

THOU SHALT RECOGNIZE RELIGIOUS NATIVE ADVERTISEMENTS: THE ROLE OF
BELIEF CONGRUENCE IN PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE PROCESSING

by

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(Under the Direction of Nathaniel J. Evans)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigated the psychological processing of religious native advertisements using the persuasion knowledge model in conjunction with the belief congruence theory. The study theorized belief congruence may activate conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge, operationalized as advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent respectively. The study specifically accounted for the individual-level factor of religiosity in this process. In addition, the study tested how the type of message appeal used in the advertisement, either explicit or implicit, influenced the course of persuasion knowledge under the theory of planned behavior. The main experiment used a 2 (religious affiliation: affiliated vs unaffiliated) X 2 (message appeal explicitness: high vs low) between-subjects factorial design to determine how this processing affected relevant outcomes, including attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click. Double moderated serial mediation models found belief congruence did not affect advertising recognition, inferences of manipulative intent, and subsequent outcomes as predicted. Post hoc analyses showed advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent did not operate in a serial manner and impacted outcomes independently. Additional post hoc analyses clarified the roles of

message appeal explicitness and religiosity. Message appeal explicitness had a significant positive direct effect on advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent.

Religiosity, however, had a significant negative direct effect on advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent. The implications of these effects are discussed for both persuasion knowledge theory and advertising practice.

INDEX WORDS: Native advertising, Social media, Religious advertising, Persuasion Knowledge Model, Belief congruence, Message appeals, Religiosity, Inferences of manipulative intent

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DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents, Jim and Nancy Primovic. I love you both.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Religious Advertising

Religious values affect people's behavior across most situations (Minton & Kahle, 2019). Existing research shows religion significantly impacts consumers' responses to advertisements (Minton, 2019; Alhouti et al., 2015). Seventy-two percent of Americans belong to a religious group. Religious advertisements could arguably affect the attitudes and behavior for over 246 million consumers (DeRose, 2024; "The demographic outlook: 2024 to 2054," 2024). Religious commerce encompasses a broad range of economic activities estimated as up to a third of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (Grim & Grim, 2016). Yet many scholars consider religious communication an understudied, complex, and often taboo topic (Marmor-Lavie et al., 2009; Minton & Kahle, 2019; Walter & Casidy, 2021).

Religious advertising spending varies based on the size and goals of the organization. One Christian church consulting firm, The Effective Church Group, recommends spending \$25 thousand in advertising four times each year to gather large crowds for mega-church sermons ("Advertising the Church," 2017). But a smaller church reports spending just \$20 on Facebook native advertisements to inform community members about an Easter event (Wilbur, 2019).

The effectiveness of religious advertisements remains unclear. A small and growing line of advertising effects research suggests mostly positive outcomes associated with exposure to religion in secular print advertisements and marketing scenarios (Appendix B). Practitioners, however, have reported negative responses to religion in advertisements (Agarwala et al, 2021;

Minton, 2020). The sampling population could explain the discrepancy between literature and practice. Research has scarcely accounted for the religious affiliation of the sample relative to the religious promotional materials (Appendix B). The religious affiliation of the sample offers a starting point in the present study to theorize how religious advertising affects outcomes.

Overview of Religious Native Advertising

Escalating social media use for religious communication transformed how religious organizations encourage religious practice (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017). Facebook is specifically known for fostering a “rich environment” for faith-based communication (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017, p.1). Religious native advertisements are frequently used by religious organizations to reach a variety of audiences, both affiliated and unaffiliated with a particular religious group.

Native advertisements resemble the format of content audiences desire to consume by blending with the format of surrounding organic content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). On social media, a native advertisement is a post that is inserted into a social media feed. Users seamlessly encounter the native advertisement while browsing. Religious native advertisements are defined as advertisements used by religious organizations to promote religious practice and products. These advertisements may promote study materials, events, worship services, discipleship, evangelism, or giving. For example, the Christian brand, “Not Consumed,” used Facebook Ads to promote Biblical scripture study notecards (Appendix A). The advertisement appeared with a few photos, including a photo of a woman reading the notecards, and the caption stated ideas for how to use them. An example of a Jewish native advertisement is a post by the influencer, @Miriam.Ezagui, on Instagram. The video is an advertisement promoting succahs by the company, Mitzvahland. A succah (sukkah) is a temporary structure used during the Jewish harvest festival, Sukkot. In the video, the influencer shares a story about a scary experience

building a succah when she was younger, and she promotes the Mitzvahland succah as being easy-to-build (Appendix A). These advertisements matched the formats of surrounding posts and appeared within a social media feed to promote religious products that aid in religious practices.

Religious native advertisements often use “call-to-action” buttons with message appeals. For example, a Facebook native advertisement by Crossway, a Christian publishing company, promoted a book about the attributes of God using the message appeal, “shop now.” The post included a photo of a woman reading the book, and the caption said, “Explore ten attributes of God that Christians are called to reflect with your small group this fall and discover freedom and purpose in becoming all that God made you to be” (Appendix A). A Facebook religious native advertisement by the Christian discipleship ministry, The Navigators, used the “call-to-action” button, “Learn more,” in a social media post to promote a free eBook about spiritual mentorship. The caption of the post said, “Your relationship with God doesn’t stop with you. He’s calling you to something greater...” (Appendix A). Call-to-action buttons in religious native advertisements typically ask the audience to engage in relevant behavior. In this case, the religious native advertisement encouraged viewers to “Learn more” about downloading a discipleship eBook to read.

A religious group’s members’ viewing experiences of native advertisements on social media is not scientifically known or understood. Audiences for religious native advertisements on social media generally include both religious group members and non-members. Religious advertisers target religious group members for the purpose of providing opportunities for religious practice or promoting religious products. These advertisers target non-religious group members for the purpose of spreading religious influence (Sprenkle, 2024). Facebook’s parent company, Meta, worked to keep advertisers from targeting specific audiences based on religious

affiliation. In January of 2022, Meta removed “detailed targeting” options. “Detailed targeting” options enabled advertisers to target users based on sensitive personal details (“Removing certain ad targeting options and expanding our ad controls,” 2021). Shortly thereafter, the Christian prayer app, Hallow, used social media native advertisements to reach both Christians and non-Christians. Hallow app has since been reportedly purchased by Muslim, Jewish, and Agnostic users in addition to Christian users (Dumas, 2022).

Meta’s decision to remove “Detailed Targeting” was in response to expert concerns about how targeting options, like religious group affiliation, could be used in ways that “lead to negative experiences for people in underrepresented groups” (“Removing certain ad targeting options and expanding our ad controls,” 2021). Religious advertisers still reach specific religious audiences on Facebook without “detailed targeting” by instead using an “interest targeting” function. For example, Christian users can be targeted with a religious native advertisement on Facebook for reporting an interest in Christian music artists (lundeen, 2023). Additionally, advertisers can purchase religious native advertisements in countries where a religious group is a minority to evangelize. For example, missionaries working for the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest protestant denomination in the U.S., purchase Christian native advertisements in places where Christians are the minority group to spread the Gospel (Sprenkle, 2024).

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Meta sought input from experts about the “detailed targeting” issue to “reduce the potential for abuse,” but native advertising scholars have not specifically examined the effects of native advertisements for religious group members (“Removing certain ad targeting options and expanding our ad controls,” 2021). Researchers have, however, identified a key experience consumers may or may not have when viewing a native advertisement called advertising

recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). The importance of advertising recognition is derived from the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). PKM is a theoretical framework that argues consumers guard against recognized persuasion attempts based on personal experiences and sociocultural factors (Friestad & Wright, 1994; 1999). A consumer's persuasion knowledge processing of a native advertisement primarily depends on the ability to identify the sponsored nature of the content, known as advertising recognition, embedded within organic content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Consumers have been known to struggle to discern what content has been paid for by an advertiser. When a consumer does not experience native advertising recognition, the content is processed as if it were organic (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018). Upon advertising recognition, social media research shows consumers respond to native advertisements with more negative attitudes toward the advertiser (Evans et al., 2017). It is thus important for a religious consumer viewing a native advertisement on social media to recognize the content as a native advertisement. This dissertation hypothesizes that a consumer's religious affiliation relative to the group's religious affiliation sponsoring the advertisement could influence the consumer's persuasion knowledge processing.

As previously mentioned, religious native advertisements may be targeted at various religious groups according to the purpose of the advertisement and capabilities of the social media platform. The Belief Congruence Theory (BCT) asserts that consumers evaluate stimuli relative to their own beliefs (Alhouthi et al., 2015; Rokeach, 1960). Does belief congruence affect the persuasion knowledge processing of religious native advertisements?

Existing research arguably suggests belief incongruence made a religious native advertisement more noticeable in an extreme case. Carlson (2015) discusses a religious native advertisement by the controversial religious group, the Church of Scientology, in *the Atlantic*.

Audiences noticed the advertisement and warned others about it blending with other content published by the outlet. Based on the backlash, one could argue that this example suggests that belief incongruence made the native advertisement recognizable as such because the audience noticed that the Church of Scientology is incongruent with their beliefs. In this specific example, the advertisement put all native advertising practices under scrutiny, even while native advertising had been a standard practice at the time the advertisement was published (Carlson, 2015; Mirkinson, 2017). In line with the persuasion knowledge model, it is possible a consumer allocates more attention to a religiously incongruent advertisement to cope against the persuasion attempt (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This theoretical premise is investigated in this dissertation.

As previously mentioned, PKM argues that consumers guard against persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For religious native advertisements, the present study hypothesizes the consumer will infer the level of manipulative intent to defend against persuasion. Inferences of manipulative intent (IMI) refers to how the consumer detects the advertiser's desired outcome and determines if it was manipulative (Campbell, 1995). The study anticipates IMI will accompany advertising recognition to subsequently dictate the effectiveness of the religious native advertisement.

PKM assumes consumers evaluate a persuasion attempt based on previous individual experiences (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Religiosity is a factor that reflects personal experiences with a religion. It refers to the strength of adherence to religious beliefs (Minton & Kahle, 2013; Essoo & Dibb, 2004; Vitell, 2009). Religiosity has previously been shown to affect how consumers respond to marketing and advertisements. Specifically, research shows highly religious consumers are less skeptical of advertisements (Minton, 2019). Could this lack of advertising skepticism indicate that the highly religious do not guard against advertising? This

study investigates how religiosity, an individual-level factor, affects the persuasion knowledge processing the religious native advertisements. The Covert Advertising Recognition and Effects Model (CARE Model) suggests consumers recognize native advertisements according to specific individual-level differences (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Religiosity may be an individual difference that influences persuasion knowledge processing.

This study also examines a message-related factor that could affect persuasion knowledge processing. Native advertisements on social media generally use a “call-to-action” message appeal. The advertisement may include a message appeal, such as “Donate now,” to link users to the organization’s donation form on the website. There are several message appeals that advertisers use on Facebook at the time of this study. Some of the message appeals may be perceived as being more explicit than other message appeal options. This study argues the possibility that consumers recognize and guard against the advertisement according to the explicitness of the message appeal. Because of the sensitive nature of religious advertisements (Carlson, 2015; Haley et al., 2009), it is possible that the explicitness of the message appeal affects the recognizability and subsequent evaluations of the native advertisement.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the role of belief congruence, operationalized as religious affiliation, in the persuasion knowledge processing of religious native advertisements. This study mostly used the combined theoretical framework of the persuasion knowledge model and belief congruence theory. The first objective of the study is to experimentally test the effect of religious affiliation on persuasion knowledge processing through advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent on advertising outcomes. The

second objective was to understand how religiosity and message appeal explicitness influenced persuasion knowledge processing.

The Study's Importance and Synopsis of Chapters

There is scientific consensus that consumers often struggle to discern what content has been paid for by an advertiser, which makes them process the content as if it were organic (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Boerman et al., 2017). Whereas consumers who recognize native advertising respond more negatively to the content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018, Evans et al., 2017). This study will reveal whether belief congruence with a religious native advertisement affects the recognizability of the advertisement within a social media feed. Additionally, this study will evaluate how the individual-level factor—religiosity—could affect persuasion knowledge processing. Minton (2019) found high religiosity individuals experienced lower levels of advertising skepticism. Religiosity could present an obstacle to recognizing religious native advertising in a social media feed. Finally, there is a possibility that message appeal explicitness could also affect consumers ability to recognize content as advertising. It is important to examine the persuasion knowledge processing of religious native advertisements because the response will ultimately influence religious practice (Stout, 2012). Chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework used to predict the persuasion knowledge processing and outcomes associated with viewing a religious native advertisement. The chapter includes information from previous research pertaining to PKM, religious advertising, BCT, religiosity, and message appeal explicitness. Additional theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Schema Theory, are used to develop relevant hypothesis. The chapter uses previous research to predict how religious affiliation affects advertising recognition, inferences of manipulative intent, and subsequent advertising outcomes. The literature review also leads

into hypotheses to predict how religiosity and message appeal explicitness could affect this process. Chapter 3 details the method used in the online experiment, where Christian adults view a religious native advertisement and respond to measures. This chapter explains the study design, the sample composition, the recruitment procedures, and the data collection process. The results and implications of two pretests are also detailed in this chapter. The pretests assist in the development of the main study's stimuli and determine the main study's sample. In addition, Chapter 3 details the development of the surrounding content. Chapter 4 reports the results of a double moderated serial mediation model to address the hypotheses predicted in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes post hoc analyses to investigate the role of religiosity and message appeal explicitness in line with the second objective of the study. The final chapter, Chapter 5, discusses the implications of the findings for religious advertising research, native advertising research, religious native advertising practice, and regulatory decision making. The limitations of the study are subsequently detailed. This study contributes to an emerging line of native advertising research, and suggestions for future research are included throughout the chapter to ensure scholars can easily contextualize future research. An additional section discusses broad suggestions for future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion section to offer broad takeaways from the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Persuasion Knowledge Model

Friestad and Wright's (1994) theoretical framework, the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), asserts consumers develop knowledge about persuasion practices to cope with future persuasion episodes. When a persuasion attempt arises, consumers respond to the advertisement according to coping behaviors developed from agent knowledge, topic knowledge, and persuasion knowledge. The model assumes the target of a persuasion episode seeks to maintain control over the outcome and will respond to the persuasion episode according to personal goals. Agent knowledge encompasses the beliefs about the persuader, while topic knowledge includes the target's belief about the central theme of the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Friestad and Wright (1999) argue persuasion knowledge is acquired throughout daily life in a person's sociocultural context. Sociocultural factors, such as education, profession, and information access, influence persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999; Israeli et al., 2024). In other words, consumers use sociocultural experiences and memories to guide the processing of agent and topic knowledge (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999).

Persuasion knowledge for a native advertisement first occurs when the consumer recognizes the advertisement as a paid persuasion attempt through advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). The Covert Advertising Recognition and Effects (CARE) Model outlines two routes to native advertising recognition, through "top down" disclosure processing or through a "bottom-up" schema violation. Disclosure processing means a consumer notices and

understands the paid nature of the content through an advertising disclosure. Whereas a schema violation addresses the instances where consumers use message and context characteristics to arrive at the conclusion that the content is an advertisement. Individual differences in persuasion knowledge ultimately contribute to these routes of advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). According to Friestad and Wright (1999), sociocultural factors generate individual differences in persuasion knowledge. Thus, research should examine how sociocultural factors influence persuasion knowledge.

Advertising research to date uses PKM to explain how a consumer recognizes and guards against a native advertisement (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Eisend et al., 2020). Specifically, advertising recognition represents a form of conceptual persuasion knowledge, where the consumer distinguishes the advertisement from other media (Rozendaal et al., 2011). Advertising recognition is defined as the “instantiation of advertising schema” (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; p. 10). A robust line of research has shown disclosing native advertising exerts a positive effect on advertising recognition (Eisend et al., 2020). Advertising recognition has been shown to be a main determinant in outcomes related to viewing native advertisements, especially as these types of advertisements blend with surrounding organic content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Eisend et al. 2020). There is scientific consensus that native advertisements can sometimes circumvent consumers’ ability to detect a persuasion attempt by making the advertisement blend with organic, non-advertising content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020).

Social media native advertising research suggests consumers often experience advertising recognition through a “bottom-up” schema violation in line with the CARE Model. Boerman et al. (2017) found over half of the participants in the study did not notice an advertising disclosure on a Facebook native advertisement. This reduced advertising recognition for a social media

native advertisement posted by a celebrity. Native advertisements posted by a brand without disclosure, however, still activated consumers' persuasion knowledge. In other words, a native advertisement from a brand can arguably signal a persuasion attempt in a "bottom-up" manner (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). The present study examines a social media native advertisement posted by a religious organization. The hypotheses to come in this chapter describe a "bottom-up" schema violation route to advertising recognition.

Religion & Persuasion Knowledge

Native advertising research has examined the individual differences in age and education on advertising recognition because these characteristics determine "persuasion expertise" (Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2019). While these factors are important determinants of persuasion expertise, they do not account for the values that have been proven to drive consumer responses to advertising (Minton, 2019). Religious individual differences affect advertising skepticism and relevant behavioral outcomes that have been shown to follow persuasion knowledge (Minton, 2019; Ham et al., 2015). While this is the case, research has not investigated how religious individual differences impact the latent psychological processing of advertising recognition.

This is an especially valuable area to examine as religion is a sociocultural factor known to affect people's behaviors (Minton & Kahle, 2019). There are arguably two reasons religion is important to persuasion knowledge processing. First, religion shapes the sociocultural context in which persuasion knowledge develops (Friestad & Wright, 1999). It dictates the sociocultural schema norms in a person's life. Second, religion shapes self-identity by dictating moral standards and behavior. Consumers encode this type of knowledge as a means of self-preservation (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When a persuasion attempt occurs, PKM asserts people

work to protect their sense of self (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Therefore, it is possible consumers guard against a persuasion attempt if it threatens personal religious beliefs.

Religious Native Advertising Recognition

The role of religion in the instantiation of persuasion knowledge may be especially important to religious native advertisement processing. As described in the previous chapter, religious organizations use religious native advertisements to reach a variety of audiences. Many advertisers reach audiences on social media. Over 2 billion dollars were spent by advertisers for native advertisements on Meta platforms each year between 2020 and 2023 (Dixon, 2024). Religious organizations typically use the same types of advertising executions as brands and publish social media native advertisements (Stout, 2012). Therefore, religious native advertisements are an appropriate context to examine the role of religion in persuasion knowledge processing.

Belief Congruence Theory & the Persuasion Knowledge Model

Due to the individualized complexity of persuasion attempts, Friestad & Wright (1994) designed PKM to be employed alongside other theoretical frameworks. The present study and former studies all examine native advertising using PKM from the perspective of the consumer (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). For secular native advertisements, the CARE model accounts for individual characteristics such as education level and age (Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2019; Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). In the same way, when a consumer views a religious native advertisement, individual religious characteristics may be employed during the recognition and evaluation process (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). In practice, religious native advertisements may be religiously congruent or incongruent with a consumer's beliefs (Einstein, 2008; Stout, 2012).

Thus, the belief congruence theory is appropriate to employ alongside of PKM to examine the psychological processing of religious native advertisements.

Belief congruence theory (BCT) posits that individuals have a hierarchy of beliefs and evaluate stimuli in relation to their beliefs in similarity and importance (Alhouti et al., 2015; Rokeach, 1960). Coupled with PKM, belief congruence determines whether a consumer has been persuaded by a particular religious belief system by becoming affiliated with a religion. While there may be differences in theology across sects and denominations, previous research has examined BCT across different religious groups by using the broadest determinant of religious belief, religious affiliation (Alhouti et al., 2015). Religious affiliation refers to faithfulness to a religious group, such as Christianity or Judaism (Essoo & Dibb, 2004.). The present study will use religious affiliation to operationalize belief congruence.

Limited religious advertising research to date has used a belief incongruent sample (Appendix B). While practitioners have reported negative outcomes due to religion in advertisements, scholars have found some positive outcomes associated with religion in advertisements (Argwala et al., 2021; Appendix B). It is necessary to examine belief incongruence in effort to resolve the discrepancy between research and practice. While several research findings pertaining to the effectiveness of religious advertisements appear to be positive for the studies with more belief congruent samples (Appendix B), Liu and Minton (2018) found negative outcomes. This study used a random sample of Amazon Mechanical Turk participants from all faith backgrounds and found a Christian religious cue led to negative brand trust and negative perceptions of quality. While it is not known if this sample contained belief incongruent participants, belief incongruence may have exerted an effect on outcomes. The present study

investigates how belief congruence affects advertising recognition, which may, in turn, affect relevant advertising outcomes.

Advertising congruence research shows attention drives the psychological processing that takes place when consumers experience congruence and incongruence in advertisements. Specifically, advertising research about context congruence reveals an intersection between congruence and persuasion knowledge (Germelmann et al., 2020). A consumer desires to resolve incongruent enigmas in her surroundings, which leads her to pay more attention to the content. Attention requires an increase in latent processing as a means of resolving incongruence, reflected in an increased likelihood of recognizing the content as advertising.

Religious belief incongruence has been shown to increase attention and interest (Alhouthi et al., 2015; Mallia, 2009). Consumers allocate attention to resolve an incongruent enigma. Consumers may be more likely to recognize a belief incongruent native advertisement in a social media feed to reconcile the incongruent enigma. This aligns with previous research, where attention dictates advertising recognition. Wojdyski and Evans (2016) found visual attention mediated the relationship between the position of an advertising disclosure and advertising recognition. In this study, visual attention allowed consumers to experience advertising recognition.

Consumers may devote fewer cognitive resources, or less attention, to a congruent persuasion attempt because it is in harmony with the individual's beliefs. It may be less noticeable by blending with sociocultural norms, which means belief congruent consumers may not experience advertising recognition. As previously mentioned, persuasion knowledge develops out of sociocultural norms like religion (Friestad & Wright, 1999). Religious native advertisements may not activate persuasion knowledge to a consumer who is affiliated with the

religion in the advertisement. Instead, the advertisement matches the sociocultural context of the consumer and is not a threat to the consumer's sense of self (Friestad & Wright 1999). If persuasion knowledge is not activated, the consumer will not undergo coping strategies, such as avoidance, resistance, or attitude correction (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). The consumer may instead perceive the content to be organic (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016), and research shows consumers may process it as if it were non-persuasive content (Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018; Cole & Greer, 2013; Hoofnagle & Meleshinsky, 2015).

This study predicts belief congruence will influence advertising recognition directly. As previously mentioned, this study will operationalize belief congruence as religious affiliation to capture the broadest determinant of religious belief to obtain a sufficient pool of participants. The researcher predicts exposure to a belief incongruent advertisement will result in a greater likelihood of advertising recognition because previous research suggests consumers will allocate more attention to it to resolve the incongruent enigma (Alhouti et al., 2015; Mallia, 2009). Whereas consumers viewing a belief congruent advertisement may devote less attention to it because the advertisement is in line with sociocultural norms:

H1: For consumers viewing religious native ads, an unaffiliated religious advertisement will elicit a greater likelihood of ad recognition compared to an affiliated religious advertisement.

Moderating Role of Religiosity on Advertising Recognition

Religiosity refers to the strength of adherence to a religion's beliefs (Minton & Kahle, 2014; Essoo and Dibb, 2004; Vitell, 2009). A definition developed specifically for religious marketing research calls religiosity the degree to which an individual possesses and practices beliefs, values, and ideals affiliated with a religion (Alhouti et al., 2015). Belief congruence and religiosity are conceptually linked. Belief congruence captures how a person evaluates stimuli

based on the similarity and importance to their own religious belief (Alhouti et al., 2015; Rokeach, 1960). Religiosity describes how important a religious belief is to the person based on the level of devotion (Alhouti et al., 2015). Not only does religiosity dictate things like moral behaviors, but also responses to marketing and advertising (Minton, 2019). Alhouti et al. (2015) used religiosity as a moderating factor for belief congruence, operationalized as religious affiliation, on consumer behavioral outcomes. To apply religiosity to other portions of the model would inappropriately separate the factor from its conceptual connection to BCT.

Notably, high religiosity consumers have been shown to report lower advertising skepticism, which is an outcome associated with knowledge of a persuasion tactic (Minton, 2019; Ham et al., 2015). This may indicate those with high religiosity do not guard as strongly against relevant persuasion attempts in the first place. As previously mentioned, the CARE model suggests consumer values affect advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020), and religiosity may represent an individual-level factor that either heightens or attenuates the ability to recognize the paid nature of religious native advertisements. The researcher predicts religiously unaffiliated individuals higher in religiosity will report greater incidences of advertising recognition compared to individuals lower in religiosity.

Stout (2012) argues media can be an extension of religious practice, which means a congruent native advertisement on social media may be a sociocultural norm, important to the formation of PKM, for those high in religiosity (Friestad & Wright, 1999). When an individual high in religiosity experiences an incongruent religious native advertisement, the content may be more noticeable because it is outside of religious norms. Whereas religion may not be a norm to an individual lower in religiosity, and the incongruent native advertisement may be less noticeable. It is necessary to uncover the relationship between belief congruence and advertising

recognition based on religiosity because religiosity dictates the intensity of belief congruence. An examination into this relationship using Schema Theory will determine how sociocultural norms inform PKM based on BCT.

Schema Theory

The likelihood of religiosity's moderating role on advertising recognition may be predicted using schema theory. Schema theory captures how a consumer's previous experience with religion affects the amount of persuasion processing (DiMaggio, 1997; Kim et al., 2019). Alongside PKM, schema theory has been used to show the role of prior experiences in the formation of new perceptions about advertisements. Specifically, consumers organize schemas by fully processing the novel information and using their previous experiences to inform perceptions of the familiar information (Bartlett, 1932; Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Under this framework, religious group affiliation coupled with religiosity determines whether the schema is novel enough to warrant attention. An individual with higher levels of religiosity practices religion to a greater degree than someone with lower levels of religiosity (Alhouthi et al., 2015). A high religiosity person is arguably accustomed to viewing belief congruent information because of the high degree of devotion to the religion. A belief incongruent native advertisement would be novel, and thus more noticeable. Whereas an individual low in religiosity is less involved with religion. This individual may view an incongruent religious native advertisement as schema that is just as novel as surrounding organic content. This consumer will arguably pay less attention to the advertisement (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). Since greater levels of attention are associated with advertising recognition for native advertisements, less attention on the content will likely lead consumers to process the advertisement as organic content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016).

For unaffiliated religious native advertisements, the schema congruity effect points to an increase in processing for incongruent schemas. This heightened stimulation makes consumers work to reconcile mismatched information in advertising, which makes it more recognizable (Wojdyski & Bang, 2016; De Cicco et al., 2020). Native advertising research has examined this phenomenon in the context of surrounding format congruence and influencer-product fit (Kononova & Yuan, 2015; De Cicco et al., 2020). This line of research has consistently revealed incongruence leads to advertising recognition. At the time of hypothesizing outcomes for this study, native advertising incongruence had not been examined relative to the consumer's individual-level traits like religiosity. PKM indicates a mismatch between an advertisement and individual-level traits determines the extent to which coping is used to preserve self-identity (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For this reason, unaffiliated religious native advertising may be more recognizable as consumers reconcile the threat to their religious identity.

Because previous research has found an association between religiosity and advertising skepticism, it is important to investigate how religiosity affects persuasion knowledge (Minton, 2019). This study will extend the body of knowledge by determining how the degree of religious belief influences the predicted relationship between belief congruence and advertising recognition. The findings will extend the CARE Model by showing how an individual-level factor, religiosity, influences advertising recognition through a message or context-driven pathway. Additionally, the study will determine if religiosity makes consumers uniquely vulnerable to persuasion from religious native advertisements. With this information, practitioners can update ethical standards for advertising and work to protect vulnerable consumers.

H2: Advertising recognition will be greater for religiously unaffiliated individuals who are higher in religiosity compared to religiously unaffiliated individuals who are lower in religiosity.

Theory of Planned Behavior & Message Appeal Explicitness

Native advertisements on social media often use “call-to-action” message appeals, such as “learn more” or “donate now.” In the social media advertising creation process on Facebook Ad Manager, advertisers select which call-to-action appeal will drive consumers to their website or purchase portal. Each appeal differs in explicitness according to what is being asked of the consumer. Previous message appeal research classifies message explicitness with consumers as being either a hard-sell or soft-sell appeal, which differs in the explicitness of product information shared with the consumer (Okazaki, et al., 2010). The concept of a hard or soft sell does not adequately address the difference in the explicitness of the “ask” made to a consumer because the call-to-action is a step in the purchase process.

While popular in social media native advertisements, “call-to-action” message appeals have not been used as independent variables by researchers at the time of conducting this study. Instead, they have been used as dependent measures to examine behavioral intentions. For instance, a dependent measure of information seeking represents outcomes associated with the appeal to “learn more.” The scope of examination has been limited by scholars using outcome versions of the appeals. These “call to action” appeals may instead accentuate or attenuate advertising recognition by the theory of planned behavior (TPB). This dissertation will examine the role “call-to-action” message appeals play in the processing of native advertising.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits consumers must intend to perform a behavior, like completing a call-to-action, according to their attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Self-identity and past behavior interact in a way that

increases the predictive power of the theory of planned behavior (Smith, et al., 2007). As previously addressed, self-congruence pertains to self-concept (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). The theory of planned behavior has not been used in conjunction with BCT. BCT refers to religious affiliation, which may be considered a key part of human identity and self-concept (Liu & Minton, 2018). This combined theoretical lens is especially important because message appeals, or “calls-to-action,” may serve as invitations to practice religion (Stout, 2012). Under TPB, a consumer affiliated with a religion possesses existing behavioral intentions related to the religion. A religious native advertisement with a “call-to-action” illuminates the religiously affiliated consumer’s predisposition to act on these existing behavioral intentions. For instance, a native religious advertisement with the call-to-action, “donate now,” may be perceived as an offering collection. Giving to a religious group is often a subjective norm to a religiously affiliated consumer (Stout, 2012; Ajzen, 1991). The explicitness of the message appeal in a religious native advertisement will align with existing norms and intentions, and the explicitness will be perceived based on what is understood about the religion. Thus, a less direct message appeal will exert less of a moderating effect on advertising recognition for religiously affiliated consumers compared to religiously unaffiliated consumers. Religiously unaffiliated consumers, instead, may perceive more advertising recognition because there is less of a predisposition to act on the requested action.

For religiously unaffiliated consumers, the message appeal explicitness will draw attention to the paid nature of the content in a more heightened way than religiously affiliated consumers. This is because the requested behavior is entirely outside of subjective norms. Thus, message appeal explicitness will have a moderating effect on advertising recognition where a

more direct message appeal leads to a greater likelihood of advertising recognition for unaffiliated consumers.

H3: A more explicit message appeal will heighten advertising recognition for religiously unaffiliated consumers compared to religiously affiliated consumers.

Inferences of Manipulative Intent

Consumers experience a progression from conceptual to attitudinal persuasion knowledge when viewing native advertisements (Beckert et al., 2020). Attitudinal persuasion knowledge refers to evaluative defense mechanisms that occur after the realization of the persuasion tactic (Rozendaal et al., 2011). After experiencing advertising recognition, consumers have been shown to adjust evaluations of native advertising with attitudinal persuasion knowledge (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018, Evans et al., 2017). If consumers infer deliberate manipulation in this evaluative process, consumers will adjust to cope with the persuasion attempt (Friestad & Wright, 1994; An et al., 2019).

Thus, consumers' inferences of manipulative intent (IMI) represent the attitudinal persuasion knowledge mechanism that takes place upon advertising recognition. Manipulative intent refers to how a consumer senses an advertiser's desired outcome and determines if the persuasion was "inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative" (Campbell, 1995, p. 228). This evaluation especially applies to religious native advertisements, where advertising recognition does not occur under a traditional buying and selling paradigm. A religious native advertisement promotes a religious practice instead of a secular good or service. Advertising recognition will lead to an attitudinal evaluation reflective of the advertisement's religious characteristics. Any coping that takes place through attitudinal persuasion knowledge allows consumers to protect a

sense of self (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This is especially important as religious affiliation is a sociocultural factor that shapes self-identity.

Under this paradigm, religion is a key driver of behavior and makes consumers vulnerable to manipulation (Sandikci & Ger, 2010). Consumers argue the intersection of religion and advertising endorses worldliness by coming close to manipulation (Stout, 2012). Unfortunately, there have been both recent and historical instances where religious communication has been used to manipulate people and people groups. For instance, religious communications have played a role in profiteering schemes, enslaving populations, and perpetuating sexual abuse (Diara et al., 2020; Bailey, 2016; Dale et al., 2007). Consumers have been shown to discern if religious advertisements move beyond appropriate persuasive bounds (Stout, 2012; Haley et al., 2001). Therefore, IMI captures this attitudinal persuasion knowledge processing for religious native advertisements.

Advertising recognition will arguably lead consumers to exercise discernment using IMI. Native advertising research concludes that attitudinal persuasion knowledge follows advertising recognition. Consumers evaluate the persuasion tactic upon understanding that the communication is a form of paid promotion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Furthermore, the religious advertising paradigm especially leads consumers to engage in IMI. Religious advertising research reveals consumers consider factors pertaining to inferences of manipulation under the understanding that the communication is advertising (Stout, 2012; Haley et al., 2001; Campbell, 1995).

Response to Religious Native Advertising

Native advertising research suggests conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge, operationalized by advertising recognition and IMI, occur sequentially and lead to relevant

behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). When consumers do not experience conceptual knowledge through advertising recognition, there is scientific consensus that the content will be processed organically (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). As a result, consumers report higher attitudes and credibility assessments than if advertising recognition were experienced (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018; Campbell & Evans, 2018; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). In studies with samples where participants are generally affiliated with the religious group in the advertisement, the findings show more positive responses to the advertisement (Appendix B).

As previously described, consumers who experience conceptual persuasion knowledge, as advertising recognition, also undergo attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Attitudinal persuasion knowledge has been shown to affect downstream perceptions of native advertisements (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016; 2020). For instance, there is scientific consensus that perceptions of sponsorship transparency, a form of attitudinal persuasion knowledge for native advertisements, improve initial negative reactions due to advertising recognition (Evans, et al., 2019). In the present study, IMI is predicted to affect attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Consumers have been shown to respond negatively to native advertisements when the perceived intent is to manipulate or deceive (Wentzel, et al., 2010; Wojdyski, et al., 2018). Consumers who report greater IMI, predicted as being unaffiliated with the advertised religious group, may subsequently report more negative outcomes. Whereas, consumers who report less IMI, predicted as being religiously affiliated, may self-correct any negative reactions to advertising recognition to a more positive response (c.f. Evans, et al., 2019).

Together, native advertising and religious advertising research provide context for the types of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes consumers may experience (Appendix B). Research

has examined attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention, and sharing intention as important outcomes for native advertisements on social media (Hayes et al., 2019). Existing religious advertising research has examined similar outcomes, including purchase intentions and attitude toward the brand (Agarwala et al., 2021; Dotson & Hyatt, 2000, Henley et al., 2009; Minton, 2020; Muralidharan et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2010; Appendix B). It is not known, however, how religious native advertisements affect persuasion knowledge processing and subsequent outcomes.

Specifically, *attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and sharing intention* have all been shown to be affected by the relevance of the social media native advertisement to the consumer (Hayes et al., 2020). Advertising relevance has been shown to influence positive responses to advertisements (e.g. Houston & Walker, 1996). Religious advertising research has also shown a more positive attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and sharing intention in studies that suggest a religiously affiliated sample (Appendix B). This implies religiously affiliated consumers will likely experience lower levels of manipulative intent and more positive attitudinal and behavioral responses.

Specific to social media native advertisements, the present study will examine consumer behavior related to the “call-to-action” user experience buttons. The *intention to click a “call-to-action” button*, such as “learn more” or “donate now,” represents a key behavioral outcome for native advertisements on social media. For instance, Meta shares the total number of call-to-action button clicks with advertisers to represent a key performance indicator. Religious native advertisements use “calls-to-action” to elicit a behavior from the consumer. Native advertising research to date has not examined this important behavioral outcome.

H4: Message appeal explicitness will conditionally affect the indirect effect of an unaffiliated religious advertisement serially through advertising recognition and then inferences of manipulative intent such that a more explicit message appeal will have a more negative effect on (a) attitude towards the religious organization, (b) purchase intention, (c) sharing intention, and (d) “call-to-action” click intention.

H5: Religiosity will conditionally affect the indirect effect of an unaffiliated religious advertisement serially through advertising recognition and then inferences of manipulative intent such that higher reported religiosity will have a more negative effect on (a) attitude towards the religious organization, (b) purchase intention, (c) eWOM sharing intention, and (d) “call-to-action” click intention.

Based on the predictions, the proposed research model is below in Figure 1.

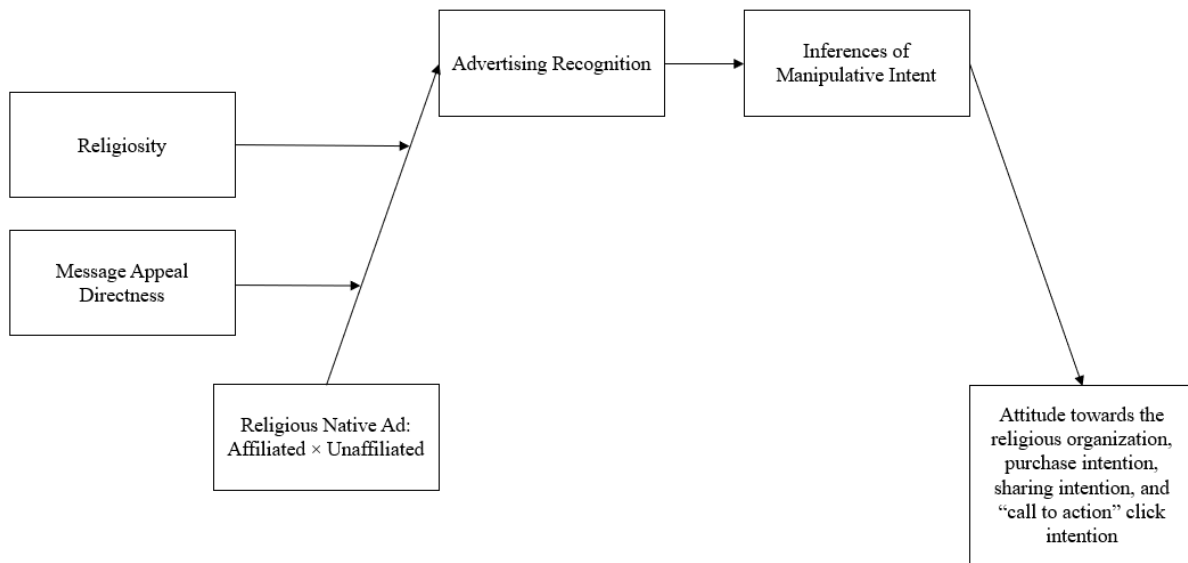


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Method

Overview and Main Study Design

The purpose of the main study was to investigate the effect of religious belief congruence on persuasion knowledge processing and subsequent outcomes for religious native advertisements. These outcomes included behavioral intentions and attitudes related to religious native advertising. Additionally, this study examined the roles of religiosity and message appeal explicitness in this processing. A 2 (religious affiliation: affiliated vs unaffiliated) X 2 (message appeal explicitness: high vs low) between-subjects factorial design was used in an online experiment. As previously described, the unaffiliated level of the independent variable aligns with the mission of many religions to reach non-group members (Sprenkle, 2024).

Sample

To execute the main study design, an online data collection company, Prolific, was used to recruit U.S. adult participants ages 18-64 who self-identified as Christians. There were no repeat participants in pretest 1, pretest 2, or the main study. Main study participants were assigned to one of four conditions randomly.

The sample size was informed by Fritz and MacKinnon (2007), which shows at least 398 participants are needed for .8 power. This sample size ensures a large β path when conducting the percentile bootstrapping used in PROCESS version 4.1 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Hayes, 2022). The main study sample was 457 after removals for returned surveys, incomplete surveys,

and an informed consent denial. Seven participants were removed from the dataset for committing two attention check failures in line with Prolific’s attention check policy (“Researcher Help Center,” n.d.). Demographic questions were used in the study to verify that participants beliefs did not change after initially reporting them to Prolific for screening purposes. Five participants were removed for being self-reported agnostics, one participant was removed for being a self-reported atheist, and another participant was removed for being a self-reported religious Jew. Using a boxplot, two participants were removed for being extreme outliers for the time duration spent on the questionnaire. Additionally, two cases were removed for being outliers for religiosity and one case was removed for being an outlier for inferences of manipulative intent. This led to 441 participants.

The religious group sampled in the main study was determined after conducting two pretests using participants from the two largest religious groups in the U.S., Christianity and Judaism (Pew Research Center, 2015). These pretests, detailed in this chapter, showed it was necessary to sample from one religious group in the main study. Thus, the main study sampled Christian participants because Christianity is the largest religious group in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015).

United States

Religious advertising research has primarily been conducted in the U.S., India, and Pakistan (Appendix B). These studies, however, examined mostly religiously affiliated consumers (Appendix B). For external validity, this study examined U.S. consumers. This is because it is both legal and practical to target religiously unaffiliated consumers with advertisements (Wilbur, 2019). Unlike nearly forty-one countries worldwide where religious freedom is restricted (Majumdar, 2021), both speech and religion are legally protected in the

U.S. (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). Accordingly, the U.S. is religiously diverse (Pew Research Center, 2015). Thus, U.S. consumers may reasonably encounter religious native advertisements for multiple religious groups. Especially as religious affiliation is declining in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015), religious groups rely on native advertising to gain followers and support (“Advertising the Church,” 2017; Wilbur, 2019). This means religious native advertisements do not only target religiously affiliated individuals, but it is also industry practice for religiously unaffiliated individuals to encounter religious native advertising in the U.S. (Stout, 2012; Wilbur, 2019; “Advertising the Church,” 2017).

Pretesting Christian and Jewish Samples

Christian and Jewish participants were initially selected to examine the effects of religious affiliation because these are the two largest religious groups in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015). Participants in the pretests self-identified their religious affiliation with Prolific prior to study recruitment. In a pre-screener, Prolific asked, “What is your religious affiliation?” Respondents who selected, “Christianity (e.g. Baptist, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Jehovah Witness, etc.)” or “Judaism” were invited to participate in the study. To qualify for the study, participants needed to self-identify with Christianity or Judaism. The extent of religious belief and practice will be examined in this study as the moderator, religiosity. The decision to use a Christian sample in the main study will be detailed in the analyses of the pretests. After cleaning the data for outliers, attention-check failures, and incomplete participation, there were 441 self-identified Christian participants in the main study.

Recruitment

The researcher recruited participants by hiring Prolific, a reliable large-scale participant recruitment company. Prolific recruited U.S. adult Christian participants aged 18-64 for the main

study. Prolific hosts nearly 7,000 Christian participants, who were active in the previous 90 days. Participants were offered financial compensation in line with Prolific's April 2022 inflation rate of \$8 per hour.

Data Collection

Once the researcher posted the study in Prolific, Prolific sent an email to a random group of eligible participants. Prolific notified prescreened users, who fit the criteria, to participate by randomly presenting a group of potential participants with information about the study along with an invite email. Additionally, potential participants could also view the eligible study in their account by browsing on their own. Email invites were sent to a random group of eligible participants every two days until the study had enough participants ("Researcher Help Center," n.d).

Participants who met the participation criteria and selected the study link provided by Prolific were presented with an informed consent statement (Appendix C). Upon agreement, Prolific administered the experiment (Appendix F). Afterward, Prolific made the data and prescreener demographic data available to the principal investigator by download. Related to the religious landscape at the time of the study, it is appropriate to note the data was collected and downloaded a few days before the war between Hamas and Israel was declared by Israel. The researcher removed IP addresses, automatically collected by Prolific, immediately upon receiving the data.

Pretest 1 (Appendix D)

Stimuli Development

Two pretests took place before the main study experiment to inform the stimuli. The first purpose of pretest 1 was to select message characteristics for the religious native advertisements

including the call-to-action and topic of the religious advertisement. Pretest 1 recruited 80 Christian participants and 40 Jewish participants from Prolific. Fewer Jewish participants were sampled due to Prolific's limited sample pool. After cleaning the pretest 1 data for incomplete participation and attention check failures, the sample size became 119 participants in total. Table 1 shows pretest 1's sample composition.

The second purpose of pretest 1 was to determine the plausibility of designing a study with a mixed sample of Christian and Jewish participants. Most existing religious advertising research is limited in generalizability, where findings only apply to the religious group being studied. The present study relies on belief congruence, rather than a specific religion, as the mechanism driving advertising outcomes. This is an effort to extend previous research and develop a theory to make religious advertising research more generalizable (Appendix B). Thus, it was necessary to attempt to design a study with a mixed sample to develop the most generalizable model possible. Pretest analyses were used to determine the plausibility of using a mixed religious sample of Christians and Jews.

Table 1. Pretest 1: Sample Composition

	Pretest 1
Sample N	119
Mean age	38.98 (16.711)
Sex (%)	
Male	36.13%
Female	63.03%
Rather Not Say	.84%
Race (%)	
Individual race	95.8%
Caucasian/White	81.51%
Black/African American	3.36%
Asian	6.72%
Latin/Hispanic	1.68%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.84%

American Indian/Alaskan Native	.84%
Other	.84%
Multiracial	4.2 %
Caucasian/White and Black/African American	.84%
Caucasian/White and Asian	.84%
Caucasian/White and Middle Eastern	1.68%
Unspecified multiracial	.84%
Household Income	
Less than \$10,000	4.2%
\$10,000-\$19,999	4.2%
\$20,000-\$29,999	8.4%
\$30,000-\$39,999	10.9%
\$40,000-\$49,999	6.7%
\$50,000-\$59,999	14.3%
\$60,000-\$69,999	4.2%
\$70,000-\$79,999	5%
\$80,000-\$89,999	6.7%
\$90,000-\$99,999	4.2%
\$100,000-\$149,999	18.5%
More than \$150,000	18.5%
Education	
High school graduate (diploma or equivalent including GED)	8.4%
Some college but no degree	22.7%
Associate degree in college (2-year)	7.6%
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	39.5%
Master's degree	16.8%
Professional degree (JD, MD)	5%
Religious Affiliation	
Judaism	32.8%
Conservative	23.1%
Reform	46.2%
No Branch	25.6%
Reconstructionist	5.1%
Christianity	67.2%
Evangelical Protestant	31.25%
Mainline Protestant	15%
Historically Black Protestant	1.25%
Catholic	38.75%
Orthodox Christian	6.25%
Jehovah's Witness	1.25%
Seventh Day Adventist	1.25%
Messianic – self-reports Christianity	1.25%
Non-denominational	3.75%

Note. The value in parentheses indicates standard deviation.

Religiosity

Pretest 1 participants responded to items measuring religiosity (adapted Minton 2015, Cornwall et al., 1986). Religiosity has three dimensions, including affective, cognitive, and behavioral religiosity (Cornwall et al., 1986; Minton, 2015). Cornwall et al. (1986) developed the measure using a Mormon sample that was designed to be adaptable to any religious group. Accordingly, Minton (2015) conducted a robust confirmatory factor analysis to adapt the measure to all faiths.

Specific to this dissertation, the scales on the three behavioral religiosity items from Minton (2015) were adapted to ensure respondents used a consistent 7-point Likert scale. This adaptation was made because Minton (2015) used two different Likert-like scales for the three behavioral items. One scale was used for two items and a different scale was used for the third item. An example of this adaptation is changing “How often do you pray?” with the scale items, “never,” “less than once a month,” “once a month,” “2-3 times a month,” “once a week,” “2-3 times a week,” and “daily” to the item, “I pray often,” with the 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (see table 2 for reliability statistics).

Thus, the religiosity measure consists of 12 Likert scale items as follows. For the affective dimension, the items are “My relationship with God is an important part of my life,” “God is an important influence in my life,” “I love God with all my heart,” “Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning,” and “I am willing to do whatever God wants me to do.” The items for the cognitive dimension are “I believe in God,” “I have no doubts that God lives and is real,” “There is life after death,” and “The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God.” The behavioral dimension has 3 items, including “I pray often,” “I read scripture often,” and “I attend religious services often.”

To determine if the Christian group and Jewish group differ in religiosity, a Welch's test was conducted in SPSS due to the uneven sample of Christian and Jewish participants. Welch's independent samples t-test was performed to compare the effect of religious affiliation on religiosity. There was a significant difference in religiosity between Christian participants ($M=5.1688$, $SD=1.3956$) and Jewish participants ($M=3.297$, $SD=1.5561$); $t(68.488)=6.369$, $p<.001$.

Additionally, pretest 1 results yielded insights into both the most and least prevalent dimensions of religiosity. This information indicates specific ways participants exhibit religiosity. Pretest 1 participants reported cognitive religiosity as being the greatest mean dimension of religiosity for all groups, whereas behavioral religiosity was the minimum mean dimension (Table 2). It remains important, however, to examine the effect of religiosity using the composite measure to understand how these dimensions work together in aggregate to affect attitudes and behaviors. Previous research has used composite religiosity to examine the theoretical role of religiosity. The dimensions of religiosity have been used to parse out specific effects (Minton, 2015). It is notable that the responses to the composite religiosity measure in Pretest 1 created a normal distribution, whereas each dimension individually did not generate a normal distribution.

Table 2. Means and Reliability Statistics: Religiosity Constructs

Religiosity Construct	Affective Religiosity	Cognitive Religiosity	Behavioral Religiosity	Composite Religiosity
M (SD) Christianity	5.31 (1.6204)	5.8313 (1.2438)	4.05 (1.7479)	5.1688 (1.3936)
M (SD) Judaism	3.2821 (1.808)	3.9808 (1.7485)	2.4103 (1.5284)	3.297 (1.5561)
M (SD) Total	4.6454 (1.93)	5.2248 (1.6677)	3.5126 (1.8426)	4.5553 (1.6907)
No. of Items	5	4	3	12
Alpha (α)	.97	.911	.858	.964

Facebook

Nearly 3 billion people worldwide use Facebook monthly (Statista, 2022). The frequency of Facebook use, however, is arguably not enough to determine the intensity of use. Instead, the intensity of Facebook use was used as an attitudinal measure to quantify users' connections to Facebook (Phua & Ahn, 2016). Pretest 1 collected information about participants' intensity of Facebook use to determine if the connection to the platform differs between religious groups (Ellison, et al. 2007). The intensity of Facebook use (Ellison, et al., 2007) was measured using 7-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The 6 items included, "Facebook is part of my everyday activity," "I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook," "Facebook has become part of my daily routine," "I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while," "I feel I am part of the Facebook community," and "I would be sorry if Facebook shut down."

Pretest 1 examined the intensity of Facebook use ($\alpha=.927$) between Christians and Jews to ensure religious beliefs do not affect the connection to the platform. Welch's independent samples t-test was conducted in SPSS to compare the intensity of Facebook use in Christian and Jewish conditions. There was not a significant difference in the scores for Christians ($M=3.6896$, $SD=1.6944$) and Jews ($M=3.8034$, $SD=1.8204$); $t(70.801)=-.327$, $p = .744$. This finding showed religious affiliation did not affect how connected participants felt to Facebook. Thus, Facebook is an appropriate social media platform to mimic for the stimuli designs.

Calls-to-Action

Pretest 1 was also used to assign "call-to-action" messages to low and high message appeal explicitness conditions. The results of this pretest informed the "call-to-action" phrases used in the stimuli as both a user experience button and text in the post's copy. This pretest

included all “call to action” options offered by the Facebook Advertising Manager that could be used for static social media advertisements promoting religion. This included, “Contact Us,” “Donate Now,” “Order Now,” and “Sign Up” (“Facebook Ad Manager,” 2022).

During Pretest 1, participants read instructions, which explained the meaning of a “call-to-action” in advertising. The instructions included an example graphic that explained a “call-to-action” on a social media native advertisement (Appendix D). After reading the instructions and viewing the example, participants were shown a list of the message appeals. The purpose of this list was to expose participants to all the message appeals at the same time before reporting perceptions of each one. Then, participants responded to questions for each “call-to-action.”

To determine the high and low explicitness message appeals, an adapted 9-item measure of hard and soft-selling (Okazaki et al., 2010) used bipolar semantic differential items of subtle/aggressive, suggestive/assertive, indirect/direct, implicit/explicit, imprecise/precise, insinuation/explanation, appealing/convincing, intimation/persuasion, and expressive/instructive (1=soft, 7=hard sell). The conceptualization of a hard-sell and soft-sell in advertising matched the conceptualization of high and low explicit message appeals in this dissertation. Okazaki et al. (2010) assert hard-sell appeals are direct, while soft-sell appeals are less direct.

Participants responded to the measure for each message appeal being tested. Reliability analyses were conducted to ensure internal consistency each time (Table 3). These analyses yielded 5 sufficient items applicable to all message appeals being measured. Removing 4 items, including “insinuation/explanation,” “appealing/convincing,” “intimation/persuasion,” and “expressive/instructive,” raised all the alpha levels for each “call-to-action” to an appropriate level, $\alpha > .7$. The final 5 items were “subtle/aggressive,” “suggestive/assertive,” “indirect/direct,” “implicit/explicit,” and “imprecise/precise.”

Inherent to pretest 1, the researcher predicted a significant difference between the explicitness of the message appeals. A one-way ANOVA was run with the message appeal as the independent variable and implicit/explicitness as the dependent variable. Results of the ANOVA showed a significant difference between the message appeals for implicit/explicitness; $F(4, 594)=72.817, p < .001$. Levene's Statistic was significant, and equal variance was not assumed. Accordingly, Dunnett's T3 post hoc analysis revealed that "Donate Now" ($M = 5.7294, SD = 1.0993$) was significantly more explicit than "Learn more" ($M = 3.5563, SD = 1.3315$), $p < .001$. Also, "Learn more" was significantly more implicit than all the other message appeals, $p < .001$. "Donate now" and "Order now" ($M = 5.637, SD = .8663$), however, did not significantly differ in explicitness, $p = .998$. While this is the case, "Donate now," had a greater mean value, and "Donate now" significantly differed from all the other message appeals, $p < .05$. Thus, "Donate now" was most appropriate for the religious native advertisement stimuli in the main study.

Table 3. Means and Reliability Statistics: Implicitness and Explicitness Measure

Calls-to-Action	M (SD)	No. of Items	Alpha (α)
Contact Us	4.6353 (1.2223)	5	.863
Donate Now	5.7294 (1.0993)	5	.862
Order Now	5.637 (.8663)	5	.7
Sign Up	5.3008 (1.1815)	5	.89
Learn More	3.5563 (1.3315)	5	.86

To determine the suitability of sampling a single religious group or multiple religious groups for the main study, it was important to determine if religious affiliation affected the perception of the message appeals. There is no research to date to suggest perceptions of message appeals are dictated by religious affiliation, but the possibility remains important to examine because religion can affect all aspects of a consumer's life (Minton & Kahle, 2019). Previous research has found group differences in consumer behavior related to religious affiliation (LaBarbera, 1987; Hirschman, 1981, 1982, 1983, Taylor et al., 2010). Welch's

independent samples t-test was performed to compare the effect of religious affiliation on the explicitness of the message appeals. The results were only significant for “Donate now.” There was a significant difference in perceptions of explicitness between Christian participants ($M=5.4925$, $SD=1.1282$) and Jewish participants ($M=6.2154$, $SD=0.8638$); $t(95.665)=-3.862$, $p<.001$. While both groups perceived “Donate now” to be the most explicit, Jewish participants viewed the call-to-action as being significantly more explicit than Christian participants. This difference suggested it would be appropriate to sample from one religious group in the main study.

Advertising Messages for Pretest 1

There is scant experimental precedent in this line of advertising research about developing advertising stimuli applicable to multiple religious groups for experimental purposes. Because the main study examines affiliated and unaffiliated religious native advertisements, the advertising message needed to be applicable to both religious groups represented in the stimuli. Both the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) coding system and pretest 1 were used to select an advertising message applicable to both Christianity and Judaism.

Differing from secular native advertisements, religious native advertisements promote religious activity. This is because religion facilitates established practices (Hawkins et al. 1980; Schiffman & Kanuk 1991). Religious activity, however, generally does not appear to be religious if the activity is separated from the characteristics of the religion (Dow 2006 – see original citation). For instance, “reading” is a non-religious activity, but “reading scripture” is a religious activity. “Talking” or “thinking” are non-religious activities, but “praying” is “talking” or “thinking” directed at a deity. Pretest 1 specifically examined attitudinal perceptions of religious activities, where the activity is closely tied to religion.

All religious activities examined in pretest 1 were practices applicable to both Christianity and Judaism. This ensured the advertising messages for both affiliated and unaffiliated groups maintained external validity. To select the religious messages included in pretest 1, the researcher examined the coding system of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). The ATUS is a federal survey of how U.S. citizens use their time conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau. The ATUS coding system consists of religious activities commonly conducted by the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Because the 2020 ATUS data did not provide detailed frequencies of religious activities based on religious affiliation, the researcher selected categories and examples relevant to both religious groups (Tables 4 and 5). The examples that insinuated an in-person gathering were adapted to being a webinar to ensure location or COVID-related limitations did not affect responses. Thus, the pretested activities included a religious webinar, prayer, and reading scripture.

Table 4. ATUS Coding Categories Applicable to Judaism and Christianity (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020)

ATUS Coding Category for Religious and Spiritual Activities	Relevant Examples Given
Attending Religious Services (140101)	Attending church/synagogue
Participation in Religious Practices (140102)	Attending a religious retreat Praying Reading Scripture (Bible/Torah)
Religious Education Activities (140105)	Attending a scripture study group

Table 5. ATUS Coding Categories Adapted into Advertising Messages

Religious Activity	Adapted Christian Advertising Message	Adapted Jewish Advertising Message
Attending church/synagogue; Attending a religious retreat; Attending a scripture study group	Invite to a Christian webinar	Invite to a Jewish webinar
Praying	Promoting a prayer guide	Promoting a prayer guide
Reading Scripture	A Scripture reading plan	A Scripture reading plan

Pretest 1 Religious Message

Pretest 1 measured attitudes towards the relevant ATUS activities (Tables 4 & 5). A 7-point bipolar semantic attitude towards the brand measure (Spears & Singh, 2004) was adapted to refer to religious activities instead of brands. The 5 items were, “unappealing/appealing,” “bad/good,” “unpleasant/pleasant,” “unfavorable/favorable,” and “unlikeable/likable” (Table # for reliability analysis).

Pretest 1 collected attitudinal information from both Christian and Jewish participants. The purpose of collecting information from both religious groups was two-fold. The first purpose was to extend previous advertising research as described in the literature review by ensuring the unaffiliated stimuli are externally valid. As previously mentioned, the second purpose was to prepare the researcher to conduct the main study with a mixed sample if possible. The researcher theorized the effects of belief congruence are not limited to a specific religious group; therefore, it was appropriate to attempt to design an experiment with multiple religious groups in the sample.

Table 6. Means and Reliability Statistics: Attitudes toward Religious Messages

Religious Message	Mean for Christian Participants (SD)	Means for Jewish Participants (SD)	Composite Means (SD)	No. of Items	Alpha (α)
Attend a religious webinar	4.2813 (1.4327)	3.0359 (1.5193)	3.8731 (1.569)	10	.971
Read scripture	5.2712 (1.4429)	3.9641 (1.7553)	4.8429 (1.663)	10	.979
Pray	6.0437 (1.3067)	4.5256 (1.9829)	5.5462 (1.7092)	10	.991

Three one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine if attitudes toward religious activities significantly differ from each other. The first ANOVA included the entire sample ($N=119$). The independent variable was religious activities, and the dependent variable was the attitude towards the religious activity. Results of the ANOVA showed a significant difference between religious activities for attitudes; $F(2, 356)=30.916, p < .001$. Levene's Statistic was insignificant, and equal variance was assumed. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed all the religious activities, "reading scripture" ($M=4.8429, SD=1.663$), "attending a religious webinar" ($M=3.8731, SD=1.5691$), and "praying" ($M=5.5462, SD = 1.7092$), were significantly different from one other at $p<.01$. The second ANOVA examined only the Jewish group ($N= 39$), and the results showed significant differences in attitudes towards religious activities; $F(2, 116)=7.105, p < .001$. Levene's Statistic was insignificant, and equal variance was assumed. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed no significant difference between "reading scripture" ($M=3.9641, SD=1.7554$) and "attending a religious webinar" ($M=3.0359, SD=1.5193$), $p=.065$, or "praying" ($M=4.5256, SD = 1.9829$), $p=.487$. However, there was a significant difference between "attending a religious webinar" and "praying," $p<.001$. Lastly, the third ANOVA used only the Christian sample ($N= 80$). Similar to the previous two ANOVAs, the findings revealed differences in attitudes towards religious activities; $F(2, 239)=32.066, p < .001$. Equality of

variance was also assumed using Levene's Statistic, and a Bonferroni post hoc analysis showed all the religious activities were significantly different from each other, including "reading scripture" ($M=5.2713$, $SD=1.4429$), "attending a religious webinar" ($M=4.2813$, $SD=1.4327$), and "praying" ($M=6.0437$, $SD=1.3067$), $p<.01$. Taken together, the ANOVAs point to "reading scripture" as being the appropriate religious activity for the religious native advertising stimuli.

An examination of the sub-populations of Jewish participants and Christian participants revealed that "reading scripture" produced the median attitudes for each religious group. Christian and Jewish participants perceived "reading scripture" with median attitudes compared to the other activities relevant to their own religion. It was not known, however, if these median attitudes differed between the religious groups. A Welch's T-test was conducted to examine the effect of religious affiliation on attitude towards "reading scripture." There was a significant difference in attitudes between Christian participants ($M=5.2713$, $SD=1.4428$) and Jewish participants ($M=3.9641$, $SD=1.7554$); $t(63.824)=4.033$, $p<.001$. This significant difference in attitude towards reading scripture suggested the importance of conducting the main study experiment by analyzing the two religious groups separately.

A previously reported analysis showed a significant difference between religious groups for religiosity. Religiosity may have contributed to the differences in attitude towards reading scripture. A simple mediation analysis was performed using Model 4 of PROCESS 4.1 in SPSS (Hayes, 2022). All assumptions were met, and eight outliers for religiosity were removed using Cook's Distance. The outcome variable for the analysis was attitudes toward reading scripture. The predictor variable for the analysis was religious affiliation. The mediator variable for the analysis was religiosity (Minton, 2015). The direct effect of religious affiliation on religiosity was found to be statistically significant ($b= 1.6368$, $SE=.294$, $p <.001$, 95% CI = [1.0541,

2.2194]). The direct effect of religiosity on attitudes toward reading scripture was found to be statistically significant ($b = .9449$, $SE = .0487$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.8484, 1.0414]). The direct effect of religious affiliation on attitude towards reading scripture was significant ($b = -.4851$, $SE = .1693$, $p < .01$, 95% CI = [-.8207, -.1494]). The indirect effect of religious affiliation through religiosity on attitude towards reading scripture was significant ($b = 1.5466$, $SE = .3099$, 95% CI = [.9509, 2.1657]). The simple mediation analysis found that compared to Jews, Christians reported being higher in religiosity, which in turn positively impacted attitudes toward reading scripture. Thus, group differences in attitude towards reading scripture may be attributed to both the role of religiosity and religious affiliation.

Stimuli Development

Stimuli were made using the relevant advertisement applicable to the religious group for “reading scripture” in accordance with Table 5. The stimuli resembled a native advertisement on Facebook by including a profile photo for the brand, a “sponsored” disclosure graphic, and a brand website URL with a green verification checkmark. The name of the brand directly reflected both the religious group being represented and the religious activity being promoted in the stimuli. For the Christian stimuli, the organization was “Christian Reading,” and the Jewish stimuli’s organization was called “Jewish Reading” to reinforce the experimental conditions in an externally valid way. These fictitious names also protected the experiments from any confounding variables related to specific religious organizations. The copy of the native ad includes the call-to-action and promotes a Scripture reading plan. For the less explicit condition, the copy is, “Learn more about our Scripture reading plan.” The more explicit condition is “Donate now to receive our Scripture reading plan.” The subject in the stimuli photos is an adult man reading scripture, and the Jewish version of the native ad shows him wearing a kippah. The

images were designed to mimic the photo in a religious native advertisement promoting a book from Crossway where a person is reading from a book (Appendix A). This photo composition is also found in Jewish stock photos (Coldsnowstorm, 2023). In the U.S., kippahs are used by male Jews during religious activities like reading scripture. The book in the photo features text in a two-column format that is customary in English prints of Jewish and Christian scriptures. The stimuli included social media elements, such as the like, comment, and share options with 51 likes and hearts, 10 comments, and 1 share.

Pretest 2 (Appendix E)

Pretest 2 examined the likability and quality of the native advertisements to ensure the advertising components in pretest 1 led to a reasonable advertisement that did not elicit any extreme responses. Pretest 2 recruited 160 participants. Half self-identified as religiously Jewish, and the other half self-identified as Christian in Prolific. While pretest 1 findings suggested the main study should be conducted with a sample from one religious group, pretest 2 examined group differences in perceptions of the advertisements. Pretest 2 collected responses from both religious groups to test their overall impressions and evaluations of finished advertisements.

A Qualtrics randomizer function randomly and evenly presented each participant with two of the stimuli to reduce repeat exposure effects and fatigue. After removing 8 incomplete responses and 11 attention check failures, the pretest included 141 participants. Because pretest 2 included stimuli for two main studies, the randomizer led to two participants to view only stimuli from the main study. While there were 141 participants, the stimuli had 143 views. This led to 71 views of the Christian conditions and 72 views of the Jewish conditions. There were 38 participants who viewed the Christian “learn more” advertisement and 37 participants who

viewed the Jewish “learn more” advertisement. For “donate now,” 33 participants viewed the Christian advertisement, and 35 participants viewed the Jewish advertisement.

Table 7 shows Pretest 2’s sample composition.

Table 7. Pretest 2: Sample Composition

	Pretest 2
Sample N	141
Mean age	36.89 (calculate SD)
Sex (%)	
Male	44.7%
Female	55.3%
Race (%)	
Individual race	88.7%
Caucasian/White	75.2%
Black/African American	4.3%
Asian	5.7%
Latin/Hispanic	3.5%
Multiracial	11.3%
Caucasian/White and Black/African American	1.4%
Caucasian/White and Asian/Middle Eastern	1.4%
Caucasian/White and Latin/Hispanic	6.4%
Caucasian/White, Black/African American, and American Indian/Alaska Native	.7%
Caucasian/White, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian/Middle Eastern	.7%
Caucasian/White, Asian/ Middle Eastern, and Latin/Hispanic	.7%
Household Income	
Less than \$10,000	6.4%
\$10,000-\$19,999	1.4%
\$20,000-\$29,999	7.8%
\$30,000-\$39,999	10.6%
\$40,000-\$49,999	8.5%
\$50,000-\$59,999	9.9%
\$60,000-\$69,999	6.4%
\$70,000-\$79,999	6.4%
\$80,000-\$89,999	6.4%
\$90,000-\$99,999	6.4%
\$100,000-\$149,999	14.2%
More than \$150,000	15.6%
Education	
High school graduate (diploma or equivalent including GED)	8.5%

Some college but no degree	14.2%
Associate degree in college (2-year)	5.7%
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	42.6%
Master's degree	21.3%
Doctoral degree	2.1%
Professional degree (JD, MD)	5.7%
Religious Affiliation	
Judaism	51.1%
Orthodox	1.4%
Conservative	12.5%
Reform	45.8%
No Branch	34.72%
Reconstructionist	2.8%
Secular	1.4%
Messianic – self-reports Judaism	1.4%
Christianity	48.9%
Evangelical Protestant	18.84%
Mainline Protestant	13.04%
Catholic	21.74%
Mormon	4.35%
Orthodox Christian	8.7%
Non-denominational	30.43%
Other	5.8%

Note. The value in parentheses indicates standard deviation.

As a manipulation check for religion in the advertisement, respondents were asked, “What religious group was this post about?” Table 8 details how participants perceived religion in each condition based on the participants’ religious affiliations. For Christian Reading “Learn More,” a chi-squared test of independence revealed that there was no significant difference in perceiving the religious group featured in the religious native advertisements based on religious affiliation, $X^2(1, N=38) = .924, p = .336$. For Jewish Reading “Learn More,” a chi-squared test of independence also showed that there was no significant difference based on religious affiliation, $X^2(1, N=37) = .947, p = .324$.

Table 8: Manipulation Check using “What religious group was this post about?”

Condition	Jewish Participant Views (ratio of accurate perception)	Christian Participant Views (ratio of accurate perception)	Aggregate Participant Views (ratio of accurate perception)
Christian Reading “Learn More”	19/20	18/18	37/38
Christian Reading “Donate Now”	18/18	15/15	33/33
Jewish Reading “Learn More”	18/18	18/19	36/37
Jewish Reading “Donate Now”	19/19	16/16	35/35

An additional manipulation check was included in pretest 2 to ensure participants perceived the message appeal conditions as being high or low in explicitness. The 5-item measure of explicitness used in Pretest 1 was used in this analysis (Table 9 for alphas). Composite means show the explicit “donate now” conditions have greater means than the implicit “learn more” conditions.

A one-way ANOVA was run to determine if message appeal explicitness significantly differed between the stimuli. The independent variable was the stimuli condition, and the dependent variable was message appeal explicitness (Okazaki et al., 2010). Results of the ANOVA showed an insignificant difference between stimuli conditions for explicitness; $F(3, 139)=1.312, p=.273$.

Based on the religion-specific means in Table 9, religious affiliation could arguably affect perceptions of explicitness for Christian conditions (Table 9). The means for the Christian conditions were the same for both the more implicit and less explicit conditions. A potential reason for this finding is that Christians may perceive all evangelism attempts as being explicit. To determine if religious affiliation affected the perception of explicitness, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted (Okazaki et al., 2010). Using the sample of Christian participants, the

ANOVA showed an insignificant difference between stimuli conditions; $F(3, 64)=1.934, p = .133$. For the sample of Jewish participants, the ANOVA showed an insignificant difference between stimuli conditions; $F(3, 71)=.91, p = .441$.

Taken together, these pretest 2 results suggested message appeals were not perceived differently in the full context of a religious native advertisement. This differed from the significant findings in pretest 1. This could have been due to prior experience with religious persuasion attempts, where the participant viewed social media evangelism as being explicit regardless of the specific message appeal (Friestad & Wright, 1994). It is not known, however, if the message appeal explicitness in the advertisement's copy specifically interacted with advertising recognition. There is reason to believe the message appeals differed in explicitness. Pretest 2 examined the explicitness of the native advertisement in its entirety, but it was possible that the message appeal itself drew attention as predicted in the literature review. Because pretest 1 showed clear significant differences in explicitness, the same message appeals were used in the main study to test if the message appeal itself acted as a moderator in the model.

Table 9. Means and Reliability Statistics: Explicitness

Condition	Christian M (SD)	Jewish M (SD)	Composite M (SD)	Alpha (α)
Christian Reading Learn More	4.1333 (1.1104)	4.43 (1.0979)	4.2895 (1.0991)	.722
Christian Reading Donate Now	4.1333 (.9155)	4.9222 (1.21)	4.5636 (1.1418)	.797
Jewish Reading Learn More	4.5053 (1.136)	4.5778 (.9723)	4.5405 (1.0455)	.672 (Removing item 5 would bump this to .731)
Jewish Reading Donate Now	4.825 (.932)	4.8842 (1.0777)	4.8571 (.9995)	.72

Participants also responded to measures of quality and ad likability (Sundar, 2000; Sun & Evans 2022; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2008;). The adapted measure of quality had 5 items that were rated on a 5-point Likert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree), including “believable,” “well designed,” “appealing,” “professional,” and “biased” (Sundar, 2000; Sun & Evans, 2022). This measure was adapted to assess a social media post instead of an article advertisement by using “well designed” instead of “well written.”

A reliability analysis for the quality measure showed the alpha level for the Christian Reading Learn More condition was below .7, and all the conditions had alphas below .85. By removing the “biased” item from the scale, the alpha level increased to greater than .85 for all conditions (Table 10).

Table 10. Pretest 2 Means and Reliability Statistics: Quality of Religious Native Advertisements

Religious Native Advertisement	Mean for Christian Participants (SD)	Means for Jewish Participants (SD)	Composite Means (SD)	No. of Items	Alpha (α)
Christian Reading Learn More	3.5 (1.2948)	3.05 (.8683)	3.2632 (1.1)	4	.851
Christian Reading Donate Now	3.05 (.9364)	2.8194 (1.084)	2.9242 (1.0107)	4	.883
Jewish Reading Learn More	3.3684 (1.0421)	3.0972 (1.3065)	3.2365 (1.1696)	4	.904
Jewish Reading Donate /Now	3.125 (.9958)	2.9474 (1.0226)	3.0286 (.9996)	4	.897

Table 11 shows respondents reported all religious native advertising conditions as being of moderate quality with all composite means being approximately 3. This level of quality was appropriate for non-profit advertisements, where advertisements may be developed on a low budget (Wilbur, 2019). Specifically, table 11 findings show the itemized perceptions of each religious native advertisement. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test if the quality is based on the stimuli condition. Results of the ANOVA showed an insignificant difference between

stimuli for quality; $F(3, 138)=.764, p > .5$. The stimuli were perceived to have similar quality when looking at the composite mean for both religious groups.

Table 11. Pretest 2: Itemized Quality of Religious Native Advertisements

Religious Native Advertisement	Mean for Believable (SD)	Means for Well Designed (SD)	Mean for Appealing (SD)	Mean for Professional (SD)
Christian Reading Learn More	3.95 (1.61)	3.03 (1.442)	2.84 (1.405)	3.24 (1.405)
Christian Reading Donate Now	3.48 (1.176)	2.73 (1.098)	2.42 (1.251)	3.06 (1.171)
Jewish Reading Learn More	3.97 (1.213)	2.86 (1.417)	2.84 (1.365)	3.27 (1.305)
Jewish Reading Donate /Now	3.51 (1.147)	2.74 (1.12)	2.63 (1.114)	3.23 (1.19)

It was important to examine if religious affiliation affected perceptions of quality. This information was used to determine if it was appropriate to sample from both religious groups in the main study. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare perceptions of quality based on religious affiliation for each condition, and findings showed the groups do not significantly differ in perceptions of quality. For Christian Reading “Learn More,” equal variances were not assumed based on Levene’s Test. Thus, Welch’s t-test found an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=3.5, SD=1.2348$) and Jewish participants ($M=3.05, SD=.868$); $t(29.258)=1.244, p=.223$. For Christian Reading “Donate Now,” equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s Test. Findings showed an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=3.05, SD=.9364$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.8194, SD=1.084$); $t(31)=.647, p=.523$. For Jewish Reading “Learn More,” equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s Test. Findings showed an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=3.3684, SD=1.0421$) and Jewish participants ($M=3.0972, SD=1.3065$); $t(35)=.7, p=.489$. For Jewish Reading “Donate Now,” equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s Test. Findings

showed an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=3.125$, $SD=.9958$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.9474$, $SD=1.023$); $t(33)=.518$, $p=.608$.

The ad likability (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2008) measure asked, “Thinking about the post you just saw, which of the following statements best describes your feelings towards it.” Response options were on a 5-point Likert scale (1=I disliked it very much; 5=I liked it very much). The average of the composite means is 2.865, which was moderate ad likability. Given the controversial nature of religious advertisements, this moderate response was expected (Agarwala et al, 2021; Minton, 2020; Carlson, 2015). To ensure these perceptions of ad likability applied to all the conditions, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Findings showed an insignificant difference between the stimuli for ad likability; $F(3, 138)=1.897$, $p > .1$.

Table 12. Pretest 2: Ad Likeability of Religious Native Advertisements

Religious Native Advertisement	Mean for Christian Participants (SD)	Means for Jewish Participants (SD)	Composite Means (SD)
Christian Reading Learn More	3.56 (.984)	2.65 (.875)	3.08 (1.024)
Christian Reading Donate Now	3.00 (.655)	2.28 (.752)	2.61 (.788)
Jewish Reading Learn More	3.00 (.943)	2.94 (.873)	2.97 (.897)
Jewish Reading Donate /Now	2.75 (.683)	2.84 (.898)	2.8 (.797)

To determine if the main studies needed to examine both religious groups together, pretest 2 examined the role of religious affiliation in perceptions of ad likability. Thus, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare advertisement likability based on religious affiliation for each condition. Findings showed the Christian stimuli elicited significant differences in ad likability based on religious affiliation. Equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s test. For “Christian Reading Learn More,” there was a significant difference in ad

likability between Christian participants ($M=3.56$, $SD=.984$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.65$, $SD=.875$); $t(36)=3.004$, $p<.01$. For “Christian Reading Donate Now,” there was also a significant difference between Christian participants ($M=3$, $SD=.655$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.28$, $SD=.752$); $t(31)=2.911$, $p<.01$. The independent samples t-tests for Jewish conditions, however, did not elicit significant differences in ad likability between the two religious groups. For Jewish Reading “Learn More,” equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s Test. There was an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=3$, $SD=.943$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.94$, $SD=.873$); $t(35)=.186$, $p=.854$. For Jewish Reading “Donate Now,” equal variances were assumed based on Levene’s Test. There was an insignificant difference between Christian participants ($M=2.75$, $SD=.683$) and Jewish participants ($M=2.84$, $SD=.898$); $t(33)=-.336$, $p=.739$. These findings may have been because Christians incorporate Jewish texts into their scripture, whereas Jewish texts do not incorporate Christian New Testament scriptures.

Implications for the Main Study Sample

The pretests offered key information about the sample and stimuli for the main study. As previously mentioned, the pretests aimed to extend previous religious advertising research by trying to use a mixed sample. Taken together, the pretests provided information about the appropriateness of analyzing only one religious group to develop the model. The main study sample will be of Christians because it is the largest religious group in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Pretest 1 showed Christians and Jews significantly differed in religiosity. Findings revealed that group differences in religiosity exerted an effect on attitudes toward “reading scripture.” While Jewish and Christian participants reported median attitudes toward “reading scripture” relative to their own religious group, Christian participants reported significantly

greater attitudes. Because the stimuli are advertisements for a scripture reading plan, it would not have been appropriate to mix groups with inherent differences in religiosity in the model.

Pretest 1 also revealed Jews and Christians perceive explicit message appeals differently. While both groups report “Donate now” as being the most explicit message appeal, Jewish participants reported it as being significantly more explicit than Christians. Research to date has not provided a rationale for why religious affiliation could affect perceptions of message appeal explicitness. This suggested it would not have been appropriate to use a mixed sample to analyze the effect of “donate now” in an advertisement when each group inherently perceives the message appeal differently.

Pretest 2 examined group differences in perceptions of the advertising stimuli. This pretest confirmed the main study should sample from one religious group. Findings showed group differences in ad likability between the religious groups. In the main study, it would not have been appropriate to analyze a model based on religious affiliation or lack thereof using a religiously mixed group of participants with religious group differences in ad likability.

Surrounding Content Development

The main study experiment presented participants with a mock social media feed, which included the native ad stimuli. Because native advertisements match the format of surrounding content, it was important to place native advertisements in context with non-advertising content. Native advertising research to date has effectively presented participants with mock social media feeds with embedded native ad stimuli (Boerman et al., 2017; Huang & Yoon, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023; De Keyzer et al., 2021). Three key decisions were made based on previous research to execute this experimental design: (1) the number of posts in the feed, (2) the native advertisement’s position in the feed, and (3) the context of the native advertisement.

The main experiments used a short feed of two posts including the native advertisement. While using multiple posts in a feed may seem desirable for external validity purposes, it would have arguably reduced internal validity. Participants were asked to browse the social media feed as if it were their own feed. A feed with multiple posts arguably made the experimental feed more distinguishable from personal feeds. This dissertation will use a short two-post feed that mimics the design of an article format native ad study. For this dissertation, the organic post was a recommended post. Social media platforms often recommend a post to users from accounts not yet followed. For traditional static Facebook posts, a recommended post is one individual post and not a series of recommended posts. Thus, it was appropriate to include one recommended post along with the native advertisement in the feed.

Additionally, using two posts in the experimental feed arguably enhanced recall needed to examine effects related to native advertising recognition. Some social media advertising research has used three or four posts including the native advertisement in experimental settings, but these experiments either do not examine advertising recognition at all or do not examine the lack of advertising recognition in depth (Huang & Yoon, 2022; Yoon et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2017). An experimental feed with multiple posts inhibited internal validity by increasing the cognitive load of the participant. De Keyser et al. (2021) effectively used a two-post mock feed, including a post with a Facebook profile picture change and the native advertisement. The researcher must ensure the participant can answer measures about the proper post without the burden of a heavy cognitive load from the feed, therefore a two-post feed was appropriate. Furthermore, multiple posts would have made it difficult to have participants respond to target stimuli without creating repeat exposure effects. It would have greatly reduced internal validity if the study showed the stimuli to the participants again before asking questions. After measuring

advertising recognition or lack thereof, the present experiment asked for measures of downstream attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Other social media native advertising research has examined only one post out of the context of surrounding content (c.f. Sun & Evans, 2022; Xiao, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2020). While this experimental design has been effective to date, this dissertation sought to enhance the “nativeness” of the stimuli by including an organic post. “Nativeness” means the advertisement needs to be placed in the media environment (Kim et al., 2019). Without surrounding content, the advertisement would have been out of context and not native. By including mock organic content in the main study experiment, the researcher was more certain the stimulus was processed as a native advertisement. Scant research to date has effectively evaluated the effects of advertising recognition or lack thereof for social media posts in a feed environment. Kim, Lee, and Chung (2017) found insignificant differences in responses to advertisements between participants who recognized the content as advertising and those who did not. The study proceeded by assuming advertising recognition does not affect outcomes. The researchers, however, did not explain how participants understood the measures were related to a specific post in the feed. Thus, it was necessary to rely on the experimental design from article-style native advertising research. Wojdyski and Evans (2016) created an appropriate experimental design precedent because participants were exposed to both mock organic content and a native advertisement to evaluate advertising recognition. To mimic this design, the present study used an experimental feed of two posts, one organic and the other native.

Measures were asked after viewing the short two-post feed for 10 seconds. To remind each participant about which post the measures are referring to, an aided recall graphic depicted a blurred-out version of the native advertisement. The purpose was to reduce internal validity

risks associated with repeat exposure effects, such as the potential risk of increased familiarity or changes in response based on number of exposures (O'Neill et al., 2015; Montoya et al., 2017; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979).

The native advertisement's positioning was second in the experimental feed. Huang and Yoon (2022) examined native ad positioning as being either at the middle or bottom of the feed as native advertisements generally do not appear first in a feed. Research to date has shown that ad position has not exerted an effect on perceptions of social media native advertisements (Huang & Yoon, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023). Huang and Yoon (2022) concluded the ad position in the middle or at the bottom of a social media feed may not affect how content is perceived and processed relative to its context. Thus, the present main study placed the native advertisement second on the short feed of two posts.

The context of the native advertisement was carefully controlled. Scant native advertising research has been conducted on the effects of surrounding social media content on perceptions of a native advertisement. It is known, however, that ad-context congruence can sometimes exert an influence on perceptions of a native advertisement based on factors like the type of advertisement and attitudes towards the social networking site (Huang & Yoon, 2022; Yoon et al., 2023). Ad-context congruence refers to the relevance of the surrounding content to the content in a native advertisement (Huang & Yoon, 2022). It can exert an influence on attitudes and behavioral intentions for prosocial advertisements (Huang & Yoon, 2022). Because religious advertisements may be considered prosocial to certain participants, it was important to control ad-context effects. Thus, the experimental feed featured posts that were thematically incongruent with the native advertisement. This meant the surrounding content was not about religion or the

activities featured in the advertisement. Instead, this content was informed by Facebook content norms.

As previously mentioned, surrounding content could not have related to religion or relevant activities for religious practice. Meta Foresight identified 600,000 unique topics of conversation on social media (“Culture Rising: 2022 Trends Report,” 2022). This presented a challenge to determine the appropriate surrounding content. Meta Foresight’s “Culture Rising: 2022 Trends Report” revealed the top trends on social media related to cultural activism on social issues and human connection. While these were the top two common topics to post about, they were not a fit for the surrounding content due to the risk of confounding effects on perceptions of the religious native advertisement. Instead, leisure travel was an appropriate topic for the surrounding content post because it is an ideologically neutral topic that is irrelevant to religious practice. It is also a key area Meta encourages posting about (“Travel advertising solutions,” n.d.), and the company reported more than half of travelers use Meta technologies to find places to travel (“Travel advertising solutions,” n.d.). It is plausible that a travel post could come from a user or a brand. Therefore, it was necessary to make a surrounding post about a user visiting a travel destination. In the post for the experiment, a man is standing in front of Ireland’s Cliffs of Moher. The name of the user is fictitious, but the profile photo pictures the same man in the post’s photo.

Main Study Measures (Appendix F)

Religiosity

The religiosity measure (adapted Minton, 2015) was used again for data collection in the main study to measure the devotion to the religion. The 12-item measure used Likert scales (1=Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree). The items for the affective dimension were “My

relationship with God is an important part of my life,” “God is an important influence in my life,” “I love God with all my heart, “Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning,” and “I am willing to do whatever God wants me to do.” For the cognitive dimension, the items were “I believe in God,” “I have no doubts that God lives and is real,” “There is life after death,” and “The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God.” The behavioral dimension includes 3 items, “I pray often,” “I read scripture often,” and “I attend religious services often.”

Advertising Recognition

The advertising recognition measure (adapted Boerman et al., 2017) used 3 items with 7-point Likert scales (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The items were adapted to use the term, “post” to refer to the advertisement. The items included, “The post I viewed was advertising,” “The post I viewed contained advertising,” and “The post I viewed was sponsored.”

Inferences of Manipulative Intent

The inferences of manipulative intent (IMI) measure (adapted Campbell 1995) used 5 items with 7-point Likert scales for the first 4 items (1=Completely disagree, 7=Completely agree). The last item used a bipolar semantic differential scale (1=fair, 7=unfair). The measure was adapted to use the term “post” when referring to the advertisement. The first three items included, “The way this post tries to persuade me seems acceptable to me,” “The post tried to manipulate the audience in ways I do not like,” and “I was annoyed by this post because the poster seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the consumer audience” The fourth item was a reversal, “I didn’t mind this post; the poster tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.” The last item was a bipolar semantic differential scale from “fair/unfair.”

Attitude toward the Religious Organization

The attitude toward the religious organization measure (adapted Spears & Singh, 2004) asked, “How do you feel about the religious organization in the post?” The 7-point bipolar semantic differential scale included, unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable, unlikable/likeable, negative/positive, and low quality/high quality.

Purchase Intention

The measure of purchase intention (Spears & Singh, 2004) asked, “Describe your overall feelings about the post’s Scripture reading plan.” The measure used a 5-point bipolar semantic differential items, including never buy it/definitely buy it, definitely do not intend to buy/definitely intend to buy, have low purchase interest/have high purchase interest, definitely not buy it/definitely buy it, and probably not buy it/probably buy it.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (adapted Eckler & Bolls, 2011) was measured using two items with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). The items were “I think this Facebook post is worth sharing with others” and “I will recommend this Facebook post to others.”

Intention to Click

The intention to click measure was a behavioral intention measure that was adapted to apply to message appeals (adapted Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). Using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree), participants responded to one item according to their experimental condition. The item was, “I would definitely click learn more/donate now.”

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Demographics

Table 13 shows the Main Study's sample composition.

Table 13. Main Study: Sample Composition

	Ratio of participants	Rounded percentage of participants
Sample N	441	
Mean age	41.84 (12.01)	
Sex		
Male	203/441	46.03%
Female	238/441	53.97%
Race		
Individual race	414/441	93.88%
Caucasian/White	292/441	66.21%
Black/African American	69/441	15.65%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2/441	.45%
Asian or Middle Eastern	26/441	5.9%
Hispanic/Latin	24/441	5.44%
Other: Caribbean/West Indian	1/441	.23%
Multiracial	27/441	6.12%
Caucasian/White and Black/African American	2/441	.45%
Caucasian/White and Asian/Middle Eastern	5/441	1.13%
Caucasian/White and Hispanic/Latin	9/441	2%
Caucasian/White and American Indian/Alaskan Native	3/441	.68%
Caucasian/White and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1/441	.23%
Black/African American and Latin/Hispanic	1/441	.23%
American Indian/Alaskan Native and Hispanic/Latin	1/441	.23%
Asian/Middle Eastern and Hispanic/Latin	2/441	.45%

Asian/Middle Eastern and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1/441	.23%
Caucasian/White, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic/Latin	1/441	.23%
Caucasian/White, Asian/Middle Eastern, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2/441	.45%
Caucasian/White, Black/African American, Asian/Middle Eastern, and Hispanic/Latin	1/441	.23%
Household Income		
Less than \$10,000	18/441	4.08%
\$10,000-\$19,999	27/441	6.12%
\$20,000-\$29,999	22/441	5%
\$30,000-\$39,999	32/441	7.25%
\$40,000-\$49,999	33/441	7.48%
\$50,000-\$59,999	63/441	14.29%
\$60,000-\$69,999	29/441	6.58%
\$70,000-\$79,999	38/441	8.62%
\$80,000-\$89,999	21/441	4.76%
\$90,000-\$99,999	32/441	7.25%
\$100,000-\$149,999	78/441	17.69%
More than \$150,000	51/441	11.56%
Education		
Less than high school degree	3/441	.68%
High school graduate (diploma or equivalent including GED)	59/441	13.38%
Some college but no degree	81/441	18.37%
Associate degree in college (2-year)	44/441	9.98%
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	189/441	42.86%
Master's degree	53/441	12.02%
Doctoral degree	7/441	1.59%
Professional degree (JD, MD)	5/441	1.13%
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	441/441	100%
Evangelical Protestant	101/441	22.9%
Mainline Protestant	68/441	15.42%
Historically Black Protestant	13/441	2.95%
Catholic	150/441	34.01%
Mormon	6/441	1.36%
Orthodox Christian	20/441	4.54%
Jehovah's Witness	5/441	1.13%
Non-denominational	78/441	17.69%

Note. The value in parentheses indicates standard deviation.

Tests for Potential Covariates

Three one-way ANOVAs were conducted to test for possible covariates due to group differences in Facebook use, Facebook use intensity, and native advertising familiarity. These factors are tested in line with PKM, where users' experiences may inform an understanding of persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The first ANOVA's independent variable was the condition, and the dependent variable was Facebook use. Facebook use was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1= never, 2 = once a week, 3 = 2-3 times a week, 4= 4-6 times a week, 5= once daily, 6 = several times daily) to the item, "How often do you use Facebook?" (Phua & Ahn, 2016; Ellison et al., 2007). The results of this ANOVA showed an insignificant difference between conditions for Facebook use; $F(3, 436)=1.31, p=.271$. The second ANOVA's independent variable was condition, and the dependent variable was the intensity of Facebook use (Phua & Ahn, 2016; Ellison et al., 2007). The results also showed an insignificant difference between conditions for Facebook use intensity; $F(3, 436)=.993, p=.396$. The third ANOVA's independent variable was condition, while the dependent variable was native advertising familiarity. Native advertising familiarity was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= very unfamiliar; 7=very familiar) for the item, "Please rate your familiarity with native advertising" (Krouwer et al., 2020). The results showed an insignificant difference between conditions for native advertising familiarity; $F(3, 436)=.426, p=.734$. Because the conditions do not differ based on these factors, these variables will not be included as covariates in future analyses.

Manipulation Check

The "call-to-action" refers to the language used in the post's call-to-action button. Thus, the main study measure of explicitness asked participants about the call-to-action used in the post. This was to correct a validity issue in pretest 2, where the concept of explicitness of a post's

“call-to-action” may have been perceived as being the explicitness of the post in its entirety. The measure of explicitness used the adapted 9-item measure of hard and soft selling (Okazaki et al., 2010). The bipolar semantic differential items were subtle/aggressive, suggestive/assertive, indirect/direct, implicit/explicit, imprecise/precise, insinuation/explanation, appealing/convincing, intimation/persuasion, and expressive/instructive (1=soft, 7=hard sell). The version of the measure used in the main study clarified that the bipolar semantic differential items referred to the phrase used instead of the post holistically for validity purposes. A reliability analysis was conducted for internal consistency of the items, and the value of the value for the Cronbach’s Alpha for the measure was $\alpha=.83$ for the 9 items.

A Welch’s test was conducted as an explicitness manipulation check in SPSS due to the uneven sample participants viewing the implicit and explicit stimuli conditions. Welch’s independent samples t-test was performed to compare differences in perceptions of explicitness between the implicit and explicit message appeal conditions. There was a significant difference in explicitness between participants who viewed the explicit condition ($M=4.9882$, $SD=1.0527$) and participants who viewed the implicit condition ($M=4.0262$, $SD=.9204$); $t(426.097)=-10.2$, $p<.001$. This passed the manipulation check.

Religiosity between Groups

To determine if the religiously affiliated group and religiously unaffiliated group differ in religiosity, a Welch’s test was conducted in SPSS due to the uneven sample of affiliated and unaffiliated participants. Welch’s independent samples t-test was performed to compare the effect of religious affiliation on religiosity. There was an insignificant difference in religiosity between religiously affiliated participants ($M=5.4239$, $SD=1.3308$) and religiously unaffiliated participants ($M=5.5198$, $SD=1.3226$); $t(438.635)=-.759$, $p=.807$.

Custom Model: Double Moderated Serial Mediation (Appendix G)

To test the hypotheses related to the proposed model, multiple regression analyses were conducted in SPSS using a custom double moderated serial mediation model in PROCESS version 4.1 (Hayes, 2022; Appendix G). The independent variable was religious affiliation, while the dependent variables included attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click. The analysis included message appeal explicitness and religiosity as moderators along with advertising recognition followed by inferences of manipulative intent as serial mediators. This statistical analysis examined the direct and indirect effects simultaneously.

The analysis for the custom model will begin by addressing the main effects. For H1, religious affiliation did not exert a direct effect on advertising recognition, $b=1.4788$, $SE = 2.339$, $t(7)=-.6322$, $p=.5276$. All interactions were insignificant. The interaction between religious affiliation and religiosity, predicted in H2, was statistically insignificant [$B=-.1657$, 95% CI (-.9846, .6532), $p=.6911$]. The interaction between religious affiliation and religiosity, predicted in H3, was found to be statistically insignificant [$B=-.8192$, 95% CI (-3.9012, 2.2628), $p=.6017$]. Advertising recognition did not lead to inferences of manipulative intent and subsequent outcomes, $b=.0068$, $SE = .0305$, $t(439)=.2231$, $p=.8236$. However, it is notable that inferences of manipulative intent had a negative direct effect on the outcomes of attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.5771$, $SE = .0486$, $t(439)=-11.8795$, $p=.0000$, purchase intention, $b=-.1195$, $SE = .0469$, $t(439)=-2.5469$, $p=.0112$, eWOM intention, $b=-.2616$, $SE = .047$, $t(439)=-5.5672$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.1846$, $SE = .0467$, $t(439)=-3.9556$, $p=.0001$.

Next, the custom model analysis will examine indirect effects pertaining to H4 and H5. There was no indirect effect of religious affiliation through advertising recognition and

inferences of manipulative intent on the dependent variables. The conditional indirect effects of message appeal explicitness and religiosity for this model are detailed in Table 14.

Table 14. Conditional Indirect Effects of Message Appeal Explicitness and Religiosity (Custom Model: A-Path Moderation)

Message Appeal Explicitness	Religiosity	Pathway	b(se)	LLCI	ULCI	Index of conditional moderated mediation
Implicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0017 (.0099)	-.0244	.018	.0014 (.0108) [-.0198, .0275]
Explicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0002 (.0054)	-.0118	.0124	
Implicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0013 (.007)	-.0193	.0148	.0007 (.0075) [-.0165, .0164]
Explicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0005 (.0054)	-.015	.0084	
Implicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0011 (.0083)	-.0202	.0161	.0004 (.0094) [-.0221, .0181]
Explicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0007 (.0075)	-.0208	.0115	
Implicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0003 (.0022)	-.0059	.0038	.0003 (.0024) [-.0039, .0063]
Explicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	0 (.0012)	-.0026	.0027	
Implicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0003 (.0017)	-.0046	.003	.0002 (.0017) [-.0037, .004]
Explicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0001 (.0012)	-.0033	.0018	

Implicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0002 (.0018)	-.0046	.003	.0001 (.0021) [-.0054, .0041]
Explicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0001 (.0017)	-.0048	.0024	
Implicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0007 (.0046)	-.0114	.0082	.0007 (.005) [-.0086, .0128]
Explicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0001 (.0025)	-.0054	.0058	
Implicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0006 (.0036)	-.0095	.0063	.0003 (.0036) [-.0078, .008]
Explicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0002 (.0025)	-.0066	.0038	
Implicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0005 (.0039)	-.0099	.007	.0002 (.0046) [-.0105, .0092]
Explicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0003 (.0035)	-.0094	.0054	
Implicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0005 (.0035)	-.0086	.006	.0005 (.0037) [-.0061, .0097]
Explicit	16 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0001 (.0018)	-.0035	.0043	
Implicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0004 (.0026)	-.0065	.0046	.0002 (.0026) [-.0055, .006]
Explicit	50 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0002 (.0017)	-.0048	.0027	
Implicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0003 (.0028)	-.0071	.0052	.0001 (.0033) [-.0081, .0066]
Explicit	84 th percentile	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0002 (.0025)	-.0071	.0036	

Overall, this double moderated serial mediation model showed advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent did not work together to produce an effect on the dependent variables as predicted in H4 and H5. Inferences of manipulative intent, however, directly affected outcome variables. It is possible advertising recognition could also exert a similar direct effect on downstream outcomes independently of inferences of manipulative intent.

Thus, it is appropriate to examine each factor as a separate mediator to establish if these factors influence relevant processing and outcomes.

Post Hoc Analyses

Model 7s in PROCESS version 4.1 were used to investigate the roles of advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent along with message appeal explicitness and religiosity (Hayes, 2022). The independent variable was religious affiliation, the moderator was message appeal explicitness, the mediators were advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent, and the dependent variables were attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click.

Religious affiliation did not activate advertising recognition, $b=.6599$, $SE = .5666$, $t(437)=1.1645$, $p=2.448$. In line with this finding, message appeal explicitness was an insignificant moderator for religious affiliation on advertising recognition [$B=-.2951$, 95%CI (-1.0037, .4134), $p=.4134$]. However, message appeal explicitness directly affected advertising recognition, $b=.7312$, $SE = .2562$, $t(437)=2.8546$, $p=.0045$. Additionally, advertising recognition had a negative direct effect on attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.0771$, $SE = .0302$, $t(437)=-2.5482$, $p=.0112$, purchase intention, $b=-.1453$, $SE = .0283$, $t(437)=-5.1374$, $p=.000$, eWOM intention, $b=-.157$, $SE = .0291$, $t(437)=-5.385$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.1392$, $SE = .0284$, $t(437)=-4.8949$, $p=.0000$. There was not an indirect effect of religious affiliation through advertising recognition on attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click (Table 15).

Religious affiliation did not activate the other mediator, inferences of manipulative intent, $b=-.0264$, $SE = .3613$, $t(437)=-.0732$, $p=.9417$. Message appeal explicitness was an insignificant moderator for religious affiliation on inferences of manipulative intent [$B=.161$, 95%CI (-.2908,

.6127), $p=.4841$]. Message appeal explicitness did not directly affect inferences of manipulative intent, $b=.3062$, $SE = .1633$, $t(437)=1.8746$, $p=.0615$. Inferences of manipulative intent did, however, have a direct negative effect on attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.5939$, $SE=.0474$, $t(437)=-12.5309$, $p=.0000$, purchase intention, $b=-.1383$, $SE=.0443$, $t(437)=-3.1192$, $p=.0019$, eWOM intention, $b=-.1648$, $SE=.0457$, $t(437)=-5.7979$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.201$, $SE=.0446$, $t(437)=-4.5117$, $p=.0000$. There was no indirect effect of religious affiliation through inferences of manipulative intent on attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click (Table 15).

Table 15. Conditional Indirect Effects of Message Appeal Explicitness (Model 7: A-Path Moderation)

Message Appeal Explicitness	Pathway there will be 12 pathways	b(se)	LLCI	ULCI	IoMM (se) [LLCI, ULCI]
implicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards religious organization	-.0281(.0253)	-.0848	.0125	.0227(.0324) [-.0297, .1014]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards religious organization	-.0054(.0198)	-.0425	.0384	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards religious organization	-.0799(.0907)	-.2637	.0966	-.0956(.1351) [-.3634, .1681]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards religious organization	-.1755(.1072)	-.3922	.0237	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> purchase intention	-.053(.0396)	-.1331	.0234	.0429(.0527) [-.0553, .1493]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> purchase intention	-.0101(.0346)	-.0778	.0602	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0186(.0229)	-.0718	.022	-.0223(.034) [-.0955, .0419]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> purchase intention	-.0409(.0284)	-.1048	.0071	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> eWOM	-.0572(.0442)	-.1476	.0275	.0463(.0579) [-.0663, .1616]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> eWOM	-.0109(.038)	-.0871	.0642	

implicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI - > eWOM	-.0356(.041)	- .1186	.0429	-.0426(.0619) [-.1671, .0774]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI - > eWOM	-.0783(.0475)	-.1775	.0129	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> intent to click	-.0508(.0385)	-.1279	.0224	.0411(.0517) [-.0609, .1484]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> intent to click	-.0097(.0333)	-.0744	.0605	
implicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI - > intent to click	-.027(.031)	-.0927	.0313	-.0324(.0477) [-.1335, .0569]
explicit	Religious affiliation -> IMI - > intent to click	-.0594(.0385)	-.1421	.009	

To examine the role of religiosity as a moderator in a similar model, PROCESS Model 7s were used with the independent variable religious affiliation, the mediators were advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent, and the dependent variables were attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click. Religious affiliation did not activate advertising recognition, $b=.1446$, $SE = .769$, $t(437)=.188$, $p=.8509$. Religiosity was an insignificant moderator for religious affiliation on advertising recognition [$B=.013$, 95%CI (-.2555, .2815), $p=.9243$]. Religiosity did, however, have a negative direct effect on advertising recognition, $b=-.1933$, $SE = .0968$, $t(437)=-1.996$, $p=.0466$. As seen in the previous model 7, advertising recognition had a negative direct effect on attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.0771$, $SE = .0302$, $t(437)=-2.5482$, $p=.0112$, purchase intention, $b=-.1453$, $SE = .0283$, $t(437)=-5.1374$, $p=.000$, eWOM intention, $b=-.157$, $SE = .0291$, $t(437)=-5.385$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.1392$, $SE = .0284$, $t(437)=-4.8949$, $p=.0000$. There was no indirect effect of religious affiliation through advertising recognition on the dependent variables (Table 16).

Religious affiliation also did not activate the other mediator, inferences of manipulative intent, $b=.5258$, $SE = .491$, $t(437)=1.0709$, $p=.2848$. Religiosity was an insignificant moderator

for religious affiliation on inferences of manipulative intent [$B = -.0579$, 95%CI $(-.2293, .1136)$, $p = .5075$]. Religiosity also did not directly affect inferences of manipulative intent, $b = -.0821$, $SE = .0618$, $t(437) = -1.3278$, $p = .1849$. As previously noted, inferences of manipulative intent had a negative direct effect on attitude towards the religious organization, $b = -.5939$, $SE = .0474$, $t(437) = -12.5309$, $p = .0000$, purchase intention, $b = -.1383$, $SE = .0443$, $t(437) = -3.1192$, $p = .0019$, eWOM intention, $b = -.1648$, $SE = .0457$, $t(437) = -5.7979$, $p = .0000$, and intention to click, $b = -.201$, $SE = .0446$, $t(437) = -4.5117$, $p = .0000$. For the mediator, inferences of manipulative intent, there was not an indirect effect of religious affiliation on the dependent variables (Table 16).

Table 16. Conditional Indirect Effects of Religiosity (Model 7: A-Path Moderation)

Religiosity	Pathway there will be 12 pathways	b(se)	LLCI	ULCI	IoMM (se) [LLCI, ULCI]
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> interest	-.0231(.0293)	-.0857	.0317	-.0015(.0167) [-.0335, .0333]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> interest	-.0251(.0223)	-.0721	.0173	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> interest	-.0271(.0334)	-.0941	.0397	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> interest	-.0779(.0545)	-.1996	.018	.0158(.0274) [-.034, .0738]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> interest	-.057(.035)	-.1356	.0039	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> interest	-.0361(.046)	-.1325	.0532	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the ad	-.0136(.018)	-.054	.0176	-.0009(.0099) [-.0197, .0215]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the ad	-.0147(.0134)	-.0444	.0098	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the ad	-.0159(.0195)	-.0562	.0235	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the ad	-.1211(.0785)	-.276	.0334	.0245(.041) [-.0577, .1036]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the ad	-.0886(.0497)	-.188	.0083	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the ad	-.0561(.0684)	-.1923	.0769	

-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the religious organization	- .0153(.0213)	-.0653	.0193	-.001(.0114) [-.021, .0262]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.0166(.016)	-.0532	.0119	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> attitude towards the religious organization	- .0179(.0227)	-.065	.029	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	-.1698 (.1091)	-.3914	.0362	.0344(.0576) [-.0755, .1545]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	- .1241(.0699)	-.2692	.0107	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> attitude towards the religious organization	- .0787(.0977)	-.2683	.1166	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> intent to click	- .0276(.0345)	-.1026	.036	-.0018(.0193) [- .0365, .0408]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> intent to click	-.03(.0254)	-.0824	.0196	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> intent to click	- .0324(.0376)	-.1043	.0486	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> intent to click	- .0575(.0407)	-.1488	.0114	.0116(.0207) [-.0256, .0583]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> intent to click	- .0421(.0255)	-.0979	.0038	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> intent to click	-.0266(.034)	-.0944	.043	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> purchase intention	- .0288(.0349)	-.1016	.0384	-.0019(.02) [-.0404, .0391]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> purchase intention	- .0313(.0262)	-.086	.0202	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> purchase intention	- .0338(.0395)	-.1124	.0469	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> purchase intention	- .0395(.0291)	-.1069	.0085	.008(.0141) [-.0175, .039]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> purchase intention	- .0289(.0194)	-.0735	.0025	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> purchase intention	- .0183(.0246)	-.0714	.027	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> eWOM	- .0311(.0382)	-.1119	.039	-.002(.0218) [-.0451, .0414]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> eWOM	- .0338(.0294)	-.0952	.0211	

1 SD	Religious affiliation -> ad rec -> eWOM	-.0366(.044)	-.1276	.0502	
-1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0757(.0504)	-.1809	.0174	.0153(.0261) [-.0343, .0693]
Mean	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0554(.0322)	-.1213	.0051	
1 SD	Religious affiliation -> IMI -> eWOM	-.0351(.044)	-.12	.0549	

The original double moderated serial mediation model showed belief congruence, operationalized as religious affiliation, did not clearly exhibit the serial mediation of advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent respectively. The model 7 findings then showed belief congruence did not have a significant effect on advertising recognition or inferences of manipulative intent independently of each other. It is notable that the predicted moderators, message appeal explicitness and religiosity, still did not produce interactions. Since these models did not depict accurate effects, it is appropriate to examine advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent for each condition.

Comparing Conditions for Advertising Recognition and Inferences of Manipulative Intent

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if religious affiliation and message appeal explicitness have an effect on advertising recognition. The independent variable was the condition (religious affiliation: affiliated or unaffiliated $\times$ message appeal explicitness: high or low), and the dependent variable was advertising recognition. The religious affiliation of the participants did not affect advertising recognition $F(1, 437) = 1.451, p = .229$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$. There was, however, a significant main effect of message appeal explicitness, $F(1, 437) = 10.485, p < .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .023$. There was not a significant interaction between religious affiliation and message appeal explicitness, $F(1, 437) = .67, p = .413$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. Another two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if religious affiliation and message appeal

explicitness have an effect on inferences of manipulative intent. The independent variable was the condition (religious affiliation: affiliated or unaffiliated $\times$ message appeal explicitness: high or low), and the dependent variable was inferences of manipulative intent. The religious affiliation of the participants did not affect inferences of manipulative intent $F(1, 437) = 3.5$, $p=.062$, partial $\eta^2=.008$. There was a significant main effect of message appeal explicitness, $F(1, 437) = 11.319$, $p<.005$, partial $\eta^2=.025$. There was not a significant interaction between religious affiliation and message appeal explicitness, $F(1, 437) = .713$, $p = .49$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. The significant main effects in these ANOVAs suggest message appeal explicitness may be an important factor in conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge processing. Additional analyses will determine how persuasion knowledge processing, through either advertising recognition or inferences of manipulative intent, may be affected by message appeal explicitness.

Message Appeal Explicitness & Persuasion Knowledge Processing

To define the relationship between the predictor variable, message appeal explicitness, on the outcome variables through advertising recognition as the mediator, regression analyses used model 4 in PROCESS version 4.1 (Hayes, 2022). The outcome variables include attitude toward the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click. Message appeal explicitness exerted a positive direct effect on advertising recognition, $b=.5738$, $SE = .1801$, $t(439)=3.1851$, $p=.0016$. The direct effect of advertising recognition on attitude towards the religious organization was insignificant, $b=-.0659$, $SE = .0359$, $t(438)=-1.8362$, $p=.067$. Thus, advertising recognition did not mediate the effect of message appeal explicitness on attitude towards the religious organization. There were significant negative direct effects of advertising recognition on purchase intention, $b=-.1387$, $SE = .0299$, $t(438)=-4.6434$, $p=.0000$, eWOM intention, $b=-.161$, $SE = .0305$, $t(438)=-5.275$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.1159$,

$SE = .0296$, $t(438)=-3.9181$, $p=.0001$. There was a significant negative indirect effect of message appeal explicitness on purchase intention [$B=-.0796$, 95% CI $(-.1448, -.0266)$], eWOM intention [$B=-.0924$, 95% CI $(-.1677, -.0324)$], and the intention to click [$B=-.0665$, 95% CI $(-.1266, -.0189)$]. There were insignificant direct effects of message appeal explicitness on attitude towards the religious organization [$B=-1.991$, 95% CI $(-.4684, .0702)$], purchase intention [$B=.114$, 95% CI $(-.1976, .2506)$], and eWOM intention [$B=.1176$, 95% CI $(-.1115, .3466)$]. There was, however, a significant direct effect on the intention to click [$B=-.4318$, 95% CI $(-.6538, -.2098)$]. The total effect of message appeal explicitness was insignificant for purchase intention [$B=-.0531$, 95% CI $(-.2797, .1736)$] and eWOM intention [$B=.0252$, 95% CI $(-.2081, .2584)$]. The total effect was significant for intention to click [$B=-.4983$, 95% CI $(-.7214, -.2753)$]. Advertising recognition mediated the effect of message appeal explicitness on purchase intention and eWOM intention, and it partially mediated the effect of message appeal explicitness on the intention to click.

To define the relationship between the predictor variable, message appeal explicitness, on the outcome variables, attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click, through inferences of manipulative intent as the mediator, regression analyses used model 4 in PROCESS version 4.1 (Hayes, 2022). Message appeal explicitness exerted a significant positive effect on inferences of manipulative intent, $b=.3793$, $SE = .1151$, $t(439)=3.2954$, $p=.0011$. There were significant negative direct effects of inferences of manipulative intent on attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.5759$, $SE = .0492$, $t(438)=-11.6982$, $p=.0000$, purchase intention, $b=-.119$, $SE = .0475$, $t(438)=-2.5025$, $p=.0127$, eWOM intention, $b=-.2697$, $SE = .0476$, $t(438)=-5.6715$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.1567$, $SE = .0465$, $t(438)=-3.3686$, $p=.0008$. There was a significant negative indirect effect of

message appeal explicitness on attitude towards the religious organization [$B=-.2184$, 95% CI (-.3635, -.0869)], purchase intention [$B=-.0451$, 95% CI (-.0963, -.0089)], eWOM intention [$B=-.1023$, 95% CI (-.1812, -.0367)], and the intention to click [$B=-.0594$, 95% CI (-.1148, -.0163)]. There were insignificant direct effects of message appeal explicitness on attitude towards the religious organization [$B=-.0185$, 95% CI (-.2547, .2177)], purchase intention [$B=-.008$, 95% CI (-.236, .2201)], and eWOM intention [$B=.1275$, 95% CI (-.1007, .3556)]. There was, however, a significant direct effect on the intention to click [$B=-.4389$, 95% CI (-.6621, -.2157)]. The total effect of message appeal explicitness was insignificant for attitude towards the religious organization [$B=-.2369$, 95% CI (-.5039, .03)], purchase intention [$B=-.0531$, 95% CI (-.2797, .1736)] and eWOM intention [$B=.0252$, 95% CI (-.2081, .2584)]. The total effect was significant for intention to click [$B=-.4983$, 95% CI (-.7214, -.2753)]. Inferences of manipulative intent mediated the effect of message appeal explicitness on attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, and eWOM intention. It partially mediated the effect of message appeal explicitness on the intention to click.

Religiosity & Persuasion Knowledge Processing

The literature review suggests religiosity may affect persuasion knowledge processing. To investigate this, model 4s in PROCESS version 4.1 were used to examine the relationship between religiosity on attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click with advertising recognition as the mediator (Hayes, 2022). Religiosity had a negative direct effect on advertising recognition, $b=-.1838$, $SE = .0682$, $t(439)=-2.695$, $p=.0073$. The direct effect of advertising recognition on attitude towards the religious organization was insignificant, $b=-.0428$, $SE = .0339$, $t(438)=-1.2601$, $p=.2083$. Therefore, advertising recognition did not mediate the effect of religiosity on attitude towards the

religious organization. There were significant negative direct effects of advertising recognition on purchase intention, $b = -.1111$, $SE = .0281$, $t(438) = -3.9597$, $p = .0001$, eWOM intention, $b = -.1282$, $SE = .0286$, $t(438) = -4.4874$, $p = .0000$, and intention to click, $b = -.1072$, $SE = .0284$, $t(438) = -3.7752$, $p = .0002$. There was a significant positive indirect effect of religiosity on purchase intention [$B = .0204$, 95% CI (.0044, .0426)], eWOM intention [$B = .0236$, 95% CI (.0053, .0488)], and the intention to click [$B = .0197$, 95% CI (.0036, .0412)]. There was a significant positive direct effect on attitude towards the religious organization [$B = .3499$, 95% CI (.2538, .446)], purchase intention [$B = .2992$, 95% CI (.2197, .3786)], eWOM intention [$B = .3177$, 95% CI (.2368, .3987)], and the intention to click [$B = .2911$, 95% CI (.2107, .3714)]. The total effect was significant for purchase intention [$B = .3196$, 95% CI (.2395, .3997)], eWOM intention [$B = .3413$, 95% CI (.2593, .4233)], and the intention to click [$B = .3108$, 95% CI (.2298, .3917)]. Taken together, advertising recognition partially mediated the effect of religiosity on purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click.

A simple linear regression was used to evaluate the extent religiosity could predict advertising recognition for consumers viewing a religiously congruent advertisement. Using 5000 bootstrap samples in line with the analyses previously conducted in PROCESS, a significant regression was found ($F = 3.763$, $df = 1$, $p = .049$). The R^2 was .017, showing that religiosity explained approximately 1.7% of the variance in advertising recognition. The regression equation was found to be: [advertising recognition = $6.107 + .18(\text{religiosity})$]. Confidence intervals showed 95% certainty that the slope to predict advertising recognition from religiosity is between -.366 and -.005. Another simple linear regression was used to determine the extent religiosity could predict advertising recognition for consumers viewing a religiously incongruent advertisement. Using 5000 bootstrap samples, an insignificant regression was found

($F=3.721$, $df=1$, $p=.055$). If the analysis was significant, the R^2 would have also been .017. This is notable as this regression is $p=.005$ away from significance.

Another series of model 4 analyses in PROCESS version 4.1 were used to examine the relationship between religiosity on attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and intention to click with inferences of manipulative intent as the mediator (Hayes, 2022). Religiosity had a negative direct effect on inferences of manipulative intent, $b=-.1083$, $SE = .0437$, $t(439)=-2.4808$, $p=.0135$. There were significant negative direct effects of inferences of manipulative intent on attitude towards the religious organization, $b=-.5389$, $SE = .0464$, $t(438)=-11.6021$, $p=.0000$, eWOM intention, $b=-.2211$, $SE = .0444$, $t(438)=-4.9774$, $p=.0000$, and intention to click, $b=-.147$, $SE = .0445$, $t(438)=-3.3034$, $p=.001$. However, the direct effect of inferences of manipulative intent on purchase intention was insignificant, $b=-.0798$, $SE = .0445$, $t(438)=-1.7947$, $p=.0734$. Inferences of manipulative intent did not mediate the relationship between religiosity and purchase intention. Religiosity did, however, have a positive direct effect on purchase intention, $[B=.3109, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2305, .3914)]$. There was a significant positive indirect effect of religiosity on attitude towards the religious organization $[B=.0584, 95\% \text{ CI } (.0074, .1116)]$, eWOM intention $[B=.0239, 95\% \text{ CI } (.0028, .0481)]$, and the intention to click $[B=.0159, 95\% \text{ CI } (.0018, .0342)]$. There were significant positive direct effects of religiosity on the attitude towards the religious organization $[B=.2994, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2153, .3835)]$, eWOM intention $[B=.3174, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2369, .3978)]$, and intention to click $[B=.2948, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2142, .3754)]$. The total effect of religiosity was significant for attitude towards the religious organization $[B=.3578, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2624, .4532)]$, purchase intention $[B=.3196, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2395, .3997)]$, eWOM intention $[B=.3413, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2593, .4233)]$, and intention to click $[B=.3108, 95\% \text{ CI } (.2298, .3917)]$. Inferences of manipulative intent partially mediated the effect

of religiosity on attitude towards the religious organization, and eWOM intention, and the intention to click.

A simple linear regression was used to evaluate the extent religiosity could predict inferences of manipulative intent for consumers viewing a religiously congruent advertisement. A significant regression using 5000 bootstrapped samples was found ($F=4.992$, $df=1$, $p=.038$). The R^2 was .022, and religiosity explained approximately 2.2% of the variance in advertising recognition. The regression equation was found to be: [inferences of manipulative intent = $3.548 + .14(\text{religiosity})$]. Confidence intervals showed 95% certainty that the slope to predict advertising recognition from religiosity is between -.275 and -.009. Another simple linear regression was used to determine the extent religiosity could predict inferences of manipulative intent for consumers viewing a religiously incongruent advertisement. With 5000 bootstrap samples, the regression was insignificant ($F=1.832$, $df=1$, $p=.226$).

Overall, the hypothesized main study model was insignificant. The significant post hoc analyses, however, show the importance of the variables tested for the persuasion knowledge processing of religious native advertisements. These findings suggested that the message appeal in the native advertisement and the religiosity of the consumer may sometimes affect advertising recognition or inferences of manipulative intent. The general discussion chapter will detail the meaning of these findings.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main study examined the ability of Christian adults to recognize if religious native advertisements presented in a social media feed are advertisements based on belief congruence. This research included two pretests to select the characteristics of the advertisement and to determine the religious affiliation of the main study participants. Informed by these pretests, the first objective of the main study was to test the effects of belief congruence on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes through advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent. A second objective was to examine the potential role of religiosity and message appeal explicitness on advertising recognition. For the first and second objectives, the findings proved insignificant. This chapter will discuss the implications of this insignificance relative to existing research and practice. The discussion will begin by going over the findings, especially as these findings relate to advertising recognition. A third objective emerged out the finding that belief congruence did not influence advertising recognition. This objective sought to understand the roles of religiosity and message appeal explicitness in the contexts of advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent. The third objective is addressed throughout most of the sections to follow, but especially in the “Religiosity” and “Message Appeal Explicitness” sections. The section, “Inferences of Manipulative Intent” primarily focuses on how this variable produced meaningful results in post-hoc analyses. Limitations and suggestions for future research are addressed.

Belief Congruence

Theoretical Overview: Persuasion Knowledge Model & Belief Congruence Theory

Friestad and Wright (1994; 1997) assert that persuasion knowledge develops from sociocultural factors. Religious belief is known to be a sociocultural factor that both directs consumer responses to advertisements and drives a substantial portion of the US GDP (Minton, 2019; Grim & Grim, 2016). Limited research addresses how consumer values specifically inform persuasion knowledge processing for native advertisements. Thus, the present study used belief congruence theory as a mechanism to investigate how persuasion knowledge operates for religious native advertisements, a widely used form of advertising that pertains to consumer religious values. Belief congruence theory asserts that consumers evaluate stimuli in relation to their own beliefs (Alhouthi et al., 2015 & Rokeach, 1960). Taken together, PKM and the belief congruence theory suggest that belief congruence may inform persuasion knowledge. Empirical evidence to date has generally examined religiously congruent advertisements with mixed results (Appendix B). This dissertation specifically examined the potential effects of congruent and incongruent religious native advertisements to shed light on how these theories may or may not work together.

Unique to advertisements that feature a belief, there are arguably two persuasive influences involved in the processing of the religious native advertisement. The first is the sociocultural influence of religion. The second is the resultant belief congruity emergent from exposure to the native advertisement that does or does not match their preexisting religious beliefs. The persuasion knowledge model suggests that the consumer will use sociocultural experiences to manage a persuasion attempt. Under belief congruence theory, a consumer viewing a religious native advertisement evaluates a persuasion attempt relative to existing

beliefs. For example, a consumer who practices a Christianity should theoretically use existing experience with Christianity to inform the understanding of and response to a Christian native ad. This dissertation predicted that existing belief congruence would ultimately dictate the persuasion processing of a religious native ad. The findings consider this initial prediction as well as important direct effects emerging from belief congruence. This information has implications for religious advertising research, native advertising research, and advertising practice.

Implications for Religious Advertising Research

The examination of belief congruence for religious native advertisements filled a gap in religious advertising research. Apart from Alhouti et al. (2015), belief congruence has scarcely been accounted for in religious advertising studies. While scholars have generally found religious advertisements to be effective, there are still mixed results (Appendix B). This is especially important to investigate as some practitioners have rendered religious advertisements ineffective (Agarwala et al., 2021; Minton, 2020). For instance, Liu and Minton (2018) used a random sample of Amazon Mechanical Turk participants and found a Christian marketing cue led to negative outcomes. Whereas Agarwala et al. (2021) used a partially Hindu sample and found a Hindu religious cue on a print advertisement led to positive brand outcomes. To the best of this researcher's knowledge based on the information published, neither study accounted for the belief congruence of the participants when analyzing the results. Because of conflicting findings, the effectiveness of religious advertisements is mixed (Appendix B). Minton (2015) suggested previous advertising research findings by Taylor et al. (2010) may have been in line with BCT, but scholars have scarcely examined findings relative to BCT.

The present study found belief congruence directly dictates the effectiveness of religious advertisements. Consumers responded to the religious native advertisements relative to their own beliefs by reporting more positive responses to belief congruent native advertisements. Using the broadest determinant of religious belief, religious affiliation, there was a positive direct effect on the attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, and the intention to click for religiously congruent advertisements.

The present study revealed a notable exception to belief congruence leading to positive advertising outcomes that may be insightful to religious advertising researchers. Belief congruence did not lead to increased levels of eWOM intention for a Christian sample viewing a Christian native advertisement. This researcher can only speculate why this outcome deviates from some of the positive advertising outcomes (Appendix B). Qualitative religious advertising research about Christians has suggested that Christians struggle to reconcile their beliefs with the principles of advertising (Haley et al., 2009). It is possible that the controversial nature of religious advertising may have kept Christians from reporting eWOM intention (Haley et al., 2009). This is especially notable as Christianity is an evangelical religion, where sharing about the faith is a core tenant of the religion (Brodie, 2023).

Implications for Native Advertising Research

Congruity is considered one of the most widely studied concepts in advertising sponsorship research, and it continues to be a growing stream of investigation within native advertising literature. Congruity is an especially important concept in native advertising research because native advertisements, by definition, work to achieve cohesiveness with their environments. “Congruence has been argued to play a significant role in ad nativeness” (Sun & Evans, 2022, p. 220). Native advertising research has generally examined congruity relative to

the fit within a media context (Sun & Evans, 2022). Only recently have researchers considered the importance of individual-level, self-congruity with aspects of a native advertisement (Hirsch et al. 2024). PKM suggests consumers evaluate a persuasion attempt relative to their own sociocultural experiences (Friestad & Wright, 1999). Thus, consumers bring experiences and traits to the table that foster a congruent or incongruent media environment to themselves. The body of native advertising research appears to be moving toward examining consumers' individual-level congruity. To grow this body of literature, the present study used one of the most consistent predictors of human behavior, religious values, to examine the effects of individual-level congruity with a native advertisement (Minton & Kahle, 2019).

While belief congruence had a direct effect on important behavioral and attitudinal advertising outcomes, it did not have a direct effect on advertising recognition. This finding shows the persuasive system of belief congruence did not lead to the persuasion knowledge of native advertising. There is scholarly consensus that consumers first experience persuasion knowledge for native advertisements as advertising recognition when a schema violation occurs. The Covert Advertising Recognition and Effects Model (CARE Model) specifically outlines how schema violations may occur for native advertisements under PKM. The CARE Model posits that a schema violation may happen due to individual differences and specific factors in an advertisement (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). The belief congruence theory arguably defines the schema norm by which a consumer may evaluate advertising stimuli. Thus, the researcher predicted an advertisement that is not in line with a consumer's beliefs could generate a schema violation.

Instead, the findings do not support this premise. Religious affiliation did not induce or contribute to a schema violation as advertising recognition in this context. This finding contrasts

with a robust series of native advertising studies examining ad-context congruence, where congruence led to positive outcomes, such as increased ad effectiveness, involvement, attitudes, purchase intention, and intention to engage in social media activity (Yang et al., 2021; Huang & Yoon, 2022; Kim et al., 2017). An emerging line of research examines self-congruity with native advertisements. In this research, individual-level belief congruity with an advertisement has not been shown to affect conceptual persuasion knowledge. Hirsch et al. (2024) published a native advertising self-congruity study after data analysis for the present study was conducted. The researchers examined the role of self-congruity with a political social media native advertisement using political fit and issue fit. While Hirsch et al. focused on the persuasion knowledge process related to personalized ad targeting, the study had findings that mirrored the findings of the present study. Specifically, Hirsch et al. reported that neither political fit nor issue fit led to significant levels of perceived persuasive intent (PPI). In the study, PPI was defined as knowing that the social media post intends to advertise (Hirsch et al., 2024; Boerman et al., 2018). PPI is conceptually similar to advertising recognition, but it typically follows advertising recognition (Boerman et al., 2018). Similarly to Hirsch et al. (2024), the present study found that belief congruence, arguably a form of self-congruity, did not lead to advertising recognition. While Hirsch et al. (2024) primarily focuses on ad targeting, these two studies arguably examine the effect of belief congruence, either political or religious, on conceptual persuasion knowledge. Taken together, there appears to be opportunities to examine the ongoing relationship between these two constructs. Thus, the present study extends this new body of research to show belief congruence operates differently than ad-context congruity for native advertisements.

Implications for Future Research

The present study's use of belief congruence theory offers a starting point for scholars to begin to resolve discrepancies in outcomes related to religious advertising effectiveness. As the line of religious advertising research continues to grow (Waller & Casidy, 2021), scholars should use belief congruence theory when developing methodology and predicting outcomes. Future research needs to account for participants' belief congruity before evaluating whether the advertisement is effective.

Native advertising scholars should consider examining the effect of belief congruence on other kinds of conceptual persuasion knowledge beyond advertising recognition. Hirsch et al. (2024) measured targeting knowledge as a form of persuasion knowledge, which quantified consumers understanding of the persuasion attempt intentionally being displayed to them. Findings showed that high political fit had a significant effect on targeting knowledge. Future research may serve to replicate this finding by examining the effect of religious-fit on targeting knowledge. Replication studies may consider using other types of belief congruence. For example, scholars could examine consumers who identify strongly with specific prosocial, environmental, health, or economic beliefs.

Additionally, future research could conduct replication studies to examine different native advertising formats. The finding about belief congruence in the present study is generalizable to social media posts, but it is not known whether it applies to an article-style native advertisement. Since articles generally contain more detailed information by the nature of the format, an article-style religious native advertisement could contain more specific belief-related information. Thus, it is possible belief congruence could exert a different effect on persuasion knowledge in this context.

Implications for Practice

It was previously unclear whether religious advertising is effective (Appendix B). The present study provides evidence that religious ads may indeed be effective for a belief congruent target audience. Specifically, Christian advertisements may achieve positive attitudinal and behavioral responses, such as attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, and the intention to click, when targeting a Christian audience. Christian organizations should not, however, anticipate sharing behavior in response to the advertisements. Instead of relying on the audience to share the advertising message, Christian media practitioners should allocate a sufficient portion of their advertising budgets to reach additional members of the target audience.

Additionally, practitioners should curate a high-quality website to link to the native advertisement. The link used in the advertisement is arguably an extension of the advertisement. This study showed the belief congruent users exhibited the intention to click on the link. Practitioners should ensure the website is user-friendly and works in line with communication goals since viewers may click the link.

If belief congruence exerted an effect on advertising recognition, practitioners would need to address ethical concerns related to advertising to specific groups of people. However, this was not the case in the present study. Until proven otherwise, practitioners and regulatory bodies should operate under the assumption that belief congruence itself is not a factor that negatively affects a consumer's ability to understand the paid nature of a social media native ad.

Religiosity

Implications for Religious Advertising Research

Religious advertising research uses religiosity to determine the extent of individual-level religious belief (Minton & Kahle, 2013). Religiosity is a trait that encompasses affective,

cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of an individual (Minton, 2015). It has been shown to shape consumers responses to religious advertising (Minton, 2015; Alhouti et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2010; Minton, 2019). While responses to native ads have been shown to result from persuasion knowledge (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020), little was previously known about how religiosity affects persuasion knowledge processing. Religious advertising research has previously identified religiosity to be associated with ad skepticism, an outcome shown to follow persuasion knowledge (Minton, 2019; Ham et al., 2015). The findings of the present study showed that religiosity had a negative direct effect on conceptual persuasion knowledge as advertising recognition. These findings support PKM's premise that the effects of previous experiences, evidenced by high levels of religiosity, ultimately affect the processing of future persuasion attempts, like viewing religious native ads.

Implications for Native Advertising Research

Unlike belief congruence, religiosity had a negative direct effect on advertising recognition. The researcher argues that this finding is generalizable to religious native advertisements. An argument could be made, however, that this finding may apply to native advertisements promoting a secular brand with a religious cue. Minton (2019) found that religiosity led to reduced levels of advertising skepticism for secular advertisements that feature a religious cue. This has implications for future research because there may be other individual-level traits that affect the conceptual persuasion knowledge of native advertisements (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). This fits into a growing line of research that examines the effects of individual-level traits on native ad recognition (Pasandaran & Mutmainnah, 2020; Hirsch et al., 2024). Future research should work to determine if religiosity hinders secular native advertising recognition for advertisements that do not feature a religious cue. Additionally, scholars could

work to identify other individual-level traits that may hinder or accentuate advertising recognition for native ads.

Implications for Practice

Practitioners should exercise careful ethical consideration when targeting high religiosity consumers due to the persuasion vulnerability found in this study. Advertisements should include “clear and conspicuous” advertising disclosures in line with Federal Trade Commission guidelines to ensure high religiosity consumers have accessible means of identifying the paid nature of the content (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). The stimuli in the present study mimicked advertising disclosures offered on Meta’s Facebook platform in 2023. While disclosures were present, high religiosity consumers were still shown to report lower levels of ad recognition. Practitioners targeting high religiosity consumers should, therefore, consider including additional “top-down” and “bottom-up” characteristics from the CARE Model to show consumers the content is advertising (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Wojdyski and Evans (2020) assert top-down characteristics include disclosure language, prominence, and positioning in an ad. Bottom-up characteristics include message characteristics, such as brand presence, and delivery context characteristics, such as perceived delivery rationale (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020).

Regulatory Implications

The Federal Trade Commission aims to guard all American consumers from deceptive business and advertising practices by enforcing relevant consumer protection laws (“About the FTC,” 2024). The FTC also offers relevant educational resources for consumers and businesses (“Mission,” 2024). For instance, the FTC offers educational resources to guide businesses about how to conduct native advertising (Liu & FTC, 2021). The FTC has previously worked to protect

vulnerable consumers based on demographic traits, such as age (“Advertising and marketing on the internet: Rules of the road,” 2024), and socioeconomic traits, such as public assistance status (“FTC Acts to Stop FloatMe’s Deceptive...,” 2024). This study, however, showed that a psychographic trait presents a vulnerability to recognizing the paid nature of sponsored social media content. While religiosity’s direct negative effect on advertising recognition was relatively small, it is not known how other psychological traits may compound with religiosity to greatly hinder religious native advertising recognition.

The FTC’s Enforcement Policy on Deceptively Formatted Advertisements asserts that the Commission considers the “net impression” an advertisement gives to a viewer to determine if it is misleading (Liu & FTC, 2021). This places the burden on the advertiser to convey the paid nature of the content. The present study instead found the net impression of the native advertisement depended on the viewer’s religiosity. The viewer exerted some control over the net impression of the content even while the advertisement adhered to FTC guidelines. In other words, the viewer’s religiosity contributed to the misleading nature of the native advertisement. This issue presents a gap in consumer protection practices. Since it is not appropriate to measure everyone’s persuasive risk, this researcher argues it is instead appropriate for the FTC to offer educational materials to vulnerable populations instead of enacting policies that target specific groups of people or genres of advertisements. The FTC should increase educational efforts, especially toward people high in religiosity, to improve persuasion knowledge about native advertisements.

The FTC should also consider commissioning research to determine what other traits inhibit advertising recognition to identify other vulnerable populations. For instance, a study could examine consumers who have the propensity to overspend on credit cards (Sotiropoulos &

d'Astous, 2013). There could be traits about consumers who struggle with credit card spending that make them vulnerable to native advertising. Findings from this type of study could be used to target vulnerable consumers with educational materials.

Additionally, social media platforms, like Meta, should consider eliminating “interest targeting” related to religion to protect high religiosity consumers. While Meta removed “detailed targeting” of advertisements for religious group members, advertisers are still able to target religious consumers through “interest targeting” (Iundeen, 2023). Unfortunately, the “interest targeting” may be more problematic for advertising recognition than “detailed targeting” based on the findings from the present study. High religiosity consumers likely have more religion-related interests than people who are lower in religiosity. If an advertiser, for instance, targets an audience based on interest in a worship music artist, the advertiser may only be targeting high religiosity individuals who listen to worship music. Because high religiosity consumers may struggle to recognize religious native advertisements, “interest targeting” may leave these consumers vulnerable to native advertising persuasion.

Message Appeal Explicitness

Implications for Religious Advertising Research

“Calls-to-action” in religious advertisements are unique message appeals because they arguably connect media to religious practice (Stout, 2012). For instance, “Donate now” could be considered an invite to participate in religious giving, which is a religious practice. In Pretest 1, the two groups of participants, Christians and Jews, reported significantly different levels of message appeal explicitness for the call-to-action, “Donate now.” Both groups perceived “Donate now” to be the most explicit call-to-action, but Jewish participants reported significantly greater levels of explicitness compared to Christian participants. This finding arguably

contributes to a line of marketing research that has previously suggested religious affiliation could lead to differences in consumer behavior (Taylor et al., 2010). Dated research referenced by Taylor et al. (2010) found that Evangelical Christian consumers report more favorable attitudes toward secular advertisements compared to other consumers (LaBarbera, 1987). Jewish consumers have been found to be more innovative and brand loyal than Christian consumers (Hirschman 1981, 1982, 1983; Taylor et al., 2010). This line of research arguably suggests that religious affiliation may affect consumer behavior, and the present study's findings contribute to this concept. The implication for religious advertising research is that researchers should be mindful to check for religious group differences.

Implications for Native Advertising Research

A sizable portion of the variance in native advertising recognition has been shown to be due to the presence of an advertising disclosure (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016; Boerman et al., 2017; Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). While this is the case, Wojdyski and Evans (2020) assert consumers can experience ad recognition due to message and context characteristics in line with the CARE Model. Lim et al. (2021) found that a branded context paired with disclosure improved advertising recognition. Research has shown that consumers have been able to recognize advertising without disclosure (Campbell & Evans, 2018; Jung & Heo, 2019).

The present experiment used stimuli with advertising disclosures for external validity, and the study's post hoc analysis found that message appeal explicitness had a direct effect on advertising recognition. This finding supports the CARE Model's premise that a "bottom-up" pathway affects advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Wojdyski and Evans (2020) assert, "If a consumer perceives that a message is crafted for the gain of a specific brand or product,...[the] consumer may be more likely to suspect that message is coming from an

advertiser rather than through more objective channels” (p. 17). More explicit calls-to-action arguably spell out the “gain” that the advertiser is seeking, such as donations for “Donate now.” Whereas less explicit calls-to-action, like “Learn more,” do not clearly represent the advertiser’s “gain.” For instance, “Learn more” does not directly suggest that the advertiser’s goal is to lead the consumer to donate.

Ethical Implications

The findings of the present study show how a high explicitness “call-to-action” in a social media native advertisement increased advertising recognition. This, in turn, negatively affected purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click. While this seemingly discourages advertisers from using more explicit message appeals, it ultimately questions the ethics of ever using a less explicit message appeal.

While advertisers may experience benefits from using a less explicit message appeal compared to a more explicit message appeal, these benefits arguably occur when the consumer struggles to understand that the social media content is advertising. Why should an advertiser avoid using a messaging strategy that is commonly used in sales? The evidence from this study suggests a distinction between the use of a less explicit call-to-action in a native advertisement and the “soft-sell” sales approach. In the soft-sell sales approach, the consumer typically knows the salesman has a paid relationship with the company. Whereas a consumer viewing a less explicit native advertisement may not understand the paid nature of the social media content. This finding is especially concerning because this effect occurred for advertisements with “clear and conspicuous” advertising disclosures in line with FTC guidelines (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). Thus, the researcher argues that advertisers should only use more explicit call-to-actions or no call-to-action at all in social media native advertisements. This would keep

advertisers from using a call-to-action that could inhibit a consumer from detecting the paid nature of the social media content.

Inferences of Manipulative Intent

Implications for Advertising Research

Previous studies have used measures similar to inferences of manipulative intent, such as perceived manipulative intent, to examine persuasion knowledge in social media native advertisements (Hirsch et al., 2024; An et al., 2019; Binder et al., 2022). Hirsch et al. (2024) found that the perceived persuasive intent (PPI) of a political social media native ad led to a reduction in perceived manipulative intent. Binder et al. (2022) assert that PPI is knowing that “the aim of the sponsored content is to sell products” (p. 208). This variable is arguably a form of attitudinal persuasion knowledge, but it assumes advertising recognition has occurred (Boerman, et al., 2018). Hirsch et al. (2024) linked PPI to perceived manipulative intent. While the model in the present study did not clearly exhibit serial mediation between advertising recognition and inferences of manipulative intent, this may be due to the design of the study. It is likely the two experiences are still indeed connected, where advertising recognition affects IMI because it informs how the consumer thinks. These processes occur quickly and may not be captured sequentially by the experimental measures. Future research could develop methodology to measure this processing more precisely. Additional future research could aim to draw a distinction between advertising recognition and PPI to better understand how specific types of persuasion knowledge affect IMI (Hirsch et al., 2024).

Post hoc analyses suggest IMI leads to similar effects as ad recognition. The previous sections discussed the roles of religiosity and message appeals in advertising recognition. The discussion will now highlight the effects of these variables on IMI. Greater levels of religiosity

led to a reduction in IMI, but religiosity's effect on advertising recognition was stronger than the effect on IMI. Lower levels IMI had a negative effect on attitude towards the religious organization, eWOM intention, and the intention to click. There was not an effect on purchase intention. While both advertising recognition and IMI acted as partial mediators for purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click, only IMI also partially mediated the effect on attitude towards the religious organization.

Related to message appeals, the post hoc analyses found that more explicit message appeals led to increased levels of inferences of manipulative intent. This, in turn, led to reduced levels of attitude towards the religious organization, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and the intention to click. This finding is notable because it suggests that IMI can elicit similar effects as advertising recognition on outcomes, even while these effects occur independently from advertising recognition. Message appeal explicitness, however, had a greater effect on advertising recognition compared to IMI, but the downstream effects remained mostly similar between the two variables. Unlike advertising recognition, IMI once again had a negative effect on the attitude towards the religious organization. Compared to conceptual persuasion knowledge, perhaps attitudinal persuasion knowledge led to an attitudinal outcome. Taken together, these post hoc findings suggest advertising recognition and IMI operate both similarly and independently.

Limitations

The current study is not without limitations. Social media research conducted in an experimental setting outside of a social media platform threatens external validity. Numerous native advertising studies have effectively used a single stimuli design, and this study tried to find a proxy for the environment that is like social media (c.f. Sun & Evans, 2022; Xiao, 2023;

Lee & Kim, 2020). While this is the case, the experiment did not use a real social media feed. The organic post included the label, “Suggested for you,” which could have drawn attention away from the advertisement (Appendix F). Additionally, the mock feed included only two social media posts. Participants may have allocated more attention to the short experimental feed compared to a personal social media feed. The survey did not proceed forward until each participant viewed two posts for 10 seconds. This especially threatens external validity because social media users can browse endless amounts of content at their own discretion outside of an experimental setting.

Because participants viewed two social media posts, the questionnaire used aided recall images to ensure participants understood which post pertained to the measures (Appendix F). The recall images used for the advertising recognition measures were blurred out photos from the social media posts. While this risked repeat exposure effects, O’Neill et al. (2015) suggests repeat exposure does not lead to more accurate responses. Under this premise, this researcher argues that the repeat exposure with the blurred photos did not lead to a more accurate reporting of advertising recognition. Another recall image, however, could have introduced repeat exposure concerns. This image was shown before asking for additional measures (Appendix F). This particular recall image was a blurred-out screenshot of the entire religious native advertisement. This image arguably could have led to familiarity-driven repeat exposure effects, such as more favorable responses to the post (Montoya et al., 2017; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979).

Additionally, any study sampling an ideological group opens the possibility of group members differing in specific aspects of the ideology. The main study sampled Christians, who are members of various Christian denominations. While the decision to sample a broad range of Christians leveraged Prolific’s large pool of Christian participants, it led to a diverse Christian

sample. Even while members of the denominations identify as Christians, the denominations vary in specific religious beliefs. This study examined belief congruence broadly as religious affiliation, but it would have better internal validity if the study examined one specific belief from members of one denomination.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in a country with a Christian majority (Pew Research Center, 2015). For the main study, it is possible that low-religiosity individuals were still familiar with Christian practices. This could mean that less attention was allocated to the native advertisement due to familiarity with the content. It is not known how the sociocultural context of living in a majority Christian society influenced the study.

There was a questionnaire design issue in Qualtrics that yielded missing data for dichotomous advertising recognition. The data analysis instead used a scale measure of advertising recognition to remedy the issue. This is a limitation because Wojdyski and Evans (2020) argue that advertising recognition should ideally be a dichotomous measure to capture whether the instantiation of advertising schema has occurred. This data was not able to be recovered by Qualtrics because there was an issue with the survey. This researcher attempted to proceed with the data analysis despite the missing data, but the amount of missing data was too large to statistically correct. The scale advertising recognition measure arguably limits the conceptualization of advertising recognition to measuring the confidence that content is advertising instead of driving the consumer to decide if it is or is not advertising.

This main study was also unable to use a mixed religious sample, which may limit the generalizability of the study to applying to Christians. The pretests showed Christians and Jews perceived the message appeals and advertising stimuli differently, and there was not enough equivalence between the religious groups to use a mixed sample to test the model. The findings

from the main study certainly extend to Christian participants, but it is not known if the findings can extend to other religious group members, such as Jews.

The premise of the study may appear to suggest religious advertisements are common for all religious groups. Thus, it is important to note that Jewish advertisements may be less common than Christian advertisements. This may be because there are fewer Jewish people than Christian people in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). This imbalance of population size led to a smaller participant pool for Jewish participants compared to Christian participants during the pretests. Furthermore, the Jewish religion does not emphasize evangelism in the same way as Christianity.

Additional Suggestions for Future Research

While future research recommendations have been made throughout this chapter, additional future research suggestions will be discussed in this section. Future research could assist in identifying additional context-driven pathways in line with the CARE Model. This study found that call-to-action message appeals acted as a bottom-up route to advertising recognition for social media native advertisements. Future experiments could continue to investigate potential message and context-driven pathways to advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). These studies, for instance, could examine whether “suggested” content and the amount of likes or comments users have left on the advertisement (e.g. a native advertisement with 1.2 thousand likes compared to one with 10 likes) affect advertising recognition. Additionally, research could investigate the persuasion knowledge processing of religious native advertisements on Instagram that use the statement, “Instagram is not affiliated with this organization” under the post.

Additionally, future studies could examine other individual-level psychological factors that affect advertising recognition. The present experiment provides evidence that religiosity affects

the incidence of advertising recognition. It is possible that other individual-level factors could affect consumers' discernment of advertising content on social media. Scholars should also consider how multiple individual-level factors compound to produce an effect.

Future research could also assist in the development of the persuasion knowledge model for native advertisements by examining additional types of conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge factors act as serial mediators. Native advertising research to date has studied the serial association between advertising recognition and sponsorship transparency related to advertising disclosures (Campbell & Evans, 2018; Evans et al., 2019). Emerging research examines factors like PPI and targeting knowledge (Hirsch et al., 2024). The present study, however, was unable to parse out how advertising recognition and IMI specifically worked together to produce an effect on advertising outcomes. Additional research in this area will further clarify how persuasion knowledge occurs when a consumer views a native advertisement.

Lastly, the results of this study could be solidified by replication studies that apply BCT and PKM to other types of beliefs. Researchers could examine the effects of participants' existing beliefs about politics, the environment, health, economics, and other sensitive topics on persuasion knowledge processing. Given the sensitive nature of beliefs, a psychophysiological study in this area could reveal how consumers biologically respond to stimuli based on BCT. Self-reported measures may be compromised by social desirability bias, and psychophysiological measures can contextualize self-reported measures.

Conclusion

Overall, this dissertation grows an emerging body of research about the persuasion knowledge processing for ideological native advertisements. Hirsch et al. (2024) showed that high political fit and issue fit, arguably forms of belief congruence, do not affect perceived

persuasive intent. Similarly, this dissertation showed that belief congruence did not affect advertising recognition. Taken together, these studies suggest belief congruence does not affect the early stages of persuasion knowledge processing for social media native advertisements.

Through post hoc analyses, this study yielded insights about two other important factors that affect native advertising recognition, religiosity and message appeal explicitness. First, high levels of religiosity can hinder advertising recognition. Religiosity creates an obstacle to experiencing advertising recognition for religious native advertisements on social media. In this context, religiosity acts as a vulnerability that could compound with other individual-level vulnerabilities to affect attitudes and behaviors.

Second, the explicitness of “call-to-action” message appeals in social media native advertisements affect native advertising recognition. More explicit message appeals lead to greater levels of advertising recognition and vice versa. This contributes to a growing line of research about message and context-driven pathways to native advertising recognition (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). In sum, this dissertation identified persuasion knowledge pathways through post hoc analyses for religious native advertisements. This has implications for attitudes and behaviors related to Christians viewing Christian or Jewish advertisements on social media. The researcher recommends social media platforms and advertisers adapt religious native advertising practices to promote advertising recognition.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS NATIVE ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The following examples were advertisements the researcher received on Meta platforms. The screenshots are included in this appendix for educational purposes only.



A screenshot of a static post on Facebook by Not Consumed. This post is a religious native advertisement because it promotes the religious practice of reading scripture.



A screenshot of a video post on Instagram from @Miriam.Ezagui. This post is a religious native advertisement because it promotes the practice of a religious holiday using a succah.



A screenshot of a static Facebook post by Crossway. This post is a religious native advertisement because it promotes small group meeting material.

**The Navigators**

Sponsored ·



Your relationship with God doesn't stop with you.
He's calling you to something greater.

... See more



NAVIGATORS.ORG

**What you gain as a spiritual
mentor**

[LEARN MORE](#)

Download our FREE eBook to fi...

A screenshot of a static Facebook post by The Navigators. This post is a religious native advertisement because it promotes discipleship.

APPENDIX B: RELIGIOUS ADVERTISING RESEARCH METHODS

Study	Stimuli/Cue Affiliation	Sample	Relevant Findings
Agarwala, Mishra & Singh (2021)	Hindu cue	English-speaking students in India, Hindus only, and English-speaking consumers in India	Positively affects brand affect, brand trust, and purchase intentions
Alhouti et al. (2015)	Jewish & Christian cues	Convenience sample of Jewish and Christian participants	Incongruence was examined and led to increased interest
Dotson & Hyatt (2000)	Christian cue	Convenience sample of Christian undergraduate students	Positively affects attitude towards the brand and purchase intention for highly dogmatic subjects who are interested in the product
Henley et al. (2009)	Christian cue	Majority Christian convenience sample	Positively affects attitude towards brand, and purchase intentions for relevant products
Liu & Minton (2018)	Christian cue	Amazon Mechanical Turk participants randomly assigned conditions	Negatively affected brand trust and quality perceptions
Lumpkins (2010)	Christian cue	Convenience sample of female African American church-goers	Positively affects recall and attitude
Minton (2020)	Islamic & Christian cues	Primarily Protestant Christian & Catholic adults and college students randomly assigned conditions	Ads without religious cues had higher attitudes and purchase intentions than those with religious cues. No statistical difference in attitudes or purchase

			intention between Islamic and Christian cues.
Muralidharan & La Ferle (2018)	Christian cue	Christians	Higher levels of religiosity positively affect bystander intervention for cyberbullying
Muralidharan, La Ferle, and Pookulangara (2018)	Hindu cue	India – Hindu population	Higher levels of religiosity positively affected attitude towards the ad and relevant behavioral intentions
Taylor, Halstead & Haynes (2010)	Christian cue	Not known	Positively affects perceived quality and purchase intentions
Taylor, Halstead & Moal-Ulvoas (2017)	Christian cue	Millennial adults	Negatively affected service provider quality for those lower in religiosity
Zehra & Minton (2020)	Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu cues	U.S. students randomly assigned conditions	Non-Christian symbols were perceived as being more unique; Christian symbols elicited more positive affect

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FOR PRETESTS

Informed Consent Form for Non-Medical Human Subjects Research **Perceptions of Social Media Posts**

Dear Participants,

We are researchers from the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at Grady College in the University of Georgia. Before you start completing the survey, I would like you to read the following statement very carefully and, if you agree to it, to check the box below. Unless you check the box, this screen will not go to the next page and the survey will not begin.

We are conducting a research study to examine how certain groups of consumers perceive social media message topics and posts. If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey answering questions regarding your perceptions of social media posts. You understand that participants must be at least 18 years old to be eligible to participate in this research study.

The entire study should take approximately less than 5 minutes to complete. You will be compensated at the rate of at least \$8 per hour. The researcher reserves the ability to reject the submission and reject payment in line with Prolific's rejection policy.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. No risk is expected in this survey. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If the submission is incomplete, the researcher may request the participant to return the submission in line with Prolific's policy because there are many reasons online studies may not be completed.

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent permitted by law. The results of the study may be published but neither your name nor your individual answers will be known. No individually-identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be collected except the IP address used when participating. However, once we receive the completed surveys, the researcher will delete IP address information immediately. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. Participants may benefit from becoming more aware of how they personally perceive social media posts, and the results of the research will also help us to understand how groups of consumers perceive social media posts.

This study is part of a dissertation that is funded by awards from the Broun Award and the American Academy of Advertising Dissertation Award.

If you have any questions concerning the research, please contact Dr. Nathaniel Evans at (706) 542-4791 (email: nevans4@uga.edu) and Marilyn Primovic Broggi at (770) 688-5361 (email: mprimovic@uga.edu).

Mailing address:

Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication
Attn: Nathaniel Evans
120 Hooper Street
Athens, GA 30602

Sincerely,

Dr. Nathaniel Evans and Marilyn Primovic Broggi
Department of Advertising & Public Relations
University of Georgia

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board: telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

I understand that I agree with the statement to participate in this research project. (CLICK)

I disagree with the statement to participate in this research project. (CLICK)

Informed Consent for Main Study

Informed Consent Form for Non-Medical Human Subjects Research **Perceptions of Social Media Posts**

Dear Participants,

We are researchers from the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at Grady College in the University of Georgia. Before you start completing the survey, I would like you to read the following statement very carefully and, if you agree to it, to check the box below. Unless you check the box, this screen will not go to the next page and the survey will not begin.

We are conducting a research study to examine how certain groups of consumers perceive social media posts. If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey answering questions regarding your perceptions of social media posts. You understand that participants must be at least 18 years old to be eligible to participate in this research study.

The entire study should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will be compensated at the rate of at least \$8 per hour. The researcher reserves the ability to reject the submission and reject payment in line with Prolific's rejection policy.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. No risk is expected in this survey. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If the submission is incomplete, the researcher may request the participant to return the submission in line with Prolific's policy because there are many reasons online studies may not be completed.

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent permitted by law. The results of the study may be published but neither your name nor your individual answers will be known. No individually-identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be collected except the IP address used when participating. However, once we receive the completed surveys, the researcher will delete IP address information immediately. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself.

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University of Georgia

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I understand that I agree with the statement to participate in this research project. (CLICK)

I disagree with the statement to participate in this research project. (CLICK)

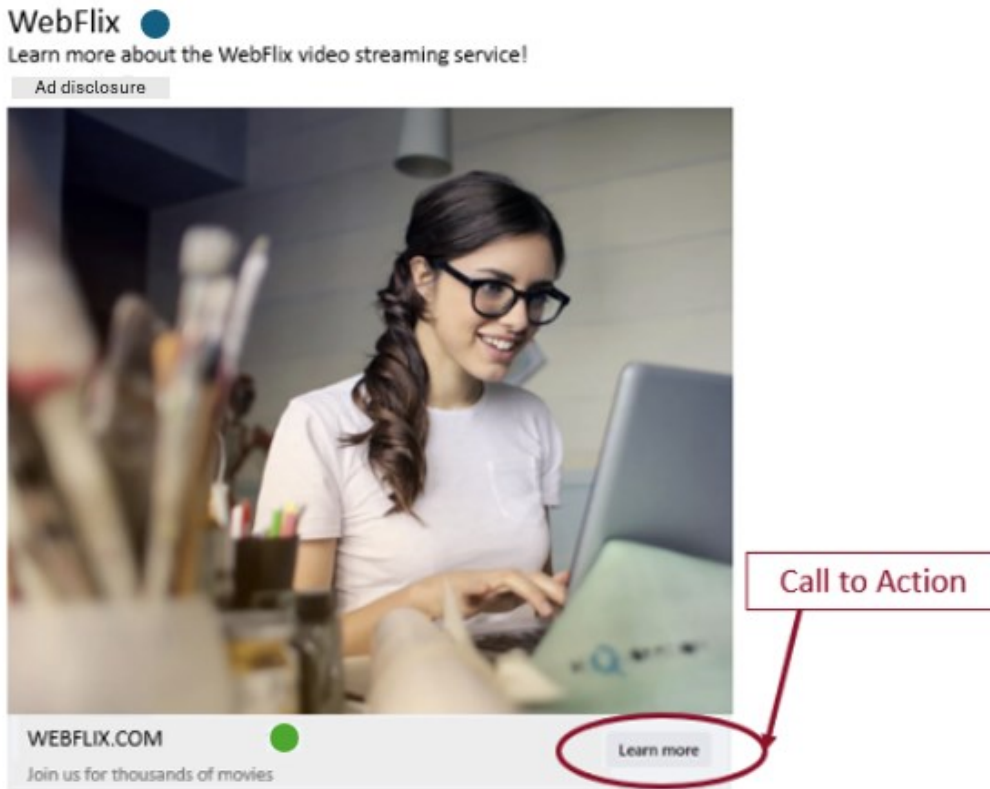
APPENDIX D: PRETEST 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Please respond to the following about Facebook.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Facebook is part of my everyday activity. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook has become part of my daily routine. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am part of the Facebook community. (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. (6)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

Instructions On Facebook, advertisements use “Call to Action” phrases.

In the example below, the "Call to Action" is circled in red.



-page break-

The next several questions will ask your perceptions of these phrases.

These phrases are:

- **Order now**
- **Donate now**
- **Sign up**

- Contact us

- Learn more

-page break-

Social media ads with the phrase, "**Order now**," are:

This measure was repeated for, "Learn more," "Contact us," "Donate now," and "Sign up."

Each measure had its own page.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Subtle	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Aggressive
Suggestive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Assertive
Indirect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Direct
Implicit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explicit
Imprecise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Precise
Insinuation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explanation
Appealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Convincing
Intimation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Persuasion
Expressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Instructive

-page break-

Attention check: Please indicate your agreement with the statement below:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Social media posts are normally created using the user's feet (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Instructions: Rate your perceptions and attitudes towards the following religious activities:

-page break-

Reading religious Scripture:

This measure was repeated for, “attending a religious webinar” and “praying.” Each measure had its own page.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Unappealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Appealing
Bad	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Good
Unpleasant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Pleasant
Unfavorable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Favorable
Unlikable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Likable
Unimportant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Important
Irrelevant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Relevant
Meanings nothing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Means a lot to me
Worthless	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Valuable
Not needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Needed
-page break-								

Please respond to the following about yourself:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
My relationship with God is an important part of my life. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
God is an important influence in my life. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love God with all my heart. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am willing to do whatever God wants me to do. (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I pray often. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read scripture often. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I attend religious services often. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I believe in God. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have no doubts that God lives and is real. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is life after death. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

Attention check:

The main goals of social media ads will be determined by you. This is an attention check. When asked to select a social media platform, select Twitter.

Based on what you read above, what social media platform have you been asked to select?

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ TikTok

☐ Snapchat

☐ Twitter

-page break-

Instructions: Because there are many ways to represent a religion, your answers to the following are important.

-page break-

With what religion do you most closely affiliate with?

☐ Christianity

☐ Judaism

-page break-

What denomination do you most closely affiliate with? (*flow from "Christianity" response above*)

☐ Evangelical Protestant

☐ Mainline Protestant

☐ Historically Black Protestant

- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Mormon
- ☐ Orthodox Christian
- ☐ Jehovah's Witness
- ☐ Other _____

What branch of Judaism do you most closely affiliate with? (*flow from "Judaism" response above*)

- ☐ Orthodox
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Reform
- ☐ No Branch
- ☐ Other _____

-page break-

Age What is your current age in years?

(e.g. 50)

-page break-

What sex were you assigned at birth, such as on an original birth certificate?

(Note: At the time of the study, Prolific required this question to be phrased this way)

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say

-page break-

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree in college (2-year)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree
- ☐ Professional degree (JD, MD)

-page break-

Choose one or more race that you consider yourself to be:

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other _____

-page break-

Information about income is very important to understand regarding perceptions of social media posts. Would you please give your best guess?

Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income (in previous year) before

taxes.

Less than \$10,000

- ☐ \$10,000 - \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 - \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 - \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 - \$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000 - \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 - \$89,999
- ☐ \$90,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ More than \$150,000

APPENDIX E: PRETEST 2 QUESTIONNAIRE

Pretest 2 Questionnaire

***Note:** Each measure relevant to a post was asked for each of the 4 conditions.*

These are the stimuli for each condition:



Christian Reading

Ad disclosure

Learn more about our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG 

Learn more



Christian Reading

Ad disclosure

Donate now to receive our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG



Donate now



Jewish Reading

Ad disclosure

Learn more about our Scripture reading plan.



JEWISHREADING.ORG 

[Learn more](#)



Jewish Reading

Ad disclosure

Donate now to receive our Scripture reading plan.



JEWISHREADING.ORG 

Donate now

Questionnaire

Instructions: View the following social media post and respond to the items that follow:



Christian Reading

Sponsored ·

Learn more about our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG

[Learn more](#)

(Each post was presented here)

-page break-

What religious group was this post about?

☐ Christianity

☐ Judaism

-page break-

Rate the following about the quality of the post:

	Strongly disagree (6)	Somewhat disagree (7)	Neither agree nor disagree (8)	Somewhat agree (9)	Strongly agree (10)
Believable (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Well designed (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Appealing (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Biased (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Thinking about the post you just saw, which of the following statements best describes your feelings towards it?

- ☐ I disliked it very much
- ☐ I disliked it
- ☐ I neither disliked it nor liked it
- ☐ I liked it
- ☐ I liked it very much

-page break

This post is:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Subtle	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Aggressive
Suggestive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Assertive
Indirect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Direct
Implicit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explicit
Impercise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Percise
Insinuation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explanation
Appealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Convincing
Intimation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Persuasion
Expressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Instructive

-page break-

The following measures were asked once.

Please respond to the following about yourself:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
My relationship with God is an important part of my life. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
God is an important influence in my life. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love God with all my heart. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am willing to do whatever God wants me to do. (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I pray often. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read scripture often. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I attend religious services often. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I believe in God. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have no doubts that God lives and is real. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is life after death. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

Attention check:

The main goals of social media ads will be determined by you. This is an attention check. When asked to select a social media platform, select Twitter.

Based on what you read above, what social media platform have you been asked to select?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Twitter

-page break-

Instructions: Because there are many ways to represent a religion, your answers to the following are important.

-page break-

With what religion do you most closely affiliate with?

☐ Christianity

☐ Judaism

-page break-

What denomination do you most closely affiliate with? (*flow from "Christianity" response above*)

☐ Evangelical Protestant

☐ Mainline Protestant

☐ Historically Black Protestant

☐ Catholic

☐ Mormon

☐ Orthodox Christian

☐ Jehovah's Witness

☐ Other _____

What branch of Judaism do you most closely affiliate with? (*flow from "Judaism" response above*)

☐ Orthodox

☐ Conservative

☐ Reform

☐ No Branch

☐ Other _____

-page break-

Age What is your current age in years?

(e.g. 50)

-page break-

What sex were you assigned at birth, such as on an original birth certificate?

(note: at the time of the study, Prolific required this question to be phrased this way)

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say

-page break-

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree in college (2-year)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree
- ☐ Professional degree (JD, MD)

-page break-

Choose one or more race that you consider yourself to be:

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other _____

Information about income is very important to understand regarding perceptions of social media posts. Would you please give your best guess?

Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income (in previous year) before taxes.

Less than \$10,000

- ☐ \$10,000 - \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 - \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 - \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 - \$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000 - \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 - \$89,999
- ☐ \$90,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ More than \$150,000

APPENDIX F: MAIN STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

Imagine you are browsing your own social media feed.

-page break-

The questionnaire pertained to the condition assigned to the participant.

This is how the mock social media feed appeared to the participant:

(10 second timer before participants can proceed)

Suggested for you



Joe Thompson

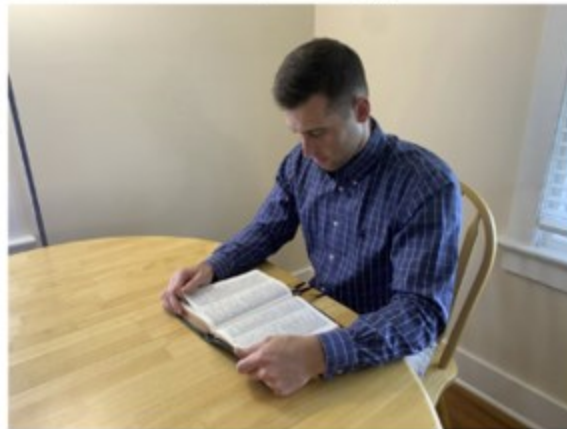
Visit Ireland if you get the chance. It felt great to unplug for a bit.



Christian Reading

Ad disclosure

Donate now to receive our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG

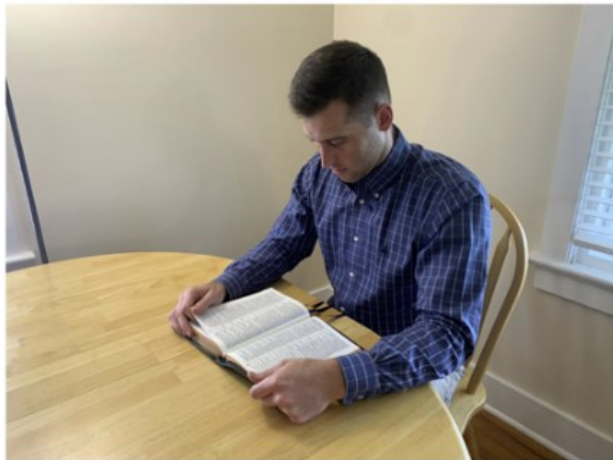
Donate now

These are the conditions (second post in the feed):

Affiliated/Learn more:

 **Christian Reading**
Ad disclosure

Learn more about our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG  [Learn more](#)

Affiliated/Donate now:

 **Christian Reading**
Ad disclosure

Donate now to receive our Scripture reading plan.



CHRISTIANREADING.ORG  [Donate now](#)

Unaffiliated/Learn more:



Unaffiliated/Donate now:



-page break-

Please respond to the following about the short feed of social media posts you viewed. Use the blurred photos to help recall the posts.

Rate the extent you agree with the following statements about the first post in the feed.

A blurred image was used to enable participants to recall the proper post from the feed.



The first advertising recognition measure asked about the organic post.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The post I viewed was advertising. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The post I viewed contained advertising. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The post I viewed was sponsored. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Rate the extent you agree with the following statements about the second post in the feed.

The second advertising recognition measure referred to the native advertisement stimulus in the feed. Image used depended on the condition.

Image for religiously affiliated condition:

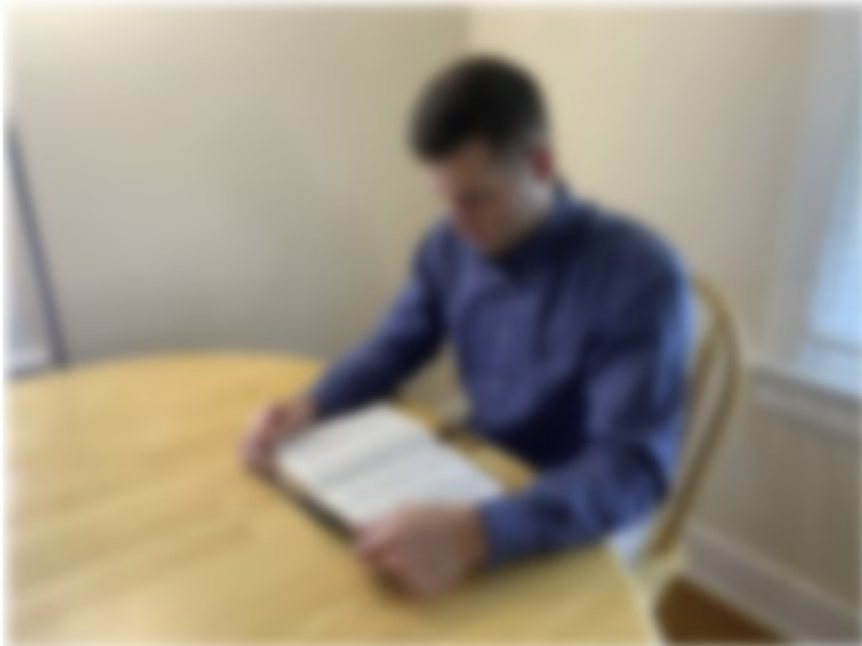
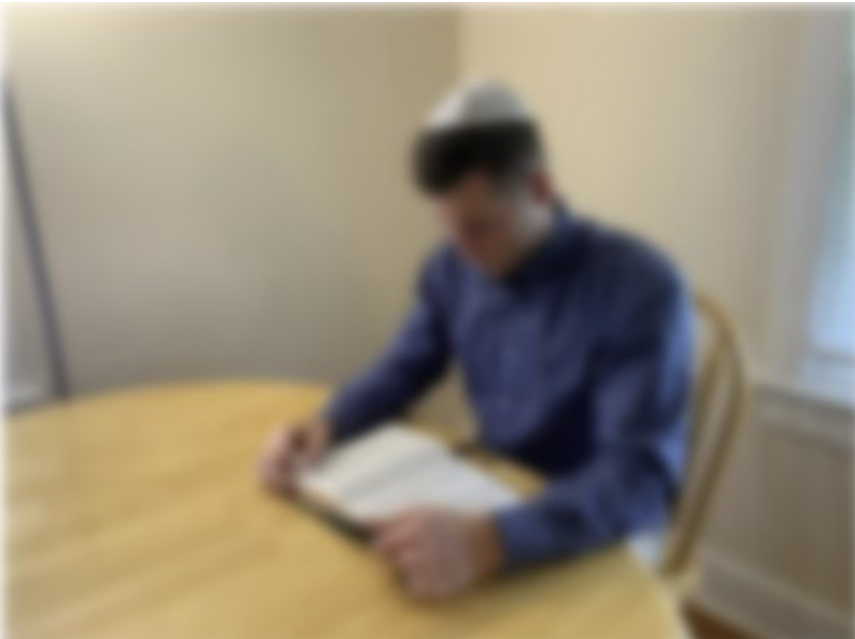


Image for religiously unaffiliated condition:

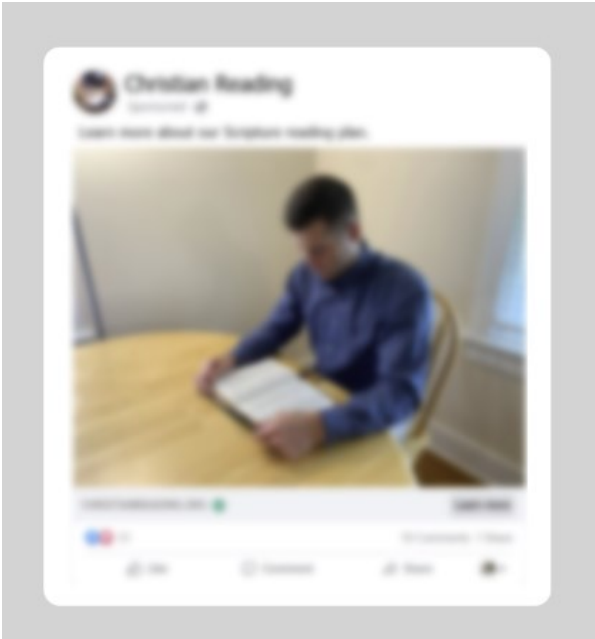


	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The post I viewed was advertising. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The post I viewed contained advertising. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The post I viewed was sponsored. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

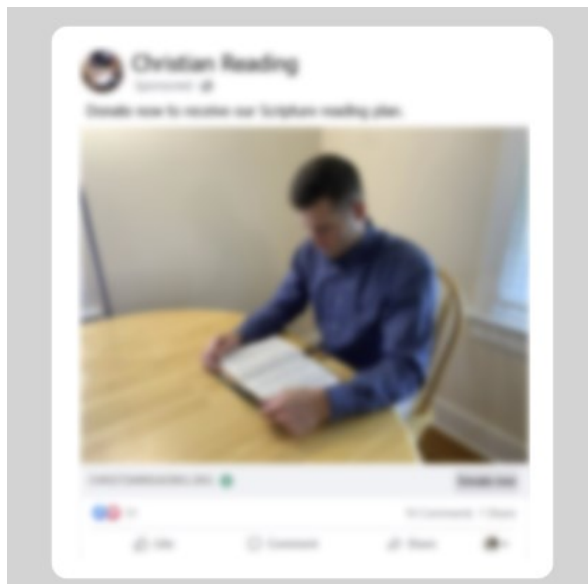
-page break-

The following questions refer to the original version of the blurred post below:

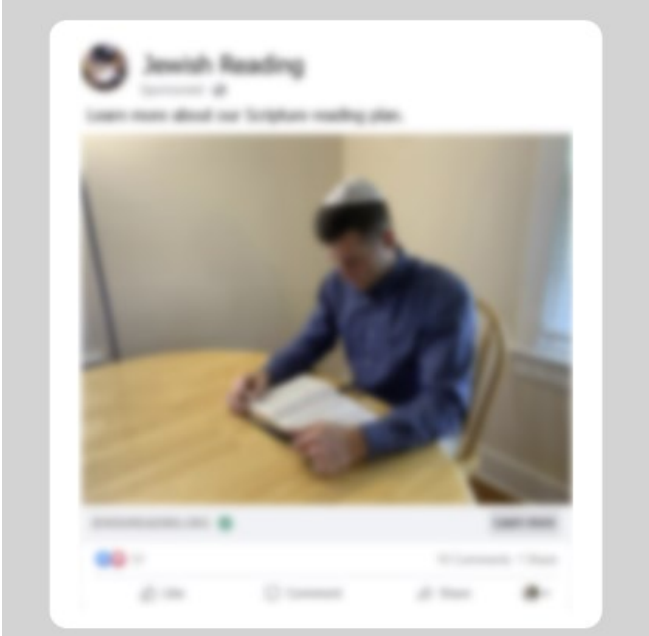
Image depended on the condition.



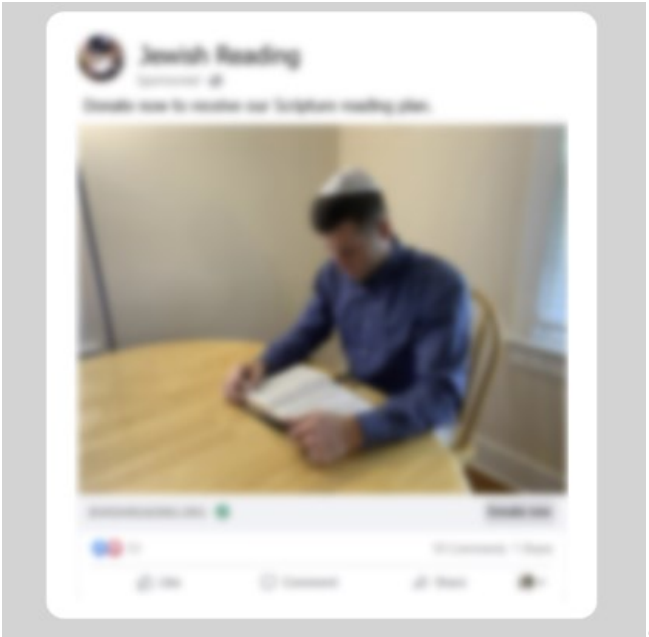
Affiliated/Learn more



Affiliated/Donate now



Unaffiliated/Learn more



Unaffiliated/Donate now

The post was
fair in what
was said and
shown. (5)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I think that this post is

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Fair	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unfair

-page break-

Please respond to the following:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I think this Facebook post is worth sharing with others. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will recommend this Facebook post to others. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Aided recall: Which of the following phrases exist in the original version of the blurred post?

☐ Learn more

☐ Order now

☐ Donate now

-page break-

If you saw the phrase, "**Learn more**," in a post like this, how would you evaluate it?

For the explicit message appeal conditions, this question said, "Donate now."

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Subtle	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Aggressive
Suggestive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Assertive
Indirect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Direct
Implicit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explicit
Imprecise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Precise
Insinuation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Explanation
Appealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Convincing
Intimation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Persuasion
Expressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Instructive

-page break-

Aided recall: Which of the below religious organizations made the post?

☐ Christian Reading

☐ Jewish Resources

☐ Muslim References

-page break-

How do you feel about the religious organization, "Christian Reading," in the post?

This measure reflected the relevant condition.

	1	2	3	4	5	6)	7	
Unappealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Appealing
Bad	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Good
Unpleasant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Pleasant
Unfavorable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Favorable
Unlikable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Likable
Negative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Positive
Low quality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High quality

-page break-

Please respond to the following:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I think this Facebook post is worth sharing with others. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will recommend this Facebook post to others. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Please respond to the following about the post:

This question reflected the relevant condition.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree or disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would definitely click "learn more." (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Describe your overall feelings about the post's Scripture reading plan.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never buy it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Definitely buy it
Definitely do not intend to buy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Definitely intend to buy
Have low purchase interest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Have high purchase interest
Definitely not buy it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Definitely buy it
Probably not buy it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Probably buy it

-page break-

Please respond to the following about yourself:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
My relationship with God is an important part of my life. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
God is an important influence in my life. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love God with all my heart. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am willing to do whatever God wants me to do. (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Please respond to the following about yourself:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I pray often. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read scripture often. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I attend religious services often. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I take a spaceship to the moon daily. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

Please respond to the following about yourself:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I believe in God. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have no doubts that God lives and is real. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is life after death. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The scripture for my religious affiliation is the word of God. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

How often do you use Facebook?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ 2-3 times a week
- ☐ 4-6 times a week
- ☐ Once daily
- ☐ Several times daily

-page break-

Please respond to the following about Facebook.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Facebook is part of my everyday activity (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook has become part of my daily routine (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am part of the Facebook community (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would be sorry if Facebook shut down (6)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-page break-							

Please rate your familiarity with native advertising.

	Very unfamiliar (1)	Unfamiliar (2)	Somewhat unfamiliar (3)	Neither familiar nor unfamiliar (4)	Somewhat familiar (5)	Familiar (6)	Very familiar (7)
Please rate your familiarity with native advertising (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

-page break-

With what religion do you most closely affiliate with?

☐ Christianity

☐ Judaism

What denomination do you most closely affiliate with?

☐ Evangelical Protestant

☐ Mainline Protestant

☐ Historically Black Protestant

☐ Catholic

☐ Mormon

☐ Orthodox Christian

☐ Jehovah's Witness

☐ Non-denominational

☐ Messianic

☐ Other _____

-page break-

Age What is your current age in years?

(e.g. 50)

What sex were you assigned at birth, such as on an original birth certificate?

(This measure was in line with Prolific requirements at the time of the study)

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say

-page break-

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree in college (2-year)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree (PhD)
- ☐ Professional doctoral degree (JD, MD)

-page break-

Choose one or more race that you consider yourself to be:

- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Black or African American

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian or Middle Eastern
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic or Latinx
- ☐ Other _____

-page break-

Information about income is very important to understand regarding perceptions of social media posts. Would you please give your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income (in previous year) before taxes.

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000 - \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 - \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 - \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 - \$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000 - \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 - \$89,999
- ☐ \$90,000 - \$99,999

☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999

☐ More than \$150,000

APPENDIX G: SYNTAX FOR CUSTOM MODEL

The dependent variable changed based on the analysis.

Using PROCESS (Hayes, 2022), the following is syntax used for the custom model:

y=attreli/m=adrec imi/x=congru/w=appeal/z=religi/

bmatrix= 1,0,1,0,0,1/wzmatrix= 1,0,0,0,0,0

APPENDIX H: FUNDING

This dissertation was completed thanks to funding from the Broun Fund at Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication along with funding from the American Academy of Advertising Dissertation Award.