*Z*	*p*-value
Religious items				
1. Renovation of place of worship	5.34	6.00	-6.00	<.001
2. Supporting missionary outreach programs	5.42	6.00	-6.72	<.001
3. Creating an emergency fund to help religious community members who are in financial	5.77	6.00	-7.78	<.001
4. Scholarship for students in the local religious school	5.54	6.00	-7.42	<.001
5. Serving free food to community members on religious holidays	5.03	5.00	-5.25	<.001
Nonreligious items				
1. Renovation of local city library	2.36	2.00	-7.42	<.001
2. Supporting a program to increase awareness of breast cancer	2.52	2.00	-6.93	<.001
3. Food bank for homeless people	3.37	3.00	-3.46	<.001
4. Project to install solar panels for city streetlights	2.11	1.50	-7.54	<.001
5. Building an indoor swimming pool in your neighborhood	1.95	1.00	-8.04	<.001

* Participants rated each donation on a scale from 1=Very nonreligious to 7=Very religious.

Study 1

This study aims to investigate the effect of religious conformity (high vs. low) on donating to different religious and nonreligious causes. As previously discussed, nonreligious causes refer to causes that benefit the broader society and their purpose is to enhance the quality and welfare of the public in general. We hypothesizes that religious people (high religious conformists) are more likely to donate to religious causes than nonreligious people (low religious conformists). We study this hypothesis specifically as findings on this relationship in literature are mixed. Our prediction is aligned with what Galen (2012) claims about the preference of religious people to donate to their ingroup, although major religions usually encourage people to give unconditionally to anyone.

Participants and procedure

Participants

Participants were 171 undergraduate students from a subject pool at the University of Manitoba, drawn from the same population as the Pretest. Students earned course credit for participation in this study as compensation. Twenty-seven participants were discarded as a result of failing one or more attention check questions. Therefore, 144 participants were used to analyze the data (age distribution 18-32 years (*M* = 19.5, *SD* = 2.14); 75.7% domestic student and 24.3% international). Of the total participants 43.1% identified as Christian, 7.6% as Muslim, 6.3% as Hindu, 5.6% as Jewish, 0.7% as Buddhist, 23.6% as None/Secular/Atheist/Agnostic, and 12.5% as Other.

Procedure

Hypothesis 1 was tested using a survey. The Social-Norm Espousal Scale (SNES), created by Bizer et al. (2014), was used to measure religious conformity. The purpose of the SNES is to measure how much people accept and internalize the behavioral norms of their social groups, especially in areas that are morally significant. The current study adapts this framework to a religious context by trying to adjust items to measure the espousal of religious norms or the extent to which people actively conform to the behavioral standards that their religious communities promote. Our conceptual justification is that because religious groups serve as communities that enforce norms and the interactions of ingroup-outgroup in donation behavior, conforming to group norms plays a crucial role; our empirical justification is that the SNES offers a psychometrically-validated method of evaluating norm adherence without reducing religion to abstract labels of belief or identity.

First, all participants completed the religious conformity measurement scale on a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). In this scale (Cronbach's α = .88), we adapted 14 items (e.g., "We shouldn't always have to follow a set of religious rules") from the SNES scale. After responding to religious conformity measurement scales, participants completed a distraction task asking to list all the things that come to mind when they think of the word "FRESH", following which they were directed to a hypothetical scenario (Appendix B). The distraction task was to reduce priming effects.

In the scenario, participants read about a fictional charity fundraising event at the workplace, following which they were asked to indicate their intention to donate to various causes. Specifically, they were asked to indicate how likely they are to donate $100 to several charitable causes. Both religious (e.g., "Supporting missionary outreach programs") and nonreligious (e.g., "Supporting a program to increase awareness of breast cancer") causes were shown randomly (see Appendix B for a full list). There was an equal number of religious and nonreligious causes to avoid biasing participants in one direction or the other. Then, participants answered two attention check questions to examine if they had read the scenario. Lastly, they answered demographic questions such as age, student status, language, and religious affiliation. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed about the intention of the study.

Results

Donation likelihood. To examine differences in responses to the hypothetical donation question between high and low religious conformists, a new parameter – *donation bias* – was created. Donation bias was calculated for each participant by subtracting the average donation likelihood score for nonreligious causes from the average donation likelihood score for religious causes. This allowed for a more straightforward analysis by consolidating the dependent variable into a single continuous measure rather than treating it as a two-level religious versus nonreligious variable.

To classify participants as high or low in religious conformity, a percentile-based approach was used. Specifically, individuals whose average religious conformity score fell within the upper-third percentile of the scale were categorized as high religious conformists, whereas those in the lower-third percentile were classified as low religious conformists.

Before conducting statistical analysis, reverse-coded items in the Religious Conformity Scale (items 2, 3, 8, 12, and 13; see Appendix B) were adjusted accordingly. An independent sample t-test was then performed to compare donation bias between high and low religious conformists. Results indicated that high religious conformists ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 1.16$) showed a significantly greater donation bias compared to low religious conformists ($M = -1.58$, $SD = 1.22$), $t(99) = 8.86$, $p < .001$, as shown in Figure 1.

As discussed previously, religious people prefer to directly or indirectly help their ingroup. As shown in the Pretest, we expected that religious conformists would be more inclined to give to religious charitable causes compared to nonreligious individuals. Our hypothesis was supported by the results of this study.

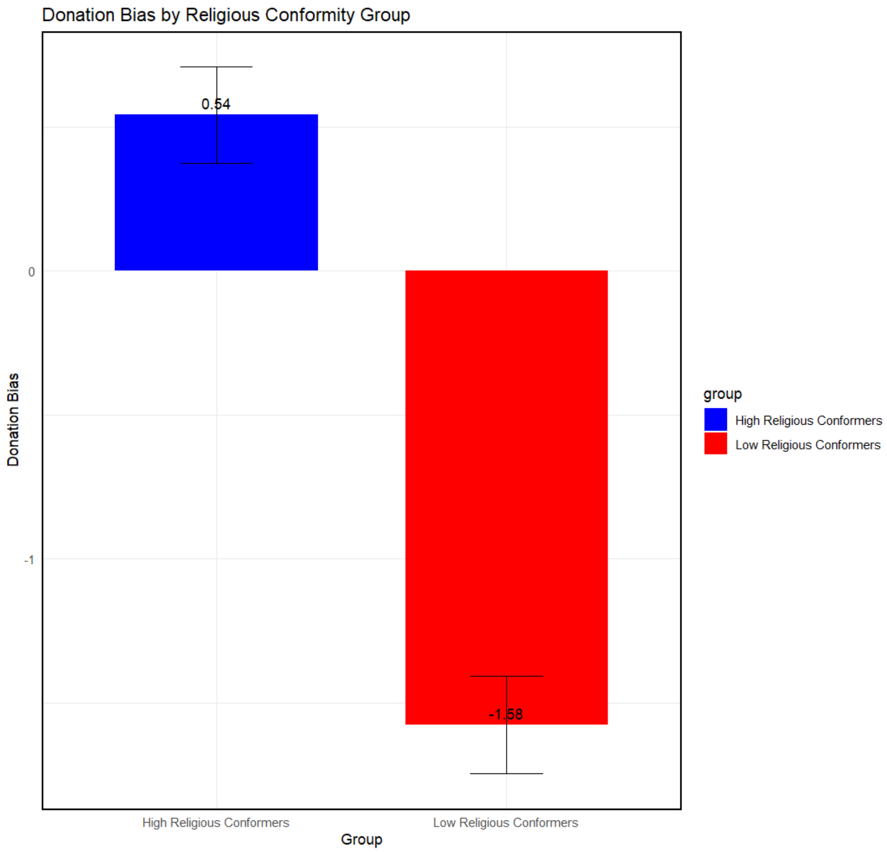

Figure 1: Donation bias in high and low religious conformists

Discussion

Donation bias was defined as the difference between the average donation likelihood score for religious causes and the average donation likelihood score for nonreligious causes meaning that a larger and more positive donation bias score indicates a higher likelihood of donating to religious causes. The results of this study suggest that high religious conformists show a stronger preference for donating to religious causes compared to low religious conformists. In other words, individuals with higher religious conformity scores demonstrate a greater tendency to prioritize religious causes over nonreligious ones when making donation decisions.

This result aligns with the literature (e.g., Galen (2012)) which indicates that individuals with stronger religious conformity are more likely to internalize and adhere to religious norms, which may include favoring religiously-affiliated charitable contributions. The significant difference observed between the two groups underscores the role of religious conformity in shaping donation behavior, providing further insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying charitable decision-making.

While Study 1 demonstrates that religious conformity plays a significant role in shaping individuals' preferences for religious versus nonreligious donation causes, charitable behavior does not always occur in isolation. In real-life situations, donations can be made in the presence of others, such as donating in a charity gala or via a donation website which publicly announces names of donors, which may lead people to alter their behavior accordingly. This raises the question of whether people who are highly motivated to conform to religious norms also adjust their behavior based on who is observing them. Prior research suggests that individuals may alter their actions in public contexts due to concerns about how they are perceived, especially when the observer represents a different social group (White et al., 2014). In the case of religious conformity, individuals may feel increased pressure to uphold or even modify their behavior depending on whether the observer supports or challenges the norms they typically follow. Therefore, to extend the findings of Study 1, in Study 2 we examine how the presence of an observer – described as either religious, nonreligious, or unspecified – influences the donation behavior of religious conformists.

Study 2

This study focuses on the combined effect of religious conformity, social influence (peer presence), and personality traits (self-monitoring) on donation behavior. Unlike Study 1, which investigates the impact of only religious conformity on donation preferences, this study broadens the scope to examine how the presence of an observer (perceived as ingroup or outgroup by the donor) and self-monitoring as an individual trait interact in this context. While prior research assumes religious individuals consistently act in line with their faith-based values, we argue this may not apply uniformly. Not all individuals are equally sensitive to social evaluation. Self-monitoring, the tendency to adjust one's behavior based on social cues, can shape how people respond to observers. For religious conformists, the presence of a religious observer may encourage donations aligned with religious norms, while the presence of a nonreligious observer may prompt high self-monitoring individuals to modify their behavior to reduce stereotype threat and align with broader social expectations. Therefore, in this study, we test Hypotheses 2 , 3a, and 3b to examine how religious conformity, observer identity, and self-monitoring interact to impact donation decisions.

Participants and procedure

Participants

Participants were 337 undergraduate students from a subject pool at the University of Manitoba. The population of participants was the same as the ones for the Pretest and Study 1. Students earned course credit for participation in this study as compensation. Sixty participants were discarded as a result of failing two or more attention check questions in the study. Therefore, 277 participants were retained in the dataset (age distribution 18-47 ($M = 21.51$, $SD = 2.98$); 76.5% domestic student and 23.5% international). Of the total participants, 45.1% identified as Christian, 9% as Muslim, 2.5% as Hindu, 4.3% as Jewish, 2.2% as Buddhist, 24.5% as None/Secular/Atheist/Agnostic, and 11.9% as Other.

Procedure

In this study, we used a between-subject experimental design: 2 (religious conformity of the donor: high vs. low) × 3 (religious identity of the observer: religious vs. nonreligious vs. control condition) × 2 (self-monitoring: high vs. low). We tested hypotheses 2, 3a, and 3b using this study.

The study was conducted online using the Qualtrics survey platform and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Following consent questions, participants completed a series of measurement scales. They were first presented with a 14-item Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) adapted from the Social-Norm Espousal Scale developed by Bizer et al. (2014) to measure religious conformity. Then, they completed a 13-item Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) to measure self-monitoring from Lennox and Wolfe (1984). The scale included items such as "In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for" and "I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in". Participants completed the two measurement scales and then completed an unrelated distraction task (the same as used in Study 1) before the main experimental manipulation to reduce priming effects that could bias their responses. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: religious observer, nonreligious observer, or control condition. Each condition involved reading a hypothetical workplace scenario describing a charity fundraising event where their boss, Jesse, was observing the donation action. In the religious observer condition, Jesse was described as a highly religious individual participating in faith-based community activities. In the nonreligious observer condition, Jesse was described as a secular person who supports nonreligious donation causes. In the control condition, nothing was mentioned about the religious identity of Jesse (see Appendix C for the three scenarios). The manipulation was designed to test whether the observer's religious identity influenced participants' donation decisions.

After reading their assigned scenario, participants were directed to a hypothetical donation decision task, where they were asked to indicate the likelihood of donating $100 to different charitable causes, including both religious and nonreligious options on a 7-point scale (1=Not at all likely and 7=Very likely). To verify the effectiveness of the manipulation, a manipulation check question was asked to assess the perception of Jess's religious identity and the extent to which Jess's presence influenced their donation decisions (i.e., "To what extent did the presence of Jesse influence your decision of which cause(s) to donate to?"; 1=No influence at all, 7=Very strong influence). Some attention questions were also included to ensure participants carefully read the scenario.

Finally, participants completed demographic questions on age, mother tongue, religious affiliation, and student status. Participants were then debriefed about the study's hypotheses.

Results

Manipulation check. To assess whether the experimental manipulation successfully affected participant's perception of the observer influence, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Participants in the religious observer condition ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.67$) did not report significantly higher influence score compared to those in the control condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(181.14) = -0.99$, $p = 0.32$. Similarly, in the nonreligious observer condition ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.46$) also, the manipulation did not influence participants significantly higher than the control condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(183.65) = -0.03$, $p = 0.98$. Finally, in the nonreligious observer condition ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.46$), the manipulation was not significantly different from the religious observer condition ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(174.28) = 1.02$, $p = 0.31$.

The lack of significance in the manipulation checks, however, do not necessarily mean that the manipulations failed and participants were not influenced by the observer's religious identity. Participants might have subconsciously changed their donation behavior, even if they did not consciously feel that they were strongly influenced. Research on implicit social influence (Vorauer & Miller, 1997) shows that people often adjust their behavior based on subtle cues around them, which they may not be aware of or choose not to report in self-assessment. Therefore, although the manipulation check question results may indicate the manipulation did not work, it should be noted that participants did pay attention to the religiosity of the observer as per the attention check question that asked participants what kind of a person the observer was. Results showed that 96.7% of participants recalled the religiosity of the observer correctly. Significant results in the main analysis provide stronger evidence than a self-reported perception measure. Therefore, we continue further analysis.

As we are using categorical and continuous variables at the same time in this study, and we are also interested in interpreting the interaction effects (e.g., the effect of observer's religious identity on donation behavior when the level of self-monitoring changes), linear regression is more suitable for data analysis.

While this study included a control condition alongside the religious and nonreligious observer conditions, we chose to exclude the control condition from further analysis to simplify the statistical models and enhance interpretability. Including the control group would have required additional terms in the regression analysis and post hoc comparisons (e.g., estimated marginal means), which would complicate interpretation without directly serving the primary research question which focuses on religious versus nonreligious observer effects. Removing the control condition did not alter the pattern of results; it simply allowed for a more focused and streamlined comparison between participants observed by religious versus nonreligious individuals. As a result, the total sample size used for the rest of the data analysis was reduced from 277 to 182 participants (95 participants were in the control condition).

Hypothesis 2. Since in this hypothesis, we are examining whether the means of donation behavior changes between religious and nonreligious observer condition averaging over religious conformity, we include self-monitoring as a control variable to account for any potential influence it may have on donation behavior. However, we did not include the interaction term in the regression equation as we are not interested in the moderating effect of self-monitoring at this step. This allows us to isolate and examine the key factor that is central to the second hypothesis without confounding effects from self-monitoring interactions. Therefore, the regression equation would be:

$$\begin{aligned}
&Donation\ bias \\
&\quad = \beta_0 + \beta_1\,(Religious\ conformity) + \beta_2\,(Observers'\ religious\ condition) \\
&\quad + \beta_3\,(Self\ monitoring) \\
&\quad + \beta_4\,(Religious\ conformity\ \times Observer's\ religious\ condition) + \varepsilon
\end{aligned}$$

In this equation, *donation bias* was calculated for each participant by subtracting the average donation likelihood score for nonreligious causes from the average donation likelihood score for religious causes, as was done in Study 1. This transformation allowed consolidating the dependent variable into a single continuous measure rather than treating it as a two-level variable. Continuous variables were mean-centered.

As the observer's religious condition is a categorical variable (and since we removed the data related to the control condition), we used dummy coding with two levels (Nonreligious observer as the reference group = 0, and religious observer = 1). The results of multiple regression analysis are reported in Table 1. The overall regression model was statistically significant $F(4, 177) = 24.6, p < .001$ ($R^2 = 0.35$).

Religious conformity is a significant positive predictor of donation bias, $B = 0.93, SE = 0.14, t(177) = 6.84, p < .001$, indicating that higher religious conformity is associated with greater donation bias, which subsequently means a greater likelihood of donation to religious causes as predicted. However, self-monitoring as the control variable is not a significant predictor, $B = -0.05, SE = 0.14, t(177) = -0.31, p > .7$, indicating that individual differences in self-monitoring did not significantly impact donation likelihood. Additionally, the last row of Table 1 shows the difference between the slope of religious conformity between religious and nonreligious observer conditions, which tells how the effect of religious conformity on donation bias changes when moving from the nonreligious observer condition to the religious observer condition. The results show that this difference is not statistically significant, $B = -0.19, SE = 0.18, t(177) = -1.08, p > .2$, suggesting that the effect of religious conformity on donation bias (likelihood) is not significantly different from the nonreligious observer condition. In other words, one unit change in religious conformity does not increase the gap between the fitted lines for religious and nonreligious observer conditions significantly.

Table 2: Results of multiple regression analysis for the model in Hypothesis 2

	Estimate	S.E.	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	-0.75	0.14	-5.50	< .001
Religious Conformity	0.93	0.14	6.84	< .001
Religious observer condition	0.53	0.20	2.70	.008
Self-monitoring	-0.05	0.14	-0.31	.759
Religious conformity × Religious observer condition	-0.19	0.18	-1.08	.284

Note: $R^2 = 0.35$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.34$ ($N = 182$, $p < .001$)

Since multiple regression, when using dummy coding, gives the difference of the slopes in religious and nonreligious observer conditions rather than the slopes of each condition individually, we also conducted a simple slope analysis to estimate how the strength and direction of donation bias change with a one-unit increase in religious conformity in each condition. While the Johnson-Neyman technique is useful for identifying regions of significance when the moderator is continuous, it is not applicable here because the moderator, observer condition, is categorical. With no continuum of values to probe, the most appropriate approach is to examine the simple slopes within each category. For this purpose, we used the sim_slope function using the interactions package in R. The results revealed that religious conformity positively predicted donation bias in both conditions. Specifically, in the religious observer condition, the relationship between religious conformity and donation bias is significant ($b = 0.73$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(177) = 6.3$, $p <.001$), indicating that individuals with higher religious conformity exhibited a stronger tendency to donate to religious causes in the presence of a religious observer. Similarly, in the nonreligious observer condition, religious conformity also significantly predicted donation bias ($b = 0.93$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(177) = 6.84$, $p <.001$), showing that even in the presence of a nonreligious observer, those with higher religious conformity were more likely to donate to religious causes.

Although the regression analysis gives us the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, it does not show how the average donation bias or donation likelihood differs across conditions. As this research involves manipulated observer conditions (religious and nonreligious observers), comparing group means allows us to determine whether these conditions lead to significant differences in donation behavior.

In order to examine the differences in donation bias across conditions, estimated marginal means (EMMs) were calculated using the emmeans package in R. Estimated marginal means adjust for covariates in the model, providing a more accurate comparison of group means. We used Tukey's adjustment for pairwise comparisons to control for Type I error. The results showed that the mean of donation bias was higher in the religious observer condition (*M* = -0.22, *SE* = 0.14) than in the nonreligious observer condition (*M* = -0.75, *SE* = 0.14). Since donation bias was created to assess participants' relative preference for donating to religious vs. nonreligious causes, higher values of donation bias indicate a stronger tendency toward religious donations and lower values show a preference for nonreligious causes.

Although both means are negative, showing that on average participants demonstrated a stronger preference toward nonreligious donations, this preference was less pronounced in the religious observer condition. This means that when observed by a religious individual, participants showed a shift toward religious giving compared to when observed by a nonreligious observer. We can interpret this as the presence of a religious observer reduces the extent to which people favor nonreligious causes, shifting them toward religious options, even if the overall preference for nonreligious causes remains dominant.

Pairwise comparison indicated that the difference between the religious observer condition and nonreligious observer condition is statistically significant, *Mdifference* = -0.53, 95% *CI* [-0.92, -0.14], $p < .01$, indicating that participants were significantly more likely to donate to religious causes when observed by a religious individual compared to a nonreligious observer.

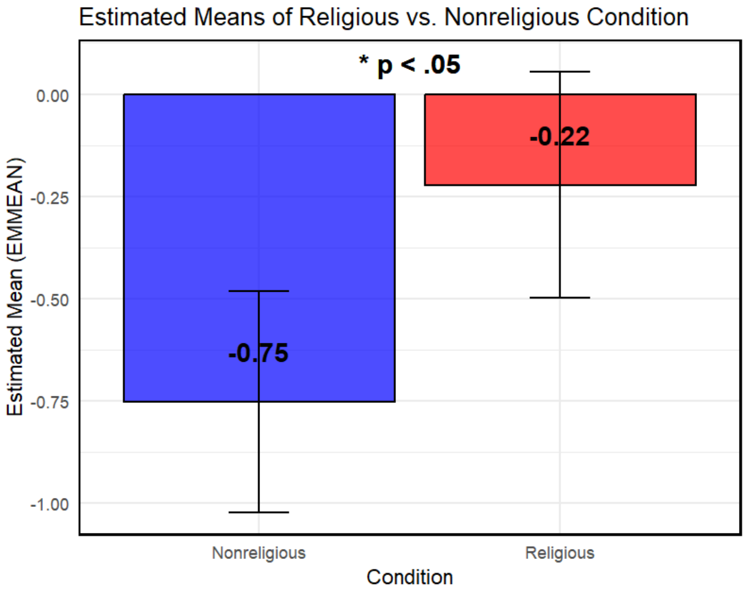

Figure 2: Estimated marginal means for religious and nonreligious observer conditions

Error bars in Figure 2 show 95% confidence intervals. Confidence intervals provide a range within which the true population mean is likely to fall. A large overlap in confidence intervals of the two conditions shows that the difference between the two groups is not significant. In addition, in smaller sample sizes, confidence intervals give a better sense of precision. As it can be seen, while there is some overlap in the intervals between the two observer conditions, it is limited, visually supporting the significant difference found in the pairwise comparison ($p < .01$).

Hypothesis 3a. In this hypothesis, we were interested in testing the effect of self-monitoring on the interaction of religious conformity and the observer's religious identity. This adds three more interaction terms to the regression equation:

$$
\begin{aligned}
&Donation\ bias \\
&\qquad = \beta_0 + \beta_1\ (Religious\ conformity) + \beta_2\ (Observer\ religious\ condition) \\
&\qquad + \beta_3\ (Self\ monitoring) \\
&\qquad + \beta_4\ (Religious\ conformity\ \times Observer\ religious\ condition) \\
&\qquad + \beta_5\ (Religious\ conformity\ \times self\ monitoring) \\
&\qquad + \beta_6\ (self\ monitoring\ \times Observer\ religious\ condition) \\
&\qquad + \beta_7\ (Religious\ conformity\ \times Observer\ religious\ condition \\
&\qquad \times\ Self\ monitoring) +\ \varepsilon
\end{aligned}
$$

As before, we used dummy coding with two levels (nonreligious observer = 0 and religious observer = 1). Two continuous variables, religious conformity and self-monitoring, were mean-centred to reduce the risk of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity can make it difficult to interpret the unique effects of the main predictors. In addition, mean-centering helps to improve the interpretability of main effects by representing the impact of a predictor at an average level of the other predictor not at zero.

The results of multiple regression analysis are reported in Table 3. The overall regression model was statistically significant $F(7, 174) = 18.6$, $p < .001$ ($R^2 = 0.43$). Religious conformity was a significant predictor of donation bias ($b = 0.94$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(174) = 6.59$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher religious conformity showed a stronger tendency toward religious donation. The three-way interaction between religious conformity, the observer's religious identity, and self-monitoring is significant ($b = -0.66$, $SE = 0.25$, $t(174) = -2.69$, $p = .008$), confirming that the effect of religious conformity on donation bias is significantly different between the religious and nonreligious observer conditions depending on the level of self-monitoring. The estimate of the three-way interaction when using dummy coding specifically reflects the difference in the effect of religious conformity between the religious and nonreligious observer conditions at different levels of self-monitoring.

Table 3: Results of multiple regression analysis for the model in Hypothesis 3a

	Estimate	S.E.	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	-0.76	0.13	-5.78	.001
Religious Conformity	0.94	0.14	6.59	.001
Religious observer condition	0.53	0.19	2.83	.005
Self-monitoring	-0.01	0.20	-0.08	.940
Religious conformity × Religious observer condition	-0.24	0.18	-1.31	.194
Religious conformity × Self-monitoring	-0.03	0.20	-0.17	.869
Self-monitoring × Religious observer condition	0.11	0.28	0.41	.682
Religious conformity × Religious observer condition × Self-monitoring	-0.66	0.25	-2.69	.008

Note: $R^2 = 0.43$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.41$ ($N = 182$, p-value < .001)

The negative sign of the estimate shows that the difference in the effect of religious conformity (slope) between religious and nonreligious observer conditions becomes more negative as self-monitoring increases. This means that the effect of religious conformity on donation bias in the religious observer condition decreases more rapidly than in the nonreligious observer condition. The Johnson-Neyman plot for the religious observer condition (Figure 3) visually supports this pattern: the slope of religious conformity on donation bias starts strongly positive at low self-monitoring levels and steadily declines as self-monitoring increases, crossing into a non-significant range at approximately 0.65 on the centered self-monitoring scale. According to the Johnson-Neyman output, the slope remains statistically significant ($p < .05$) when self-monitoring scores fall below 0.65 or above 1.68. However, since the observed range of self-monitoring scores in the data spans from -2.66 to 1.41, the effect of religious conformity is only significant in the lower portion of the self-monitoring distribution and becomes non-significant for self-monitoring values above 0.65. In contrast, the Johnson-Neyman plot for the nonreligious observer condition (Figure 4) shows that the slope of religious conformity remains statistically significant for self-monitoring values between -1.85 and 2.15, which fully contains the observed range of self-monitoring scores in that condition (-1.59 to 1.64). This stability in the nonreligious condition, compared to the sharp decline in the religious condition, illustrates that the moderating effect of self-monitoring on the relationship between religious conformity and donation bias is far more pronounced when the observer is religious.

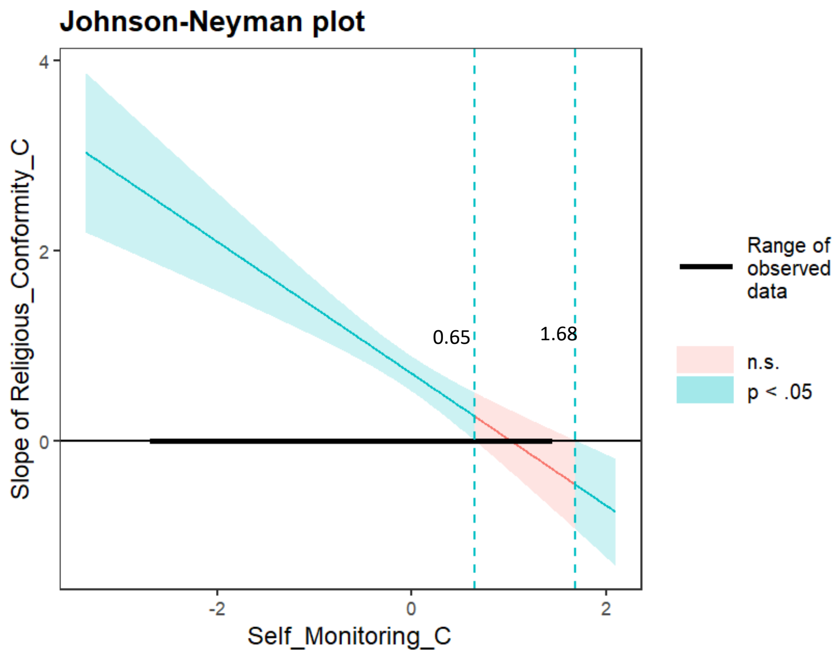

Figure 3: Johnson-Neyman plot for religious observer condition

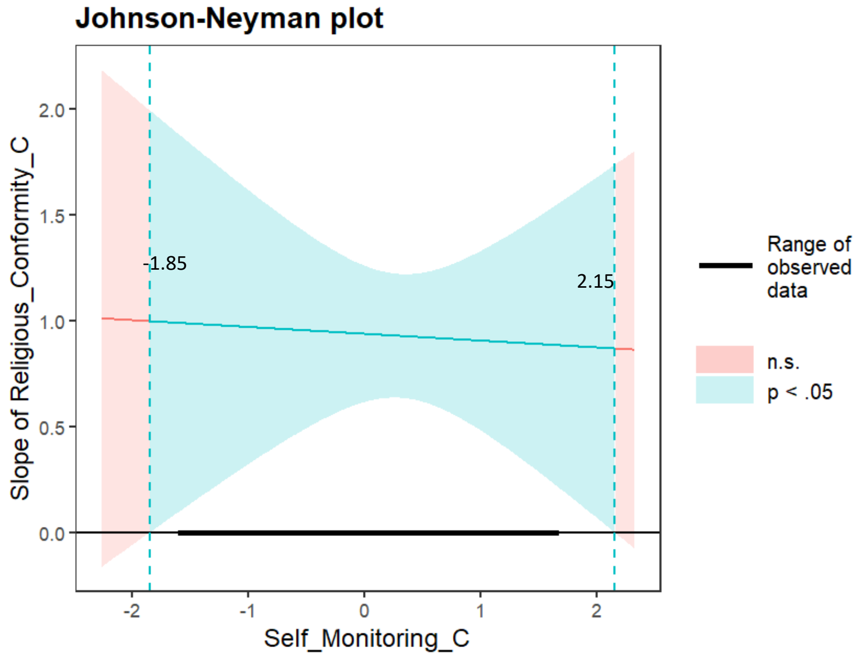

Figure 4: Johnson-Neyman plot for nonreligious observer condition

While the Johnson-Neyman analysis identifies the range of self-monitoring values where the effect of religious conformity on donation bias is statistically significant within each observer condition, it does not directly indicate whether one observer condition produces higher or lower donation bias than the other at those values. The method focuses on the significance of the slope within a single condition, not on the magnitude or direction of differences between conditions. Therefore, it is possible for the slope in one condition to be significant and in the other to be non-significant, yet for the actual donation bias means to still be similar at certain levels of self-monitoring. To address this and provide a more direct comparison of donation bias between the religious and nonreligious observer conditions across levels of self-monitoring, we conducted a follow-up analysis using estimated marginal means (EMM). EMM adjust for covariates and allow us to compare predicted means across conditions, offering a clearer understanding of whether donation bias is indeed lower or higher in one observer condition compared to the other at specific levels of self-monitoring.

EMM results revealed that the mean donation bias in the religious observer condition is $M = -0.23$, $SE = 0.13$, while in the nonreligious observer condition, it is significantly lower at $M = -0.76$, $SE = 0.13$. The pairwise comparison with Tukey adjustment confirmed that this difference is statistically significant, $b = -0.53$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(174) = -2.83$, $p < .01$. This indicates that on average, individuals were more likely to donate to nonreligious causes when observed by a nonreligious observer versus a religious observer. More importantly, when examining the EMM at high self-monitoring (we considered one standard deviation above the mean as high self-monitoring), the difference between the religious and nonreligious observer conditions remained significant. At high self-monitoring, the estimated marginal means of donation bias in the religious observer condition ($M = -0.16$, $SE = 0.20$) is significantly higher than nonreligious observer condition ($M = -0.77$, $SE = 0.18$), $b = -0.61$, $SE = 0.27$, $t(174) = -2.27$, $p < .03$. These results confirm that high self-monitors in the nonreligious observer condition exhibited significantly greater preference toward nonreligious causes compared to those in the religious observer condition.

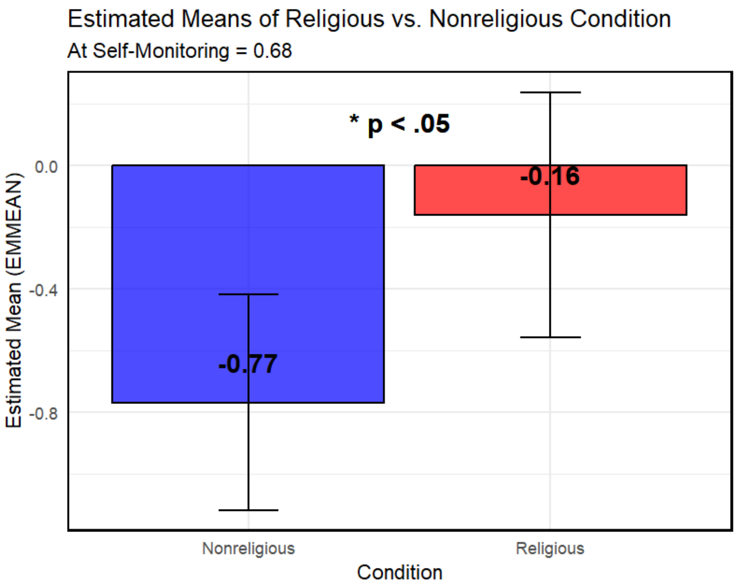

Figure 5: Estimated marginal means for religious and nonreligious observer conditions at high self-monitoring

While the three-way interaction analysis reveals how the effect of religious conformity changes across conditions, it does not directly test our hypothesis regarding the relative difference between conditions at low and high levels of self-monitoring. The EMM results provided direct evidence that, among high self-monitors, donation bias in the nonreligious observer condition is significantly lower than in the religious observer condition. This supports the idea that high self-monitors adjust their donation preferences based on the observer's religious identity, donating more to nonreligious causes when observed by a nonreligious individual.

Hypothesis 3b. In this hypothesis, we intended to show that the shift in the donation behavior in the presence of an observer does not happen for low self-monitors. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a pairwise comparison of estimated marginal mean (EMM) using the emmeans function in R, focusing specifically on participants at low levels of self-monitoring, which we defined as one standard deviation below the mean. This approach allows for a direct comparison of donation bias between religious and nonreligious observer conditions.

The findings show that among low self-monitors, the mean donation bias in the religious observer condition was M = -0.30, SE = 0.18, and in the nonreligious observer condition, it was M = -0.75, SE = 0.20. The pairwise contrast (Tukey-adjusted) between these means was b = -0.45, SE =

0.27, *t*(174) = -1.70, *p* = .09. This result indicates that the difference in donation bias between the two observer conditions is statistically non-significant for low self-monitors.

These results support Hypothesis 3b by confirming that low self-monitors do not significantly change their donation behavior based on changes in the religious identity of the observer. Unlike high self-monitors, who adjust their donation preference to align with social cues, low self-monitors appear consistent in their donation behavior regardless of the social context.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide meaningful insights into how religious conformity, self-monitoring, and religious identity of an observer influence donation behavior. Although the manipulation check did not indicate significant results, it is important to mention that self-reported influence may not fully capture subtle social influences, as it may not be a conscious one. Behavioral outcomes, such as a shift in donation bias, may occur even in the absence of conscious awareness, which aligns with past research on implicit social influence and impression management (Vorauer & Miller, 1997).

The regression analysis conducted to test the hypotheses reflected a robust and theoretically consistent pattern. Religious conformity was shown as a strong predictor of donation bias across all models (Hypotheses 2, 3a, and 3b), indicating individuals who strongly align with religious norms tend to prefer donating to religious causes. However, this tendency is influenced by the social context. While religious conformity generally predicts stronger support for religious donations, our results also show that the presence and identity of an observer can moderate this relationship. We observed that the religious identity of the observer moderated donation preferences, particularly among high self-monitors. While both groups overall preferred nonreligious causes, the preference was significantly less pronounced in the presence of a religious observer. This shift implies that people, particularly those with strong self-monitoring tendencies, are sensitive to the social identities of others when making charitable decisions and modify their behavior accordingly. High self-monitors appear to adjust their actions to align with perceived social expectations, increasing their likelihood of donating to religious causes when observed by a religious person or to nonreligious causes when observed by a nonreligious person.

Results also show that as self-monitoring increases, the difference in how religious conformity affects donation between the religious and nonreligious observer conditions becomes more pronounced. That means, as self-monitoring increases there is a sharper change in behavior depending on who is observing the donor. When the donor is observed by someone religious, the influence of religious conformity on donating to religious causes drops off more rapidly, compared to when the observer is nonreligious.

While the Johnson-Neyman analysis helps identify the specific range of self-monitoring values at which the relationship between religious conformity and donation bias is statistically significant within each observer condition, it does not show how actual donation choices compare between the religious and nonreligious observer groups. The Johnson-Neyman method focuses on whether the slope of religious conformity is significant at a given level of self-monitoring within a single condition, rather than indicating whether participants in one condition were more likely to choose religious charitable causes over nonreligious ones than participants in the other condition. In other words, while the Johnson-Neyman results showed that the effect of religious conformity becomes non-significant at higher self-monitoring levels in the religious observer condition but remains significant across most of the range in the nonreligious observer condition, this information alone cannot tell us which group ultimately displayed a stronger preference for religious causes at those levels. To answer that, we followed up with further analysis by comparing estimated marginal means (EMM). The EMM analysis revealed that for high self-monitors, the average level of donation bias (i.e., preference for donating to religious causes over nonreligious ones) was lower when the observer was nonreligious compared to when the observer was religious. This means that high self-monitoring religious conformists are actually less likely to donate to religious causes when being observed by a nonreligious person than when observed by a religious person.

This pattern highlights the social adjustment nature of high self-monitors. It seems they may adjust their behavior based on who is watching them so as to align with the observer's values perceived by the donor. When a nonreligious person is watching the donor, they might moderate religiously-motivated actions to avoid appearing overly religious. On the other hand, if the one observing is religious, the donor might feel more comfortable expressing their religious conformity through donations. In contrast, individuals low in self-monitoring showed stable behavior across observer conditions. Whether they were being observed by a religious person or a nonreligious person, their preference for donating to religious causes did not significantly change. This suggests that low self-monitoring religious conformists, who tend to hold their internal values and act based on them, are less influenced by who is observing them. Their donation decisions seem to be led more by personal values than expectations of others. As a result, the identity of the observer had little effect on their preference of donation cause.

Implications

It has been reported that the number of nonreligious people has increased globally in recent decades, diversifying the religious identity throughout the world (Lipka, 2017). This trend is especially noticeable among younger people in North America (Mathras et al., 2016). As a result of this shift, people are more likely to encounter others with a different religious identity than their own in their daily lives. Interacting with people who do not share, or share less, values with what one holds can be challenging when values do not align, but also offer opportunities for learning and growth. To make the most of these interactions, we need to explore their complexities. Understanding why and when interactions between different religious groups might not go as expected can help communities plan better and make the most of the potential benefits these diverse interactions can bring.

Although studies have pointed to the influence of social pressure on the donation behavior of religious individuals (Bekkers & Schuyt, 2008; Casale & Baumann, 2015), they have all considered the pressure from within their communities. However, no research has explored how the presence of someone from a different and possibly opposing group might affect the donation habits of people from various religious backgrounds. Additionally, research on whether religious people donate to non-religious causes shows mixed results. While some have shown that religious people give to nonreligious charities due to holding prosocial values and altruism (Bekkers & Schuyt, 2008), others indicate that highly religious individuals make the least contribution to nonreligious causes among all religious identities (Dilmaghani, 2018). Therefore, this study aimed to clarify these findings by examining how religious conformists behave when choosing between religious and nonreligious causes.

Furthermore, the current research extends the understanding of social influence on donation behavior by testing the impact of an observer's religious identity (religious vs. nonreligious) on consumer donation decisions. This research builds upon prior research which focused on how dissociative outgroups can inversely promote similar behavior (White et al., 2014). In a public context (vs. private) when someone from an opposing group engages in positive behaviors that are widely accepted, it might lead others to copy those behaviors instead of following their own group's actions. Similarly, our study challenges the common view that association with one's ingroup or dissociation from the outgroup drives the behavior. Instead, we demonstrate that the religious identity of an observer can differently influence the likelihood of donating to various causes.

This research hypothesizes the influence of peer presence and self-monitoring, regardless of religious affiliation (these factors influence the behavior both for religious or nonreligious people). Therefore, it could be a basis for researchers interested in this area to further investigate the differentiation among religious affiliations to present how nuances of each can change or reinforce our findings. In addition, as previously discussed, religious identity of an observer influences not only donation behavior but potentially other consumer choices as well. Although religious consumers may prefer products, services, or causes that align with their religious values, the results of this study can be used as a foundation for future research to examine how the presence of dissociative outgroups for religious or nonreligious consumers can change their preferences beyond the donation behavior such as brand loyalty, luxury vs. budget purchases, sustainable consumption, responding to marketing messages, and consumption of products that are controversial within the religion. Researchers also can consider the bidirectional impact of different religious identities in various consumer interaction circumstances like brand communities and market segmentation especially in diverse markets.

The results of this study could provide valuable insights for fundraisers aiming to appeal to their target group. To encourage donors to support a wider variety of charitable causes, organizations might design public settings in which individuals are subtly made aware of the presence of outgroup members, groups they do not identify with. This social context could prompt people to donate beyond their usual preferences, especially if they wish to signal broader, more inclusive values. This specifically might be fruitful in societies that are multinational and multicultural and more likely to have a mix of different religious identities. For example, a charity campaign could inform participants about the donation preferences of outgroup members and then publicly display each donor's chosen cause to all participants in the campaign. This visibility may influence individuals to make choices that appear more socially inclusive or aligned with broader group norms. In the contexts in which consumers might be observed by outgroups, marketers can use the results of this study to emphasize universal values and benefits and craft campaigns that inform consumers about the preferences of the larger group. Some strategies like event-based marketing to host an event in which religious and nonreligious segments can attend and be influenced by each other's decisions might promote sales of the products of the company.

Limitations and future research

Although our studies provide insight on how religious conformity, the presence of an observer, and self-monitoring shape donation behavior, this research has some limitations.

First, there is lack of a well-established measurement scale on religious conformity and there is ambiguity around what it means to be religious. The absence of a validated and consistently used measurement tool brings challenges to the generalizability of the results, as each researcher's definition of religion and religious conformity can be different. While constructs like religiosity or religious commitment have been measured in various ways (Mathras et al., 2016), religious conformity, particularly as a salient social identity that may be triggered in different contexts, has not been operationalized with uniformity across studies. In addition, the lack of consensus in the literature on what constitutes a religious consumer presents theoretical and practical limitations. From a theoretical lens, comparing findings across different research contexts would be difficult when there is such inconsistency. From a practical point of view, it complicates strategies for marketers or nonprofit organizations to target religious consumers. This led us to define religious conformity as the closest concept to that required for this research and adapt a scale from general social norm conformity (Bizer et al., 2014). Future research could benefit from the development and validation of a standardized scale that captures both personal and social dimensions of religious people, especially in the domain of prosocial and donation behavior.

Second, there is a lack of differentiation across religious affiliations. Labeling people as religious as a generalized construct does not capture the differences that various affiliations (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc.) might have. The meaning, expressions, and behavioral implications of being religious can vary across religious affiliations. As such, the indicated effects might not show uniformity across all religious groups. Further research could investigate whether the patterns observed in this study, such as the influence of an observer's religious identity on donation preferences, vary across different religious affiliations. For instance, individuals from collectivist religious traditions like Islam may be less influenced by the religious identity of an external observer due to a stronger emphasis on internal accountability and divine surveillance (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007).

This helps clarify the influence of certain religious teachings, social norms, or community dynamics inherent to certain religions on donation behavior.

Third, we relied on hypothetical scenarios to measure donation behavior. A main limitation of our study design is the reliance on self-reported intentions within a hypothetical donation scenario. Although this approach is commonly used in psychology and consumer behavior research, it is limited in ecological validity. Participants' responses might vary between what we found in our research and real-life situations. Particularly in the context of prosocial behaviors where social desirability and self-imaging can influence the response, the actual behavior might differ from behavioral intentions. Future research can use field experiments or a real donation task to better examine donation preferences.

Fourth, there are unexplored psychological mechanisms underlying the effects we observed. While this study identifies significant relationships and interaction effects, it does not examine the reason behind them. Although we speculated that being conscious of religious stereotypes leading to religious identity threat is causing the observed effect, we did not measure mediating constructs. Investigating the underlying mechanism is crucial to building a more robust and nuanced explanation of how and why the religious identity of the observer affects donation behaviors. Future research can bring more robustness to this study by conducting a mediation analysis.

Fifth, this study has cultural and contextual limitations. As this study was conducted in Canada, the generalizability of findings to other regions of the world or religious environments may be limited. Culture can greatly affect social norms around donation in public. For instance, the presence of a religious observer may encourage obedience in more collectivistic societies while provoking opposition or doubt in more individualistic cultures. Conducting this research in diverse geographical and cultural settings would help identify any boundary conditions.

Overall, while this study has some limitations, it still helps us better understand how people decide to give to charity, especially when religion and social situations are involved. It shows that personal values, the presence of others, and individual personality traits like self-monitoring can all play a role in shaping donation behavior. By focusing on how these factors work together, this research offers useful insights that can help both researchers and organizations create better ways to encourage charitable giving. We hope these findings will inspire future studies and provide practical ideas to support more thoughtful and successful fundraising for charitable causes.

Appendix A: Pretest

We ask you for your perceptions of various donation options. We are interested in knowing how religious versus non-religious you think each of these are. As we are interested only in your perceptions, there are no right or wrong answers.

Please rate how religious or non-religious you think each of these donation options is:

	Very nonreligious						**Very religious**
Renovation of place of worship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Renovation of local city library	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting missionary outreach programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting a program to increase awareness of breast cancer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Food bank for homeless people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creating an emergency fund to help religious community members who are in financial hardship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Project to install solar panels for city streetlights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Scholarship for students in the local religious school	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Building an indoor swimming pool in your neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Serving free food for community members on religious holidays	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B: Study 1

Religious Conformity Scale

Please indicate the extent to which each of the below statements is a representation of yours.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
I go out of my way to follow religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We shouldn't always have to follow a set of religious rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People should always be able to act as they wish rather than trying to fit the religious norm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is a correct way to behave in every situation, according to religion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If more people followed their religion's rules, the world would be a better place.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Please click Strongly Agree for this item.[4]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People need to follow religion's unwritten rules every bit as strictly as they follow the written ones.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There are lots of vital customs that people should follow as members of their religious community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The standards that religion expects us to meet are far too restrictive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who follow what their religion expects of them lead happier lives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our religious community is built on unwritten principles that members need to follow.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am at ease only when everyone around me is adhering to religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We would be happier if we didn't try to follow religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My idea of a perfect world would be one with few religious expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I always do my best to follow my religion's rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---

[4] Attention check

List all the things that come to mind when you think of the word "FRESH." List as many as you can (you don't have to necessarily list 6 things).[5]

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

In the following page you will read a hypothetical scenario about an event in your workplace. Please read it carefully. Following it, you will be asked some questions.

Your company is organizing a charity fundraising event as part of its commitment to the local community. Today is the day of that event. The event involves some speeches by the company's top management followed by contributing money to various causes by employees. There are tables at the back of the hall which contain boxes for one to donate money to different causes of their choice.

You listen to the speeches and then head to the part of the room where the donation boxes are kept. You are aware that many of your colleagues are planning to donate $100 at this event. You plan to donate the same amount.

Please indicate how likely you are to donate the $100 to each of the following causes:

	Not at all likely						**Very likely**
Renovation of place of worship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Renovation of local city library	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting missionary outreach programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting a program to increase awareness of breast cancer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Food bank for homeless people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creating an emergency fund to help religious community members who are in financial hardship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Project to install solar panels for city streetlights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---

[5] Filler task

Scholarship for students in the local religious school	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Building an indoor swimming pool in your neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Serving free food for community members on religious holidays	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please answer the below questions to the best of your ability.[6]

What was the event at your workplace?

a. Fundraising for office party
b. Fundraising for charities
c. Employee awards ceremony
d. Retirement party

As per the scenario, how much money had you planned to donate?

a. $0
b. $10
c. $50
d. $100

Please answer these general questions about yourself. We do not ask for any information with which you can be personally identified. You may skip any question you don't wish to answer.

(Demographic questions)

Please indicate your age: _____ years

Which of the following best describes you?

a. Domestic student (Canadian)
b. International student (Permanent Resident)
c. International student (not a Permanent Resident)

Your mother tongue:

a. English
b. French
c. One of the Indigenous languages
d. Mandarin/Cantonese
e. Punjabi/Hindi
f. Tagalog
g. Arabic
h. Other (please specify) _________

Please indicate the religion you are most affiliated with:

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[6] Attention check questions

a. Christian
b. Muslim
c. Hindu
d. Jewish
e. Buddhist
f. None/Secular/Atheist/Agnostic
g. Other (please specify): -----------

Appendix C: Study 2

You will be participating in a few unrelated mini studies. Your answers are fully anonymous. Please answer all the questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers to any question.

Religious Conformity Scale

Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
I go out of my way to follow religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We shouldn't always have to follow a set of religious rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People should always be able to act as they wish rather than trying to fit the religious norm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is a correct way to behave in every situation, according to religion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If more people followed their religion's rules, the world would be a better place.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Please click Strongly Agree for this item.[7]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People need to follow religion's unwritten rules every bit as strictly as they follow the written ones.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There are lots of vital customs that people should follow as members of their religious community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The standards that religion expects us to meet are far too restrictive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who follow what their religion expects of them lead happier lives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our religious community is built on unwritten principles that members need to follow.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---

[7] Attention check

I am at ease only when everyone around me is adhering to religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We would be happier if we didn't try to follow religious norms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My idea of a perfect world would be one with few religious expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I always do my best to follow my religion's rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Self-monitoring Scale

Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Once I know what the situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I'm conversing with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My powers of intuition are quite good when it comes to understanding others' emotions and motives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can usually tell when others consider a joke to be in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please click Strongly Disagree for this item.[8]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner of expression.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

List all the things that come to mind when you think of the word “FRESH.” List as many as you can (you don’t have to necessarily list 6 things).[9]

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

In the following page you will read a hypothetical scenario about an event in your workplace. Please read it carefully. Following it, you will be asked some questions.

(One-third of the participants got the below scenario)

Your company is organizing a charity fundraising event as part of its commitment to the local community. Today is the day of that event. The event involves some speeches by the company’s top management followed by contributing money to various causes by employees. There are tables at the back of the hall which contains boxes for one to donate money to different causes of their choice.

You listen to the speeches and then head to the part of the room where the donation boxes are kept. The person manning the boxes is your boss, Jesse.

Jesse is known in the office as a very religious person who regularly attends a place of worship. Jesse often talks about being involved in various religious community activities. You are aware that Jesse often donates money for religious charity causes and also fundraises for them.

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[8] Attention check

[9] Filler task

You are aware that many of your colleagues are planning to donate $100 at this event. You plan to donate the same amount.

As Jesse is the one manning the donation boxes, what cause(s) you donate to will be clearly visible to Jesse.

Please indicate how likely you are to donate the $100 to each of the following causes:

(Another one-third of the participants got the below scenario)

Your company is organizing a charity fundraising event as part of its commitment to the local community. Today is the day of that event. The event involves some speeches by the company's top management followed by contributing money to various causes by employees. There are tables at the back of the hall which contains boxes for one to donate money to different causes of their choice.

You listen to the speeches and then head to the part of the room where the donation boxes are kept. The person manning the boxes is your boss, Jesse.

Jesse is known in the office as a non-religious person who generally avoids going to places of worship. Jesse often talks about being involved in various secular community activities. You are aware that Jesse often donates money for non-religious charity causes and also fundraises for them.

You are aware that many of your colleagues are planning to donate $100 at this event. You plan to donate the same amount.

As Jesse is the one manning the donation boxes, what cause(s) you donate to will be clearly visible to Jesse.

Please indicate how likely you are to donate the $100 to each of the following causes:

(Another one-third of the participants got the below scenario)

Your company is organizing a charity fundraising event as part of its commitment to the local community. Today is the day of that event. The event involves some speeches by the company's top management followed by contributing money to various causes by employees. There are tables at the back of the hall which contains boxes for one to donate money to different causes of their choice.

You listen to the speeches and then head to the part of the room where the donation boxes are kept. The person manning the boxes is your boss, Jesse.

You are aware that many of your colleagues are planning to donate $100 at this event. You plan to donate the same amount.

As Jesse is the one manning the donation boxes, what cause(s) you donate to will be clearly visible to Jesse.

Please indicate how likely you are to donate the $100 to each of the following causes:

	Not at all likely						**Very likely**
Renovation of place of worship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Renovation of local city library	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting missionary outreach programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supporting a program to increase awareness of breast cancer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Food bank for homeless people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creating an emergency fund to help religious community members who are in financial hardship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Project to install solar panels for city streetlights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Scholarship for students in the local religious school	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Building an indoor swimming pool in your neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Serving free food for community members on religious holidays	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

To what extent did the presence of Jesse influence your decision of which cause(s) to donate to?[10]

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[10] Manipulation check

No influence at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strong influence

Please answer the below questions to the best of your ability.[11]

What was the event at your workplace?

a. Fundraising for office party
b. Fundraising for charities
c. Employee awards ceremony
d. Retirement party

Who is Jesse?

a. A subordinate who reports to me
b. Person who is at the same level as me in the organization
c. My boss
d. Person who works for a competitor organization

What kind of a person is Jesse, as per the scenario you read?

a. Very religious
b. Secular (non-religious)
c. This information was not provided in the scenario article

As per the scenario, how much money had you planned to donate?

a. $0
b. $10
c. $50
d. $100

As per the scenario, which of these is true?

a. Jesse will be able to see what cause(s) I donate to
b. Jesse will not be able to see what cause(s) I donate to
c. Most of my colleagues will be able to see what cause(s) I donate to
d. Nobody will be able to see what causes(s) I donate to

Please answer these general questions about yourself. We do not ask for any information by which you can be personally identified. You may skip any question you don’t wish to answer.

Please indicate your age: _____ years

Which of the following best describes you?

a. Domestic student (Canadian)
b. International student (Permanent Resident)

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[11] Attention check questions

c. International student (not a Permanent Resident)

Your mother tongue:

a. English
b. French
c. One of the Indigenous languages
d. Mandarin/Cantonese
e. Punjabi/Hindi
f. Tagalog
g. Arabic
h. Other (please specify) _________

Please indicate the religion you are most affiliated to:

a. Christian
b. Muslim
c. Hindu
d. Jewish
e. Buddhist
f. None/Secular/Atheist/Agnostic
g. Other (please specify): -----------

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