

God's Light Bringing Self-Transcendence Amid COVID-19: The Mediating Role of Religious Values in the Relationship between COVID-Stress and the Attitude Toward Slow Fashion

Swagata Chakraborty, University of North Texas
Amrut Sadachar, Auburn University

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Background and Literature Review

People often resort to religious/spiritual help when in trouble and experience life challenges (Clements et al., 2012). Spiritual connection often motivates people to re-evaluate the life challenges as tests given to them by God which in turn gives them the strength to cope with the challenges (Beagan et al., 2012) and engage in self-transcendent work (Reed, 2018) to be in God's good book. People around the world are experiencing stress stemmed due to the various consequences of the global pandemic, COVID-19 (Perz et al., 2020). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study which investigated how COVID-stress would increase people's connection with their religious values to deal with the life challenges emerged due to the pandemic and how would that influence attitude toward slow fashion consumption as a symbol of self-transcendence.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Surrendering to a higher power and/or being connected to God alleviates stress (Clements et al., 2012; Krause, 2006; Krause, 2019). God-mediated control beliefs reduces stress and other negative emotional consequences (Krause, 2006; Krause, 2019). Cognitive dissonance theory posits that when individuals experience negative emotional and/or psychological distress, they explore ways to reduce that distress (Festinger, 1962). Thus, it could be implied that during COVID-19, building a higher religious connection may help people deal with COVID-stress. Based on the aforementioned literature and cognitive dissonance theory, we hypothesized that higher the degree of COVID-stress, the higher would be people's connection with religious values (**H1**). Building higher religious/spiritual values often leads to self-transcendent behavior (Johnson et al., 2017; Perera & Hewege, 2018) where people cease to prioritize their own needs and explore ways to help others in need. The self-transcendence theory posits that when individuals experience vulnerabilities in life, they become self-transcendent which in turn improves well-being (Reed, 2008). Therefore, vulnerabilities experienced in the form of COVID-stress could induce self-transcendence among people to improve their well-being. Slow fashion (i.e., slow production and consumption of products) imbues many qualities of self-transcendence. For example, the functionality dimension of slow fashion helps protect the environment by reducing the production and consumption pace due to the products being more durable (Jung & Jin, 2014). The equity dimension of slow fashion helps the artisans/workers get their fair wages in a healthy working environment. The authenticity and exclusivity dimensions of slow fashion encourages handcrafted product consumption over mass-produced products which indirectly helps the artisans/workers preserve their authentic craftsmanship and reduce reliance on the machine-made mass-produced products (Jung & Jin, 2014). The localism dimension of slow fashion encourages local production and consumption of products thereby improving the livelihood of the local artisans/workers (Jung & Jin, 2014). Thus, using the self-transcendence theory (Reed, 2008), it could be implied that the connection to religious values kindled by COVID-stress may increase self-transcendence among the consumers increasing their positive attitude toward the dimensions of slow fashion. Chakraborty and Sadachar (2022) indicated that the connection with religious values positively influence favorable attitude toward slow fashion which encourages purchase intentions for sustainable apparel. Based on this literature and the self-transcendence

theory (Reed, 2008), it could be implied that higher the COVID-stress, higher would the consumers' positive attitude toward slow fashion in the hope to earn God's blessing and survive the challenges stemmed due to COVID-19. Therefore, based on this discussion, we proposed that COVID-stress will positively influence attitude toward slow fashion in terms of **(H2a)** equity, **(H2b)** authenticity, **(H2c)** functionality, **(H2d)** localism, and **(H2e)** exclusivity; connection with religious values will positively influence attitude toward slow fashion in terms of **(H3a)** equity, **(H3b)** authenticity, **(H3c)** functionality, **(H3d)** localism, and **(H3e)** exclusivity and; connection with religious values will mediate the relationship between COVID-stress and the attitude toward slow fashion in terms of **(H4a)** equity, **(H4b)** authenticity, **(H4c)** functionality, **(H4d)** localism, and **(H4e)** exclusivity.

Method and Data Analysis

An online Qualtrics survey was administered on Amazon Mechanical Turk to collect the data ($n = 317$). The national sample of U.S. millennials (born between 1981-1996), who self-identified to be connected to their religious values, were recruited to participate in the survey. Extant measurement scales were adapted to measure COVID-stress (Perz et al., 2020), attitude toward slow fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014), and connection with religious values (Ghazali et al., 2018). All the variables were measured in 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed in Mplus (version 8.6) which fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 1176.07$, $df = 539$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.18$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .93, TLI = .92, SRMR = .06). The hypotheses were tested in Structural Equation Modelling as a comprehensive model in Mplus. In Model 1, we tested H1-H3. Model 1 fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 1098.56$, $df = 537$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.05$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .94, TLI = .93, SRMR = .06). **H1** ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$), **H2a** ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), **H2b** ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), **H2c** ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), **H2d** ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), **H2e** ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), **H3a** ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), **H3b** ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), **H3d** ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), and **H3e** ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) were supported. **H3c** ($\beta = .04$, $p = .68$) was rejected. We ran Model 2 to test the mediation hypotheses. Model 2 fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 1098.56$, $df = 537$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.05$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .94, TLI = .93, SRMR = .06). **H4a** ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$, C.I. = [.10, .20]), **H4b** ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$, C.I. = [.16, .28]), **H4d** ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$, C.I. = [.14, .25]), **H4e** ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$, C.I. = [.19, .30]), were supported. **H4c** ($\beta = .02$, $p = .68$, C.I. = [-.05, .08]) was rejected. The variance explained in connection with religious values ($R^2 = 22.3\%$, $p < .001$) and attitude toward slow fashion consumption in terms of equity ($R^2 = 33.2\%$, $p < .001$), authenticity ($R^2 = 38.4\%$, $p < .001$), functionality ($R^2 = 9.1\%$, $p < .05$), localism ($R^2 = 40\%$, $p < .001$), and exclusivity ($R^2 = 41.8\%$, $p < .001$) were significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

We support the extant literature that when people are stressed their connection with spiritual and religious values/activities increases which in turn encourages them in engaging into self-transcendent behaviors to earn blessings from the higher power in the hope of getting through their life challenges (Beagan et al., 2012; Clements et al., 2012; Krause, 2006; Krause, 2019; Reed, 2018). We provide a unique contribution to the literature by suggesting how a pandemic-induced stress could positively influence the connection with religious values which in turn encourages self-transcendence manifested through a positive attitude toward the different dimensions of slow fashion. Based on our findings, we recommend the marketers to promote the self-transcendent quality of slow fashion products and how consumption of those products can help consumers earn blessings from God that will protect them from potential harms during the pandemic. In the future, researchers can investigate how stress induced in different situations could encourage self-transcendent apparel consumption behavior with a mediating effect of connection with religious values and fear of God. Researchers could also test the moderating effect of atheism in the aforementioned relationships.

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