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Promising Happiness in Advertising in Light of International Standardization:  
Religiosity and Religious Priming Overshadow Cross-Cultural Factors

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Promising Happiness in Light of International Advertising Standardization:  
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**ABSTRACT**

Advertising campaigns that explicitly claim that the advertised product can bring about happiness in the consumer's life are often standardized across national markets. While the notion that most people—if not everyone on the planet—want to be happy and might respond favorably to calls for happiness seems intuitive, the literature offers little to no evidence to support this common managerial practice. Through two studies conducted in cultural settings as different as the United Arab Emirates and the United States, this research shows that cross-cultural factors matter less than personal and situational factors such as religiosity and religious priming, respectively. Specifically, the author found that lower (higher) religiosity levels led to worse (better) ratings for happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims. Moreover, exposure to religious cues flipped the relationship between higher religiosity levels and liking for ads featuring happiness-based claims because of altered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim. This research sheds light on the interactive role of religiosity and religious priming on consumer response to standardized secular advertising.

*Keywords:* advertising, cross-cultural, happiness, religiosity, religious priming

Promising happiness is a fairly common practice in advertising. Examples are numerous across the globe and cover a large range of product categories. Coca-Cola launched its “Open Happiness” campaign in 2009 with the new slogan prominently displayed in print ads, commercials, and other formats for the next seven years worldwide. Similarly, Ferrero’s Nutella launched the “Spread the Happy” campaign in 2018 with variations in many countries including the Middle East where another food industry giant, Nestlé, still claims as of 2022 through its brand Maggi that “Happiness is homemade!” Perhaps the most famous example is McDonald’s *Happy Meal* sold in about 40,000 outlets around the globe.

While consumers might very well doubt a brand’s ability to fulfill such a promise, this tactic undeniably builds a verbal association with happiness. Some individuals have been shown to be particularly sensitive to written expressions of happiness. For instance, content analyses of text messages published on social media suggest that religious individuals use positive emotion words to a greater extent than less religious individuals (Chen and Huang 2019; Ritter, Preston, and Hernandez 2014; Yaden et al. 2018). This observation echoes evidence of a positive correlation between religiosity, or the extent to which a person adheres to their religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living (Worthington et al., 2003), and higher levels of happiness (Myers and Diener 2018; Zuckerman, Li, and Diener 2018), across the world major religions (Diener, Tay, and Myers 2011). Coincidentally, less religious individuals have been shown to endorse objectively verifiable claims and reject unfalsifiable claims (McPhetres and Zuckerman 2021). Thus, accounting for consumer religiosity might help explain their (dis)liking for ads featuring happiness-based claims.

Most of humanity still identify with a religious group (84%; Pew 2017), including in western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) countries such as the United States where 3 in 4 adults consider religion as important in their life (73%; Gallup 2020).

Although WEIRD countries are becoming more secular, religion remains a ubiquitous part of people's lives regardless of their religiosity or absence thereof. Across the globe, people's lives are indeed replete with references to religion through entertainment feeds, music, holidays, and daily objects featuring religiously connoted mottos (e.g., "In God we trust" on U.S. dollar bills). Some firms such as Forever 21 and In-N-Out Burger even imprint Bible verses on their packaging. Exposure to religious cues (i.e., religious priming) has been shown to affect people's behavior independently of religiosity levels (Casidy et al. 2021; Grewal, Wu, and Cutright 2022; Shariff et al. 2016).

In this research, we leverage compensatory control theory (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015) to investigate the interactive role of religiosity and religious priming on consumer liking for ads featuring happiness-based claims. Compensatory control research suggests that people can flexibly rely on religious and secular sources of control depending on salient associations related to the situation they are in (Jonas et al. 2014; Kay et al. 2010; Khenfer et al. 2017). We propose that religious priming lowers perceptions that the advertised brand has control over a promise such as happiness because happiness refers to an overarching goal whose attainment depends on many factors (Diener et al. 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005; Myers and Diener 1995), including God to the extent that consumers hold religious beliefs. Specifically, we hypothesize that religious priming dampens liking for ads featuring happiness-based claims among more religious consumers through altered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim.

The role of religiosity and religious priming raises the question of whether these effects hold across cultural settings where different dominant religions have contributed to shaping people's understanding of what happiness means (Kesebir and Diener 2008). Despite the growing number of articles investigating the role of religiosity on consumer response to advertising and other marketing tactics (e.g., Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021; Casidy et al.

2021; Grewal, Wu, and Cutright 2022), studies have not considered religious affiliation or any cross-cultural factor that reflects the global religious landscape. This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, international firms have not shied away from relying on happiness-based claims as the earlier examples suggest. This raises the question of the extent to which this practice can be standardized across national markets. Second, calls for research on non-WEIRD populations have piled up in recent years without much impact (Kupferschmidt 2019). In this research, we address this lack of cross-cultural perspective and ask if our theorizing holds across two countries with different dominant religions—i.e., the United States (USA; predominantly Christian) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE; predominantly Muslim).

This research makes several key contributions. First, it is the first to investigate happiness-based claims independently of emotional appeals. Our findings debunk the myth that consumers respond well to such claims unless we account for their religiosity. Second, this research highlights that the role played by religion-related constructs in persuasion processes depends on whether advertising claims—although secular—have significance in light of consumer religiosity. By distinguishing between the effects of religiosity and religious priming, this research shows that more religious consumers are not more accepting of all advertising claims. We explore a mechanism based on perceptions of the brand's control over the claim that contrasts with all-encompassing drivers such as trust and credibility favored in past research (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021; Minton 2015; Sarofim and Cabano 2018). Third, this research contributes to the advertising standardization literature by identifying culturally significant factors—individual (i.e., religiosity) and situational (i.e., religious priming)—that affect ad liking regardless of cross-cultural differences. In doing so, this research contributes to a better understanding of how religion influences consumer behavior across cultures.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

### **Happiness-Based Claims in Advertising**

Happiness-based claims in advertising differ from merely featuring positivity through creative work using for instance smiling models or flashy colors. The purpose is not so much to influence affective responses to the advertised brand—as emotional advertising would (Poels and Dewitte 2019)—but to claim that consumption of the advertised product or service can bring about happiness in the consumer’s life. Anecdotal observations suggest that advertising campaigns that build on happiness-based claims often include emotional sceneries (e.g., display of affection, laughter, awe). Consistency between emotionally arousing appeals and advertising claims have long been shown to strengthen favorable consumer responses (Poels and Dewitte 2019; Vakratas and Ambler 1999). Nonetheless, the present research seeks to pinpoint the effect of promising happiness in advertising and therefore limits its field of inquiry to claims phrased through taglines or slogans. As such, we contend that happiness-based claims are explicit claims that can be made independently of emotional appeals, that is, independently of efforts designed to trigger an emotional response from consumers.

In this research, we argue that happiness-based claims are unique in the advertising landscape. Since happiness is primarily a subjective phenomenon (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005; Myers and Diener 1995), advertisers leave it to consumers to imagine which attributes or combination of attributes are relevant given the claim and what the promise of happiness means given the advertised product. For instance, Coca-Cola’s “Open Happiness” tagline could have pertained to the drink itself (e.g., taste, coldness), the social benefit of sharing a drink with others, or the myriad of favorable associations that the brand has cultivated over the years (The Coca-Cola Company 2009). While all subjective claims are open to individual interpretation given the absence of universal agreement on how to assess

the product's performance (Ford, Smith, and Swasy 1990), they typically build on the product's attributes. For instance, although different people may come to different conclusions about whether a service will boost feelings of powerfulness, empowerment-based claims rely on customers' participation in the service (Khenfer et al. 2020).

Moreover, happiness-based claims appeal to an overarching goal whose attainment depends on numerous personal and external factors (Diener et al. 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005). Research suggests that intentional activities explain only 40% of the variance in people's happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005) while the rest can be attributed to genetics and circumstances (Braungart et al. 1992; Diener et al. 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005). Although individual consumption episodes may contribute to experiencing happiness, those experiences are punctual and short-lived (Dunn, Gilbert, and Wilson 2011). Individuals do not seek to be happy just once, but continuously throughout their lives through a string of activities subjectively perceived as relevant (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005).

In sum, we propose that the unnecessary alignment of the promised outcome (i.e., happiness) with the attributes of the advertised product in addition to the appeal to an overarching goal whose pursuit depends on many factors beyond a brand's control characterize happiness-based claims. For people to perceive that an intentional agent has control over anything, it must seem as if it is capable of performing particular actions and these actions must seem to predictably influence outcomes (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015). Thus, an inherent issue to happiness-based claims pertains to perceptions of a brand's control over the claim, i.e., the extent to which consumers perceive that a brand can reliably produce the expected outcome (Khenfer et al. 2017). We propose that not all consumers are attuned to this issue to the same extent and that religiosity and religious priming both play a moderating role.



## **Religiosity and Happiness-Based Claims**

Recent years have known a renewed interest in the role played by religion on how consumers respond to advertising from a variety of perspectives, including advice specificity (Khenfer et al. 2017), fear appeal (Wu and Cutright 2018), and the use of religious cues in ads (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021). The marketing literature also finds evidence of the positive influence of religiosity on consumers' willingness to accept persuasion messages. Specifically, Sarofim and Cabano (2018) demonstrated that religiosity positively influenced perceived ad credibility through higher levels of hope. Likewise, Minton (2015) found a positive association between religiosity and trust in advertised brands. Other research found that using religious symbols in ads had a positive impact on brand trust and purchase intentions with stronger effects among religious consumers (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021).

However, this positive and unidirectional effect of religiosity on consumers' willingness to accept persuasion messages was based on the neutrality of the claim made in the ads. That is, those studies considered a single, unspecified claim at a time. Would the influence of religiosity hold across advertising claims when contrasting happiness-based claims with claims that do not explicitly promise happiness? We address this question by considering both ends of the religious spectrum.

First, supporting studies have established that the absence of religiosity is an important predictor of skepticism, or the tendency toward disbelief (McPhetres and Zuckerman 2021). For instance, lower religiosity levels have been shown to predict disbelief toward unfalsifiable claims such as the existence of supernatural agents (Norenzayan and Gervais 2013), to positively influence support in scientific claims (McPhetres and Zuckerman 2021), and to dampen "bullshit receptivity," or the perceived profundity of claims designed to sound profound but devoid of actual meaning (Nilsson, Erlandsson, and Västfjäll 2019;

Pennycook et al. 2015). Since skepticism among less religious individuals finds its root in the rejection of claims that cannot be objectively verifiable (McPhetres and Zuckerman 2021), it stands to reason to argue that the lower religiosity levels, the less favorable consumers might feel toward unfalsifiable advertising claims. This resonates even more so in the context of happiness-based claims given the unnecessary alignment of the promised outcome with the advertised product's attributes.

Second, studies and literature reviews generally conclude that more religious individuals are more optimistic (Schutte and Hosch 1996), have higher subjective well-being (Diener et al. 1999; 2011), and are overall happier (Myers and Diener 1995; 2018). Research has uncovered several reasons why religiosity predicts happiness, including the sense of meaning drawn from religious beliefs and the social support that comes from belonging to a religious community (Pargament 2002). These results have been shown to hold across cultures at an individual level (Myers and Diener 2018). While religiosity predicts happiness, recent findings suggest that happiness leads individuals to use positive emotion words when asked to complete a writing task (Stavrova and Haarmann 2020). Moreover, supporting studies found direct evidence that religious individuals are drawn to written expressions of happiness. Ritter, Preston, and Hernandez (2014) analyzed text messages from thousands of Twitter users and found that Christians use more positive emotion words than atheists in everyday language. Chen and Huang (2019) found consistent results by extending their investigation to both Christians and Buddhists while Yaden and colleagues (2018) generalized these findings to a different social media platform (i.e., Facebook).

Thus, we predicted that religiosity would moderate the effect of happiness-based claims on ad liking. Specifically, we expected that less religious consumers would dislike ads featuring happiness-based claims compared to control claims because they would doubt to a greater extent the brand's control over the claim. In contrast, we expected that more religious

consumers would like more ads featuring happiness-based claims compared to control claims given their attraction toward written expressions of happiness. We did not expect to find differences across advertising claims regarding perceptions of the brand's control over the claim among more religious consumers given their favorable disposition to accept persuasion messages (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021; Minton 2015; Sarofim and Cabano 2018).

Formally:

**H1:** Religiosity moderates the effect of happiness-based claims on ad liking:

happiness-based claims decrease (increase) ad liking for consumers with low (vs. high) religiosity levels.

**H2:** Perceptions of the brand's control over the claim mediate the negative effect of happiness-based claims on ad liking for consumers with low (but not high) religiosity levels.

### **Religious Priming and Happiness-Based Claims**

Religiosity has long been studied as a stable demographic that durably influences individuals' behavior, leading to an emphasis on its interest as a tool for market segmentation (Mathras et al. 2016). However, recent research has highlighted that the accessibility of religion-related thoughts can be manipulated independently of religiosity levels (Casidy et al. 2021; Grewal, Wu, and Cutright 2022; Shariff et al. 2016). Attitudes and behaviors guided by life values and belief systems are not constantly present in people's minds, they tend to be activated by priming stimuli (Fazio, Powell, and Williams 1989). Although religion has a pervasive effect on many aspects of people's behavior (Mathras et al. 2016), it does not always occupy the forefront of their thoughts. Religion-related thoughts can be activated regardless of religiosity levels through mundane stimuli such as ads (Agarwala, Mishra, and

Singh 2021), press articles (Wu and Cutright 2018; Khenfer et al. 2017), and symbols associated with seasonal religious festivals (Newton, Wong, and Casidy 2018).

In this research, we propose that religious priming leads more religious consumers to feel negatively toward happiness-based claims because of altered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim. Specifically, we argue that religious priming leads them to confront the claim that the brand exerts control over people's happiness with their religious beliefs. Most religions entail beliefs in divine control, that is, the belief that powerful supernatural agents—typically God—can intervene in worldly affairs (Norenzayan and Gervais 2013; Pargament 2002). Supporting studies show that such beliefs foster the perception that those agents can influence personally relevant outcomes and improve chances of success (Khenfer et al. 2017; Landau et al. 2018). Other research found that belief in God heightened a sense of protection drawn from the belief in the unlimited nature of God's support (Wu and Cutright 2018). Moreover, evidence suggests that mere exposure to religion-related concepts (e.g., mention of God in a brief text) activates belief in divine control (Kupor, Laurin, and Levav 2015).

Compensatory control research (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015) suggests the existence of a hydraulic relationship between religious and secular sources of control by which heightened reliance on the former reduces reliance on the latter, and vice versa. Supporting studies show that external sources of control such as God and government can compensate for one another because both are perceived as all-powerful agents that have the inherent ability to intervene in many—if not any—aspects of people's lives (Kay et al. 2010; Zuckerman, Li, and Diener 2018). These findings were supported across Western and Eastern contexts. While government constitutes the most likely secular source of external control (Zuckerman, Li, and Diener 2018), firms can also be portrayed as intentional agents capable of intervening in people's lives (Khenfer et al. 2017). However, a brand's perceived intention

and ability are constrained by its field of competence (Kervyn et al. 2012). This perspective yields the hypothesis that religious priming hinders perceptions that a brand can influence life outcomes, in particular happiness which is inherently uncontrollable by one single external agent in contrast to other outcomes that advertising claims may promise. Formally:

**H3:** When consumers with high religiosity levels are exposed to religious priming, happiness-based claims decrease ad liking.<sup>1</sup>

**H4:** When consumers with high religiosity levels are exposed to religious priming, perceptions of the brand's control over the claim mediate the negative effect of happiness-based claims on ad liking.

### **Cross-Cultural Perspective**

International firms have used happiness-based claims in standardized advertising across national markets with no discernible drawback. While one could argue that there was no difference to report, another may retort that no one was looking for any. In this research, we test our theorizing across two culturally distant settings: a Western country (USA) and an Arab-majority country (UAE) whose human development index puts it in the same human development category (United Nations 2020).

Happiness has served as a prominent signal to guide and measure societal functioning across cultures (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2011). For instance, the pursuit of happiness holds such an important position in American society that it is established as an unalienable right in the U.S. Declaration of Independence. In recent years, reputable U.S.-based corporations such as Amazon and Google have gone as far as creating the position of chief happiness officer to ensure employees' well-being (The Wall Street Journal 2022). The pursuit of happiness has also become a global obsession (Freedman 1978; Gallup 2021;

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<sup>1</sup> We did not expect that religious priming would have an influence on consumers with low religiosity levels and their response to happiness-based claims given the irrelevance of religious cues for them.

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005). Examples include countries such as the UAE where the government appointed a Minister of State for Happiness in 2016 to set policies, programs, and services in that regard (UAE government 2022).

Conceptions of happiness converge across religious traditions. Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages such as St. Thomas Aquinas considered that virtue was the path to happiness (Aquinas 1947). Consistent with Islamic conceptions (Joshani 2013), living a life of virtue was considered indispensable to the good life but insufficient without devoted faith. Put differently, one must embrace high moral standards but also look beyond earthly, hedonic pleasures because happiness extends to the afterlife and depends on the grace of God, which requires religious devotion and obedience (Kesebir and Diener 2008). Divergences between Western and Islamic conceptions of happiness take root in the transformation of Western cultures during the Age of Enlightenment throughout modern times. The notion of happiness grew more hedonic and less otherworldly as illustrated by the utilitarian philosophy which determined that an action is right if it contributes to happiness by means of pleasure (Joshani 2013; Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2011; Kesebir and Diener 2008).

In sum, one could argue in favor or against the moderating role of cross-cultural factors on consumer (dis)liking for happiness-based claims, especially given countries with Christian *versus* Islamic traditions. Furthermore, the arguments underlying our theorizing (e.g., the appeal of written expressions of happiness among religious individuals, the hydraulic relationship between religious and secular sources of control) have been shown to hold across cultures, as previously suggested. Thus, we decided to adopt an exploratory approach to the role that cross-cultural factors may have in our theorizing. We did not formulate a hypothesis as to whether the influence of religiosity and religious priming on liking for ads featuring happiness-based claims was contingent on cross-cultural factors,

including country (Study 1) and more specifically dominant religious affiliation within a country (Study 2). Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual model and our analytical approach based on multilevel analyses.

INSERT\_FIGURE\_1\_ABOUT\_HERE

## STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to provide initial support for our hypotheses using a wide range of products and services. To that end, we contrasted advertising claims that included promises of happiness with claims that did not—thereafter named *control claims*. Study 1 used a 2 (Advertising claim type: happiness-based vs. control)  $\times$  2 (Religious priming: not salient vs. salient)  $\times$  2 (Cultural context: USA vs. UAE)  $\times$  one continuous factor (religiosity) mixed design in which advertising claim type was manipulated within subjects, religious priming and cultural context were manipulated between subjects, and religiosity was measured as a continuous factor. We controlled for covariates relevant to ad liking, including brand familiarity, visual appeal, mood, and perceived socioeconomic status. We also controlled for materialism. One could argue that the importance placed on material possessions has confounded with our independent variables and led participants to assess more favorably happiness-based claims because such claims suggest that one must possess the advertised product to experience happiness.

### Method

**Participants and Procedure.** We collected the data ( $N = 1024$ , 45.1% female, mean age: 38.5,  $SD_{age} = 10.1$ ) through the service of two online panel providers, namely Prolific in the USA and YouGov in the UAE. Both providers reward respondents for their participation in

surveys with cash payments. The data collected in the USA consisted of American nationals ( $n = 495$ ). Because more than 80% of UAE residents are expatriates (World Bank 2021), the data collected there ( $n = 529$ ) consisted of UAE nationals and Arab expatriates, or nationals from Arab-majority countries living in the UAE under a residency visa. We sought to recruit participants who had been socialized in an overarching cultural setting where the influence of its dominant cultural aspects (e.g., religion) would have contributed to sharing a common cultural background despite cultivating individual differences. Table 1 provides further details on the demographics. Because both Arabic and English are mainstream languages in the UAE, participants could complete the study in Arabic (87.2%) or English (12.8%). The Arabic version resulted from a back-translation performed by two research assistants hired for this study. Both spoke Arabic and English fluently. This process was implemented for the entire study.

#### INSERT\_TABLE\_1\_ABOUT\_HERE

Participants were invited to complete a survey investigating people's reactions to a series of random ads. They were first asked to complete a questionnaire which was presented as containing questions designed to measure different aspects of their personalities. All participants started with a set of five filler questions (e.g., "When I am having my favorite foods, I tend to eat too much.") which included the following attention check "I am paying attention. (Please select "strongly agree" to show you pay attention)." Those who failed to answer "strongly agree" were automatically screened out. Then, we manipulated religious priming by randomly asking half the participants to complete a series of questions designed to measure religiosity while the other half was automatically redirected to the next part of the study and completed the religiosity scale at the end. Next, we informed participants they would begin the main part of the study where they would evaluate a series of eight ads, four of which included a promise of happiness whereas the rest did not. The ads were created



specifically for this study and featured fictitious brands. Finally, participants completed demographic questions, were debriefed, and thanked.

### ***Independent Variables.***

- *Religious priming.* Participants were asked to complete a series of questions designed to measure religiosity either before or after the outcome variable depending on random allocation to conditions (salient or not salient, respectively). This priming technique has been used successfully in past research (e.g., Schumann et al. 2014). It builds on the assumption that having participants answer questions about their religious beliefs and behaviors facilitates the cognitive accessibility of religion-related associations and affects how subsequent information is encoded, even if that information derives from an unrelated context (e.g., advertising) (Shariff et al. 2016). Participants in the salient condition answered a series of 11 questions, which included the 5-item intrinsic religiosity scale (described thereafter) and six items from the Religious Commitment Inventory scale (Worthington et al. 2003; Web Appendix A) whose sole purpose was to facilitate the cognitive activation of religious concepts.
- *Advertising claim type.* Participants were exposed to a series of eight ads promoting fictitious brands. The series pertained to four different product categories, namely air travel, banking services, furniture, and notebooks. The choice was based on diversity (i.e., product/service, frequency of purchase) and affordability to most consumers. For each product category, one ad included a happiness-based claim while another included a control claim. The ads were professionally designed and did not include human characters or any form of anthropomorphism to avoid unwanted displays of emotions through facial expressions. Presentation order was random. The ad pictures and the type of advertising claim were randomly counterbalanced across participants (Web Appendix B). Participants

were forced to wait a minimum of five seconds before proceeding to the outcome variable.

- *Cultural context.* As a third experimental factor, we included the cultural context which opposed participants born and residing in the USA on one hand, and participants born in an Arab-majority country and residing in the UAE on the other hand.
- *Religiosity.* Participants completed the 5 non-reversed items of the intrinsic religiosity scale (Ward and King 2018): “I enjoy reading about my religion,” “It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer,” “I have often had a strong sense of God’s presence,” “I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs,” and “My whole approach to life is based on my religion” (7-point Likert scale;  $\alpha = .96$ ). This scale has been shown to be applicable to a range of religious affiliations (Cohen et al. 2017).
- *Covariates (Level 1).* Following the outcome variable, we measured visual appeal on a separate webpage using two items on a 5-point semantic differential scale (ugly vs. beautiful and unattractive vs. attractive) ( $r_{happiness} = .89, p < .001, r_{control} = .85, p < .001$ ; Elsen, Pieters, and Wedel 2016). We also measured brand familiarity using one item “To me, the brand in the ad is familiar” on a 5-point Likert scale.
- *Covariates (Level 2).* As part of the demographic form, participants completed a measure of perceived socioeconomic status using three items (“I have enough money to buy the things I want,” “I don’t need to worry too much about paying my bills,” and “I don’t think I’ll have to worry about money too much in the future”) ( $\alpha = .84$ ). They were also asked to complete the 15-item material values scale (Richins 2004) ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Finally, we measured mood using an 11-point item anchored by (-5) “very negative mood” and (+5) “very positive mood.”

**Outcome Variable.** Following each ad, we asked participants “do you like this ad?” given a 7-point scale (1 = “Dislike a great deal,” 2 = “Dislike a moderate amount,” 3 = “Dislike a

little,” 4 = “Neither like nor dislike,” 5 = “Like a little,” 6 = “Like a moderate amount,” 7 = “Like a great deal”). Consistent with common practices (Elsen, Pieters, and Wedel 2016), we took the average ratings of a series of target ads to level out the influence of extraneous factors related to the content of the ads while accounting for the one constant across ads (i.e., the type of advertising claim). As such, items were averaged across ads featuring happiness-based claims ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and ads featuring control claims ( $\alpha = .77$ ). (As an exploratory mediator, we also measured the perceived potentiality of the advertised product to bring about happiness on a separate webpage for each ad. Details and results are provided in Web Appendix D.)

**Manipulation and Control Checks.** Post-testing ( $N = 143$ ) confirmed that participants interpreted the advertising claims as intended without affecting mood (Web Appendix C, Table W3). Moreover, control checks revealed no significant differences between ad pictures within each product category on visual appeal or brand familiarity (Web Appendix C, Tables W4 and W5).

**Measurement Validation.** We assessed measurement equivalency of scales (i.e., religiosity and covariates) across the USA and UAE subsamples<sup>2</sup> following recommendations from past research (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998). First, we performed exploratory factor analyses on the USA and UAE subsamples separately and then on the pooled sample. Items loaded similarly in the two groups. We then tested for measurement invariance based on differences between CFI values ( $\Delta\text{CFI}$ ). Although past research has often relied on  $\chi^2$  difference tests, they have more recently fallen out of favor given their tendency to show significant differences in model fit when samples are large, and thus, to incorrectly argue against measurement invariance (Cheung and Rensvold 2002; Somaraju, Nye, and Olenick 2022). Cheung and Rensvold (2002) suggested that “a value of  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  smaller or equal to 0.01

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<sup>2</sup> Discarding the English-speaking UAE residents yielded similar results.

indicates that the null hypothesis of invariance should not be rejected” (p. 251). This criterium has been shown to perform reliably independently of model complexity and sample size. We ran a confirmatory factor analysis with loadings estimated freely (configural model: CFI = .943, RMSEA = .046 [.042; .049],  $\chi^2(254) = 800.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and then constrained to be equal across samples (measurement model: CFI = .934, RMSEA = .048 [.045; .052],  $\chi^2(268) = 904.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A CFI-difference test in which the constrained and unconstrained models were compared suggested measurement invariance ( $\Delta\text{CFI} = .009$ ). A similar test to assess the equivalence of factor covariance yielded comparable results ( $\Delta\text{CFI} \leq .01$ ), thus arguing for structural invariance. We have therefore evidence that, practically, little differentiates model fit, suggesting metric equivalency. Consequently, we combined the USA and UAE subsamples for the rest of our analyses.

## Results

**Analytical Approach.** Table 2 presents the results of four multilevel models. The full information maximum likelihood method was used to estimate the parameters. We first fitted a baseline model (Table 2, Model 1) which included advertising claim type (-.5 = control, .5 = happiness-based), religious priming (-.5 = not salient, .5 = salient), cultural context (-.5 = USA, .5 = UAE), mean-centered religiosity, and a series of level-1 and level-2 covariates. Further analyses revealed nonsignificant interactions between the experimental factors and the covariates, thus suggesting no overlap in explaining the variance of ad liking and warranting their inclusion in the model. Model 2 included all the interactions involving advertising claim type (level-1 predictor) and the level-2 moderators (i.e., religiosity, religious priming, and cultural context). The four-way cross-level interaction was not significant ( $b = -.02$ ,  $p = .865$ ), whereas the 3-way cross-level interaction involving advertising claim type, religiosity, and religious prime was significant ( $b = -.10$ ,  $p = .030$ ) (Table 2, Model 2). In Model 3, we withdrew the cultural context from analysis and found a

significant advertising claim type  $\times$  religiosity  $\times$  religious prime cross-level interaction ( $b = -.07, p = .005$ ). A likelihood-ratio test in which Model 2 and Model 3 were compared revealed a non-significant difference ( $\chi^2_{diff} = 8.98, df_{diff} = 8, p = .342$ ), suggesting that the two models have an equivalent fit. On parsimony grounds, the model with fewer parameters (Model 3) was preferred to proceed further (Garson 2014). Finally, we fitted a model excluding the covariates (Model 4). Because the results remained very similar to those of Model 3, the subsequent analyses are based on Model 4 to facilitate readability. The intraclass correlation (ICC) for Model 4 was .62. This moderate ICC coefficient indicates that observations were indeed clustered and warrants the appropriateness of a multilevel data analysis approach (Garson, 2014).

#### INSERT\_TABLE\_2\_ABOUT\_HERE

**Hypotheses Testing.** We tested the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims on ad liking as a function of religiosity when religious priming was not salient (H1) and salient (H3). Analyses revealed that the advertising claim type  $\times$  religiosity cross-level interaction was significant when religious priming was not salient ( $b = .08, p < .001$ ), but not when it was salient ( $b = .01, p = .741$ ). This is consistent with our predictions given that we expected that all participants—i.e., less religious and more religious—would dislike happiness-based claims when religious priming was salient. We proceeded with testing H1 and H3 given that the three-way cross-level interaction was significant ( $b = -.08, p = .004$ ; Figure 2). Accordingly, we ran a floodlight analysis based on the Johnson-Neyman (JN) technique to identify regions of the religiosity measure in which the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims on ad liking was significant (Preacher et al. 2006).

When religious priming was not salient, we found that the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims on ad liking was significantly negative ( $p \leq .05$ ) among participants

whose religiosity was lower than 3.67 ( $b_{JN} = -.09$ ; 31% of participants) and significantly positive ( $p \leq .05$ ) among participants whose religiosity was higher than 5.73 ( $b_{JN} = .09$ ; 44% of participants), thus supporting H1.

When religious priming was salient, the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims on ad liking was significantly negative ( $p \leq .05$ ) among all participants, including those scoring high on the religiosity measure, thus supporting H3.

INSERT\_FIGURE\_2\_ABOUT\_HERE

## **Discussion**

The results of Study 1 provide evidence that religiosity affects the liking of ads featuring happiness-based claims compared to claims that do not include an explicit promise of happiness. As expected, we find support for the effect of religious priming among more religious consumers while it triggered no change among less religious consumers. Moreover, we find no evidence of cross-cultural effects in our model. Including the cultural context and the interactions involving advertising claim type, religiosity, and religious priming did not improve model fit or yield significant effects.

Our results were robust to the inclusion/exclusion of a series of covariates deemed relevant to ad liking and the context of this study. Furthermore, we ran the same analysis for each subsample separately (USA and UAE; Web Appendix F). While we observed the trends mentioned earlier, our effects were not all significant. This can be explained by the reduced sample size which lowered the statistical power of our tests. For instance, we found a nonsignificant negative main effect of advertising claim type in each subsample, but this effect became significant when pooling the data. We justified pooling the data given evidence of cross-cultural measurement invariance and the irrelevance of the cultural context to improving model fit. Some aspects of Study 1 may also be at fault, including important

differences in religiosity levels between the two subsamples ( $M_{USA} = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ;  $M_{UAE} = 6.02$ ,  $SD = .95$ ). Pooling the data allowed us to increase variance and investigate the religiosity spectrum from end to end. Study 2 addresses this study's limitations and further tests our hypotheses across the same cultural settings.

## **STUDY 2**

Study 2 has four goals. First, it provides clear-cut comparisons between advertising claims. Previously, happiness-based claims were opposed to non-happiness-based claims, some of which may have been perceived as objective and others as subjective. In contrast, Study 2 compares three claims: happiness-based, objective, and subjective without alluding to happiness. Second, Study 2 explores mechanism and rules out an alternative explanation to H4. Past research suggests that the motives underlying religious values (e.g., moderation, humility) conflict with those that underlie materialism (e.g., self-centeredness, hedonism) (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). One could therefore argue that when religion is at the forefront of their thoughts, religious individuals respond negatively to the promise of happiness through material means because it is perceived as sinful (as opposed to virtuous, godly). Third, Study 2 involves more specific and homogenous cultural comparisons based on religious affiliation by contrasting Christian Americans residing in the USA and Muslim Arabs residing in the UAE. Fourth, Study 2 relies on a managerially relevant manipulation of religious priming and controls for cognitive load prior to ad exposure by having participants perform the same task.

Study 2 was a 3 (Advertising claim type: happiness-based *vs.* control – objective *vs.* control – subjective)  $\times$  2 (Religious priming: not salient *vs.* salient)  $\times$  2 (Cultural context:

USA vs. UAE)  $\times$  one continuous factor (religiosity) mixed design in which advertising claim type was manipulated within subjects, religious priming and cultural context were manipulated between subjects, and religiosity was measured as a continuous factor. We accounted for the same control variables as in Study 1.

## Method

**Participants and Procedure.** We collected the data ( $N = 1022$ , 45.8% female, mean age: 38.6,  $SD_{age} = 10.0$ ) using the procedure implemented in Study 1. Participants were 519 American nationals and 503 UAE residents (i.e., UAE nationals and Arab expatriates). Among the latter, 83.3% completed the study in Arabic following a procedure of back-translation similar to the one previously mentioned. In contrast to Study 1, participants identified exclusively as Christian in the USA subsample and Muslim in the UAE subsample. Participant selection based on religious affiliation was possible through the panel providers' demographic pre-screening options. Table 1 provides further details on the demographics.

We ran this study under the pretense of investigating people's reactions to print advertising in magazines. This allowed us to place the advertising claims in the context of a magazine article which we used to manipulate religious priming. This article was formatted to seem as if it came from a fictitious magazine specializing in architecture with a special issue on religious buildings (salient religious priming) or train stations (non-salient religious priming). To test their comprehension, we gave participants four multiple-choice questions about prominent aspects of the article (Web Appendix G, Table W11). Participants with 0, 1, or 2 good responses were automatically screened out and could not proceed further, as the probability that they had passed the test by chance was 94.9%;  $P(X < 3)$  with  $X$  following the binomial distribution  $B(4, .25)$ . This method of elimination on objective grounds and prior to conducting the analysis allowed us to make sure that participants look through the magazine and remained unbiased regarding our research hypotheses (Khenfer et al. 2017).



Participants who passed the attention check were asked to rate three ads for the same product and brand. One included a happiness-based claim whereas the rest included either a claim supported by evidence (control – objective claim) or a claim unsupported by evidence and without references to happiness (control – subjective claim). Finally, participants completed demographic questions, which included the religiosity measure, and manipulation-check questions.

### ***Independent Variables.***

- *Religious priming.* Participants were instructed to read one of two extracts from a fictitious magazine called *Architecture and Design*. Both extracts included a cover page and an eight-page article on architecture. In the salient condition, the issue was entitled “The Many Houses of God” and described the architecture of four houses of worship of various faith: Westminster Abbey in the United Kingdom, the Blue Mosque in Turkey, the Grand Choral Synagogue of St. Petersburg in Russia, and the Meenakshi Amman Temple in India. In the non-salient condition, the issue was entitled “The Many Houses of Commuters” and featured famous train stations. Both magazine versions featured buildings from the same countries and included the same number of images and approximately the same amount of text (Web Appendix G, Table W10). Both magazine versions were translated into Arabic in the UAE subsample.
- *Advertising claim type.* Participants were instructed to rate three ads that advertised the same ready-to-eat salad kit. In the control–objective-claim condition, participants read the tagline “Organic made easy” and had evidence of organic certification from two governmental bodies (USDA and EU). In the control–subjective-claim condition, the tagline was “Powering you with nature’s finest.” In the happiness-based-claim condition, the tagline was “Fueling life with happiness.” Presentation order was random. The ad

pictures and the type of advertising claim were randomly counterbalanced across participants (Web Appendix I).

- *Cultural context.* In line with Study 1, we included the cultural context as an experimental factor.
- *Religiosity.* Participants completed the intrinsic religiosity scale used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .93$ ).
- *Covariate (Level 1).* Participants completed the two manipulation-check questions used in Study 1 to assess the visual appeal of the ads.
- *Covariates (Level 2).* As part of the demographic form, participants completed the measure of mood and perceived socioeconomic status used in Study 1. Moreover, we measured materialism using one item (“How materialistic do you feel right now?” 1 = Not at all, 7 = A lot), as well as product attitude (“How much do you like ready-to-eat salad kits?” 1 = Dislike a great deal, 7 = Like a great deal) and brand familiarity (“How familiar are you with the brand of ready-to-eat salad kits *Florette*?” 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very).

***Outcome and Mediating Variables.*** After viewing each ad, participants provided a rating on a 7-point scale similar to the one used in Study 1. They were subsequently asked to assess the perceived brand’s control over the claim using two items “How much control do you think the brand has over the promise made in the ad?” and “To what extent do you think the brand can make its promise come true?” (1 = No control; Not at all, 7 = A lot of control; A lot,  $r_{happiness} = .81, p < .001, r_{objective} = .75, p < .001, r_{subjective} = .67, p < .001$ ). We measured the perceived sinfulness of the claim using a series of six items starting with “To me, the ad’s promise feels...” sinful, blasphemous, ungodly, vain, hollow, and superficial ( $\alpha_{happiness} = .87, \alpha_{objective} = .92, \alpha_{subjective} = .90$ ).

***Manipulation and Control Checks.*** Manipulation checks revealed that participants reported thinking more about religion in the salient condition than in the non-salient condition (Web

Appendix H, Table W12). Differences between magazine versions were not significant in terms of overall attitude and understandability (Web Appendix H, Table W12). Post-testing ( $N = 245$ ) confirmed that participants interpreted the advertising claims as intended without affecting mood (Web Appendix H, Table W13). Furthermore, we found no meaningful differences across ad pictures in terms of visual appeal (Web Appendix H, Table W14).

**Measurement Validation.** We assessed the measurement equivalency of scales by implementing the procedure described in Study 1. We first performed exploratory factor analyses on the USA and UAE subsamples separately and then on the pooled sample. Items loaded similarly in the two groups. We then tested for measurement invariance. We ran a confirmatory factor analysis with loadings estimated freely (configural model: CFI = .969, RMSEA = .043 [.037; .049],  $\chi^2(92) = 264.26, p < .001$ ) and then constrained to be equal across samples (measurement model: CFI = .968, RMSEA = .042 [.037; .048],  $\chi^2(98) = 278.35, p < .001$ ). The difference between CFI values suggested measurement invariance ( $\Delta\text{CFI} = .001$ ). A similar test to assess the equivalence of factors argued for structural invariance ( $\Delta\text{CFI} \leq .01$ ). Thus, we pooled the two subsamples in the subsequent analyses.

## Results

**Analytical Approach.** Mirroring the approach used in Study 1, we ran a series of multilevel analyses. Table 3 presents the results of four models. Model 1 was a baseline model that included the three advertising-claim-type conditions (dummy coded with the happiness-based claim as baseline), religious priming (-.5 = not salient, .5 = salient), cultural context (-.5 = USA, .5 = UAE), mean-centered religiosity, and a series of level-1 and level-2 covariates. Further analyses revealed nonsignificant interactions between the experimental factors and the covariates, thus suggesting no overlap in explaining the variance of ad liking and warranting their inclusion in the model. Model 2 included all the relevant interactions. Neither four-way cross-level interactions were significant (Happiness-based vs. control –

objective  $\times$  Religiosity  $\times$  Religious priming  $\times$  Cultural context:  $b = .04, p = .800$ ; Happiness-based vs. control – subjective  $\times$  Religiosity  $\times$  Religious priming  $\times$  Cultural context,  $b = .08, p = .652$ ) (Table 3, Model 2). Model 3 excluded the cultural context from analysis and found significant three-way cross-level interactions (Happiness-based vs. control – objective  $\times$  Religiosity  $\times$  Religious priming:  $b = .24, p = .001$ ; Happiness-based vs. control – subjective  $\times$  Religiosity  $\times$  Religious priming:  $b = .29, p < .001$ ). Moreover, a likelihood-ratio test comparing how well Model 2 and Model 3 fitted the data revealed a non-significant difference ( $\chi^2_{diff} = 4.65, df_{diff} = 12, p = .969$ ), suggesting that the two models have an equivalent fit. Consistent with Study 1, we retained the model with fewer parameters (Model 3) on parsimony grounds (Garson 2014). Model 4 built on Model 3 by excluding the covariates. Although Model 3 offered stronger results, the subsequent analyses rely on Model 4 to facilitate readability.

INSERT\_TABLE\_3\_ABOUT\_HERE

**Hypotheses Testing.** We investigated the moderating role of religiosity (H1, H2) and religious priming (H3, H4). Mirroring Study 1's results, the two-way cross-level interactions involving advertising claim type and religiosity were significant when religious priming was not salient ( $ps < .001$ ) but not when it was salient ( $ps > .20$ ). These results align with our predictions given that we expected participants to dislike happiness-based claims regardless of their religiosity levels when religious priming was salient. Moreover, the three-way cross-level interactions were significant (happiness-based vs. control – objective  $\times$  religiosity  $\times$  religious priming:  $b = .24, p < .001$ ; happiness-based vs. control – subjective  $\times$  religiosity  $\times$  religious priming:  $b = .27, p < .001$ ), thus warranting further investigation. Figures 3A and 3B report the results of our floodlight analyses based on the JN technique.

When religious priming was not salient, we expected that happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims would negatively affect ad liking through altered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim for consumers with low (but not high) religiosity levels. We further expected that happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims would positively affect ad liking for consumers with high religiosity levels. In support of H1, we found that the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control – objective) claim on ad liking was significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) among participants whose religiosity was lower than 4.20 ( $b_{JN} = .17$ ; 21% of participants) and flipped among participants whose religiosity was higher than 5.55 ( $b_{JN} = -.15$ ; 52% of participants) (Figure 3A). We found the same pattern of results given the comparison between happiness-based and control–subjective claims (Figure 3B). Next, we explored mechanism and tested H2. We found significant three-way cross-level interactions on perceived brand's control over the claim (Web Appendix J, Table W16). Floodlight analyses revealed that happiness-based (*vs.* control – subjective) claims lowered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim for participants whose religiosity was low, but not high (Web Appendix J, Figure W2). (The effect was significant for all participants when comparing happiness-based claims with control–objective claims, which is not surprising given a brand's actual control over objective claims.) To further support H2, we ran a moderated mediation analysis using the MLMED macro (Hayes and Rockwood 2020). This tool is designed to facilitate the calculations required to test a full path model in the particular case of repeated measurements. Our 1-1-1 model involved a level-1 focal predictor (*i.e.*, advertising claim type), a level-1 mediator (*i.e.*, perceived brand's control over the claim), and a level-1 outcome variable (*i.e.*, ad liking).<sup>3</sup> We found a significant effect of perceived brand's control over the claim on ad liking ( $b = .24, p < .001$ ) and estimated the within-subject indirect effects using a Monte Carlo procedure

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<sup>3</sup> The MLMED macro is currently limited to the inclusion of a single level-2 moderator influencing the effect of the focal predictor on the mediator. As such, we included religiosity as a level-2 variable moderating the effect of advertising claim type on the mediator and ran analyses at both levels of religious priming (*i.e.*, non-salient *and* salient). For practical reasons, we ran analyses at one standard deviation below and above the mean of the religiosity measure, indicating low and high religiosity levels, respectively.

with 10,000 samples. We found that happiness-based claims predicted ad liking through perceived brand's control over the claim compared to objective ( $CI_{95}$ : 0.221 to 0.388) and subjective claims ( $CI_{95}$ : 0.134 to 0.264) when religiosity was low. When religiosity was high, confidence intervals included zeros.

When religious priming was salient, we expected that consumers with high religiosity levels would dislike ads featuring happiness-based (*vs.* control) claims because of altered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim. We did not expect that religious priming would have an influence among less religious consumers given the lack of relevance of religious cues for them. In support of H3, we found that the effect of happiness-based (*vs.* control – objective) claim on ad liking was significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) among all participants (Figure 3A). We found the same pattern of results given the comparison between happiness-based and control–subjective claims (Figure 3B). To test H4, we explored mechanism using the method described earlier. In contrast to the hypothesized mediator, regressing the perceived sinfulness of the claim on Model 4's predictors did not yield significant three-way cross-level interactions (Web Appendix J, Table W16). Floodlight analyses revealed that happiness-based claims lowered perceptions of the brand's control over the claim for all participants when compared to both objective and subjective claims (Web Appendix J, Figure W2). A moderated mediation analysis revealed a significant effect of both perceived brand's control over the claim ( $b = .25, p < .001$ ) and perceived sinfulness of the claim ( $b = -.14, p = .004$ ) on ad liking. Estimation of the within-subject indirect effects at high religiosity levels revealed that happiness-based claims predicted ad liking through perceived brand's control over the claim compared to objective ( $CI_{95}$ : 0.140 to 0.279) and other-subjective claims ( $CI_{95}$ : 0.123 to 0.255). (We observe similar results given low religiosity levels, that is, confidence intervals did not include zeros). However, within-subject indirect effects through perceived sinfulness of the claim were nonsignificant as the confidence intervals included zeros.

**Discussion**

Study 2 provides further evidence that the lower (higher) religiosity levels, the lower (higher) consumers like an ad that includes a happiness-based claim. Figures 3A and 3B suggest that ratings of ads featuring subjective claims that do not allude to happiness fall in between those of ads featuring happiness-based claims and objective claims, yet closer to the latter. This suggests that our findings do not extend to any subjective claim but are specific to happiness-based claims, thus highlighting the distinctiveness of happiness-based claims in the advertising landscape. Moreover, Study 2 confirms that religious priming leads more religious consumers to dislike ads featuring happiness-based claims while having no effect among less religious consumers. We found support for our theorized mechanism and ruled out an alternative explanation. Consistent with Study 1, we found no evidence of cross-cultural effects despite a clearer distinction between subsamples. Separate analyses performed on each subsample (USA and UAE) revealed similar patterns of results and levels of significance (Web Appendix K).

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This research establishes that promising happiness in advertising can have divergent effects on consumers depending on both religiosity levels and the salience of religious thoughts at the time of exposure. While we tested our hypotheses across two culturally distant countries (the United States and the United Arab Emirates), we found no evidence that the cultural context played a role. The results have theoretical implications for international marketing research and managerial implications for advertising.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Understanding how marketing-mix elements such as advertising work across cultures has been a source of extensive investigation over the past decades (Schmid and Kotulla 2011). However, studies have largely ignored the role that religiosity, religious priming, and religious affiliation—either independently from one another or in interaction—might have on the potential for the standardization of secular advertising (e.g., Walsh, Shiu, and Hassan 2014). Religion is often an element that contributes to defining cultural settings (Saroglou and Cohen 2011), and as such, provides a common set of standards for perceiving and assessing marketing stimuli (Shavitt and Barnes 2020). While each religion has specific belief systems, rituals, and traditions, there are also significant similarities across religions (Durkheim 2001)—especially Abrahamic religions, including Christianity and Islam (Hirschman, Ruvio, and Touzani 2011). Such similarities extend to the conception of happiness as a reward for the faithful’s virtue and religious devotion (Kesebir and Diener 2008) despite Western countries becoming increasingly secular (Gallup 2020) and embracing philosophical traditions that associate happiness with pleasure (Kesebir and Diener 2008).

Our research points to the universality of religious responses to the promise of happiness in advertising. Two cross-cultural studies conducted in two countries with comparable human development indexes but different dominant religions could not find significant interactive effects involving cross-cultural factors. Although Study 1 opposed the two countries altogether, Study 2 opposed the dominant religious affiliations within said countries. We also found common response patterns across cultural settings. In doing so, this research highlights that the influence of cultural variables at the micro level—i.e., individual differences and situational factors—may shape consumers’ attitudes above and beyond cross-cultural factors that pertain to the same dimension of culture. Scholars often assume that research findings based on WEIRD populations can be generalized to others, and thus, do not extend their investigation to other cultures (Kupferschmidt 2019). Our cross-cultural



investigation provides evidence of generalizability across Western countries and the Arab world.

Moreover, this research adds to the budding literature investigating the influence of religion on consumer response to advertising tactics (Waller and Casidy 2021). First, our findings suggest that the effect of religiosity is not unidirectional as suggested in past research (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021; Minton 2015; Sarofim and Cabano 2018). We showed that one must also account for religious priming and whether the claim—although secular—has significance in light of consumer religiosity. Second, our work provides a tentative resolution to contradictory results of past research that has examined the relationship between religious priming and consumer response to advertising stimuli. Past research has used religious priming to establish the causal influence of religiosity on message acceptance and showed that the salience of religious thoughts led consumers to better evaluate ads (Sarofim and Cabano 2018). Other research has shown the opposite by leveraging the notion that brands can satisfy the same psychological needs as religion, including self-esteem (Shachar et al. 2011) and love (Grewal, Wu, and Cutright 2022). We propose that religious priming negatively affects consumer response to secular claims when they pertain to functions that both religion and brands can address, but otherwise does not. In doing so, our research supports the functional homology between religion and brands as external sources of control.

### **Managerial Implications**

From international firms to local businesses, ads explicitly promising happiness are ubiquitous in the marketplace. The rationale behind the popularity of this tactic lays on a simple observation: People yearn for happiness. Happiness permeates daily thoughts (Freedman 1978), and most people rate personal happiness as very important to them, not just

in Western countries but at a global scale (Gallup 2021). Yet, our work indicates that appealing to people's desire to be happy may backfire.

Our results illustrate the importance of accounting for religiosity and religious priming as strategic variables in the media planning of advertising campaigns that build on the promise of happiness. The less consumers adhered to religious beliefs, the more they disliked happiness-based claims compared to claims based on factual arguments or subjective claims that did not allude to happiness. Thus, firms should consider avoiding relying on happiness-based claims in less religious markets. Among more religious consumers, happiness-based claims constitute a potential double-edged sword depending on the presence of religious cues. Although religious markets might respond favorably to ads featuring happiness-based claims, firms need to account for the likelihood of consumers running into religious cues at the time of exposure. Examples include religious celebrations throughout the year (e.g., Christmas, Easter, Ramadan) and entertainment feeds known to use religious symbols or make references to God (e.g., TV programs).

Our findings provide evidence of similarities of behaviors across cultures as seemingly different as the United States and the Arab world given a topic as divisive as religion. Specifically, this research suggests that advertising campaigns that build on the promise of happiness do not have to adapt to national markets despite the influence of religion-related factors at the micro level. International advertising standardization may be all the more relevant in emerging markets where limited experience and information can make adaptation difficult and costly (Samiee and Chirapanda 2019). We find examples of international firms that have been standardizing the promise of happiness across national markets (e.g., Ferrero's Nutella "Spread the Happy"). Our findings support this managerial practice in Arab-majority countries—to the extent that the United Arab Emirates constitutes a representative market.

### Limitations and Future Research

The present research paves the path toward several opportunities for future research. For instance, our study did not account for the effect of displaying positive emotions in ad content. This choice was deliberate since we wanted to ensure that any effect of the interplay between religiosity, religious priming, and happiness-based claims would be due specifically to advertising claims explicitly worded through taglines or slogans. Yet, ads promising happiness often include smiling and happy-looking models or anthropomorphized creative work projecting amiability. One could argue that less religious consumers would be more inclined to accept the message if such characters were provided as proof that the advertised product could bring about happiness in their lives. In the same vein, one may wonder if the sole display of smiling characters could be interpreted as a promise of happiness, and thus, trigger the effects described in this research.

Moreover, future research could investigate the effect of promising happiness when the advertised products are meant for others in contexts such as gift-giving, shared consumption, or prosocial behaviors (e.g., giving to charity). Examples include Coca-Cola's 2015 Christmas campaign that featured the tagline "Make someone happy." In the present research, happiness-based claims were self-oriented and designed to be appealing to the buyer-consumer. One could argue that promises of happiness for others *versus* personal happiness might elicit a positive response among more religious consumers despite the salience of religious thoughts. The consistency between the altruistic motives underlying spending for others (Dunn, Gilbert, and Wilson 2011) and the collective-oriented values promoted by religion (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002) may trump a reading of ads promising happiness based on the brand's ability to have control over the claim.

Further research could also examine the promise of happiness in advertising from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, one could argue that advertisers use

happiness-based claims not because they expect that consumers will believe the promise, but because they seek to build a verbal association with the semantic field of happiness through repeated exposures. Advertisers might use happiness-based claims as peripheral cues to persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), that is, consumers might not consider the merit of the claim but make simple inferences based on exposure to the words “happiness” or “happy.” Longitudinal studies could examine the effect of happiness-based claims as a function of the frequency of exposures. One could also argue that the need for cognition—i.e., the tendency of an individual to engage in and enjoy thinking (Cacioppo and Petty 1982)—might explain the negative effect of happiness-based claims on ad liking among less religious consumers. Specifically, those with a higher need for cognition might feel frustrated in the face of such claims given the unnecessary alignment of the promised outcome with the attributes of the advertised product.

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**TABLE 1. DETAILED DEMOGRAPHICS.**

	Study 1				Study 2	
	USA		UAE		USA	UAE
Sample size	495		529		519	503
Gender (% females)	47.2%		45.2%		51.4%	39.6%
Mean Age ( <i>SD</i> )	38.5 (10.9)		38.4 (9.3)		40.3 (11.0)	36.6 (8.33)
Nationality						
U.S. American	100%		-		100%	-
UAE National	-		18.1%		-	46.4%
Egypt	-		32.4%		-	24.0%
Syria	-		15.1%		-	7.4%
Jordan	-		12.8%		-	9.0%
Sudan	-		6.7%		-	2.5%
Morocco	-		3.7%		-	2.0%
Lebanon	-		3.3%		-	3.3%
Others	-		6.1%		-	5.4%
Religious affiliation						
Christian	36.2%	71%	5.5%	9%	100%	-
Muslim	2.0%	1%	91.4%	62%	-	100%
Unaffiliated	24.4%	20%	1.2%	N/A; < 4%	-	-
Atheist	27.0%	3%	0.2%	N/A; < 4%	-	-
Others	10.4%	5%	1.8%	25%	-	-

*Notes.* None of the nationalities in the category “Others” exceeded 3.0%. Proportions in grey refer to the general population (USA: Gallup 2021; UAE: Britannica 2020)

**TABLE 2. MODEL RESULTS OF STUDY 1.**

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error
Intercept	1.12***	.14	1.18***	.15	1.15***	.14	4.76***	.03
<b>Main Effects</b>								
Advertising claim type (AC)	-.10***	.03	-.04	.04	-.10***	.03	-.06*	.03
Religiosity (R)	.03 <sup>†</sup>	.01	.00	.02	.00	.01	.10***	.02
Religious priming (RP)	-.03	.04	.05	.06	-.03	.05	-.09	.06
Cultural context (C)	-.14*	.06	-.08	.07				
<b>Interactions</b>								
AC × R			.03	.02	.03***	.02	.05***	.01
AC × RP			-.12	.08	-.12*	.05	-.11*	.06
AC × C			-.03	.08				
R × RP			-.01	.04	.02	.02	.02	.02
R × C			.04	.04				
RP × C			.09	.15				
AC × R × RP			-.10*	.04	-.07**	.03	-.08**	.03
AC × R × C			-.08 <sup>†</sup>	.04				
AC × RP × C			.13	.17				
R × RP × C			-.10	.10				
AC × R × RP × C			-.02	.09				
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>								
Visual appeal	.80***	.03	.81***	.03	.81***	.03		
Brand familiarity	.10***	.02	.11***	.02	.09***	.02		
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>								
Income	.01	.01	.01	.01	.02	.01		
Materialism	.07**	.02	.07**	.02	.06**	.02		
Mood	.05***	.01	.05***	.01	.05***	.01		
Parameters		12		23		15		10
-2 Log-likelihood		4578.81		4590.79		4581.81		5453.64
AIC		4581.81		4594.79		4585.81		5457.64
ICC		.41		.41		.42		.62

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$ .

Notes. Web Appendix E (Table W7) reports descriptive statistics and correlations between variables.

TABLE 3. MODEL RESULTS OF STUDY 2.

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error
Intercept	1.76***	.05	1.73***	.19	1.67***	.19	5.10***	.05
<b>Main Effects</b>								
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. Control – objective (H vs. O)	.13*	.05	.18**	.06	.13*	.05	.14**	.05
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. Control – subjective (H vs. S)	.15**	.05	.19**	.06	.14**	.05	.12*	.05
Religiosity (R)	.05*	.02	.11***	.03	.07*	.03	.11***	.03
Religious priming (RP)	-.20***	.07	-.52***	.09	-.51***	.09	-.46***	.09
Cultural context (C)	-.38***	.07	-.33***	.10				
<b>Interactions</b>								
H vs. O × R			-.12**	.04	-.12**	.04	-.12**	.03
H vs. S × R			-.12**	.04	-.10**	.04	-.07*	.03
H vs. O × RP			.51***	.11	.50***	.10	.46***	.10
H vs. S × RP			.45***	.11	.46***	.10	.39***	.10
H vs. O × C			-.12	.11				
H vs. S × C			-.00	.11				
R × RP			-.21***	.06	-.20***	.06	-.19**	.06
R × C			.08	.07				
RP × C			-.08	.12				
H vs. O × R × RP			.30***	.08	.24***	.07	.24***	.07
H vs. S × R × RP			.34***	.08	.29***	.07	.27***	.07
H vs. O × R × C			-.13†	.08				
H vs. S × R × C			-.14†	.08				
H vs. O × RP × C			-.39†	.22				
H vs. S × RP × C			-.35	.22				
R × RP × C			.05	.13				
H vs. O × R × RP × C			.04	.16				
H vs. S × R × RP × C			.08	.16				
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>								
Visual appeal	.50***	.03	.49***	.02	.51***	.03		
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>								
Income	.01	.02	.02	.02	.03	.02		
Materialism	.01	.02	.02	.02	-.02	.02		
Mood	-.03	.03	-.03	.03	-.03	.03		
Product attitude	.09***	.02	.09***	.02	.10***	.02		
Brand familiarity	.05**	.02	.05**	.02	.02	.02		
Parameters		14		32		20		14
-2 Log-likelihood		8124.36		8104.61		8109.26		9831.55
AIC		8128.56		8108.61		8113.26		9835.55
ICC		.26		.27		.28		.36

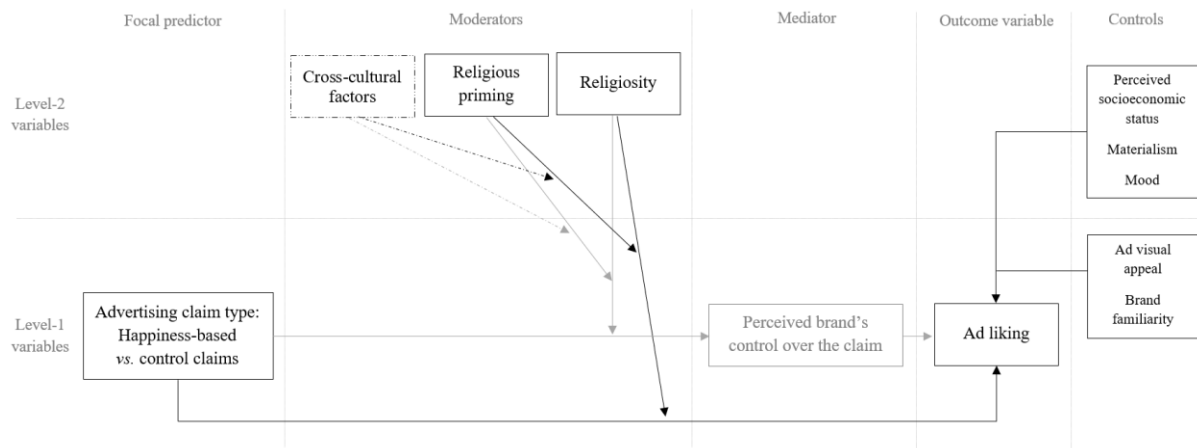
\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , †  $p \leq .10$ .

Notes. Web Appendix E (Table W8) reports descriptive statistics and correlations between variables.



FIGURE 1.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL.



Notes. Dash-dotted arrows are exploratory relationships. Grey arrows are moderated mediation.

FIGURE 2.

## INTERACTION PLOTS (STUDY 1).

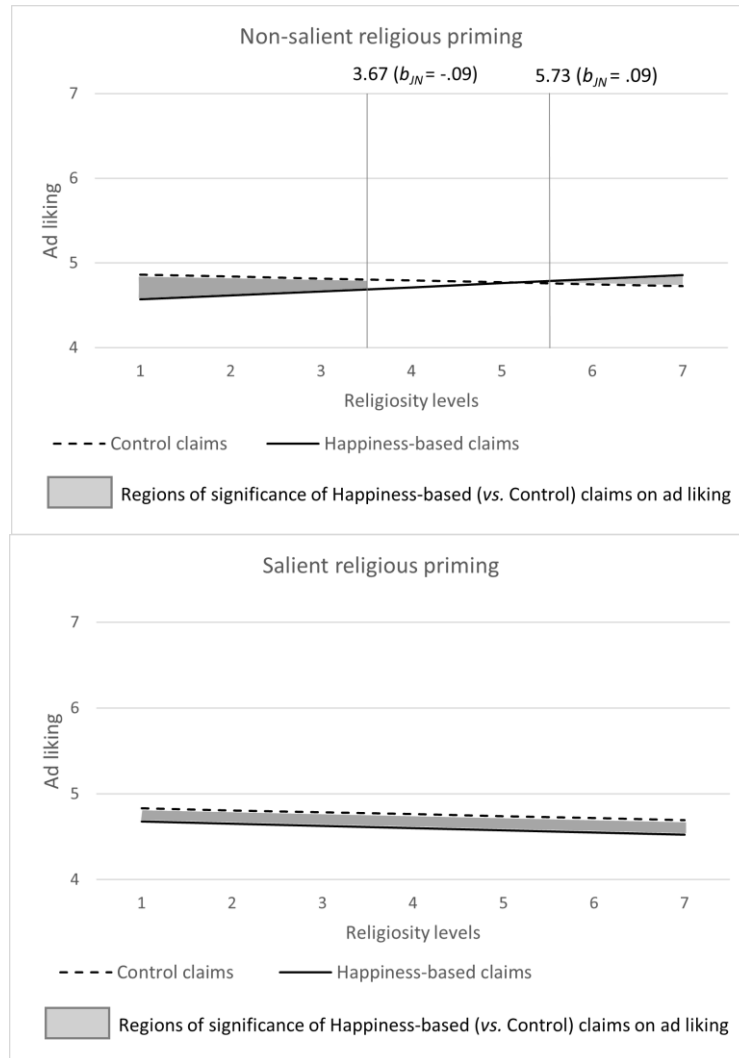


FIGURE 3A.

INTERACTION PLOTS: HAPPINESS-BASED *VERSUS* CONTROL – OBJECTIVE  
CLAIMS (STUDY 2).

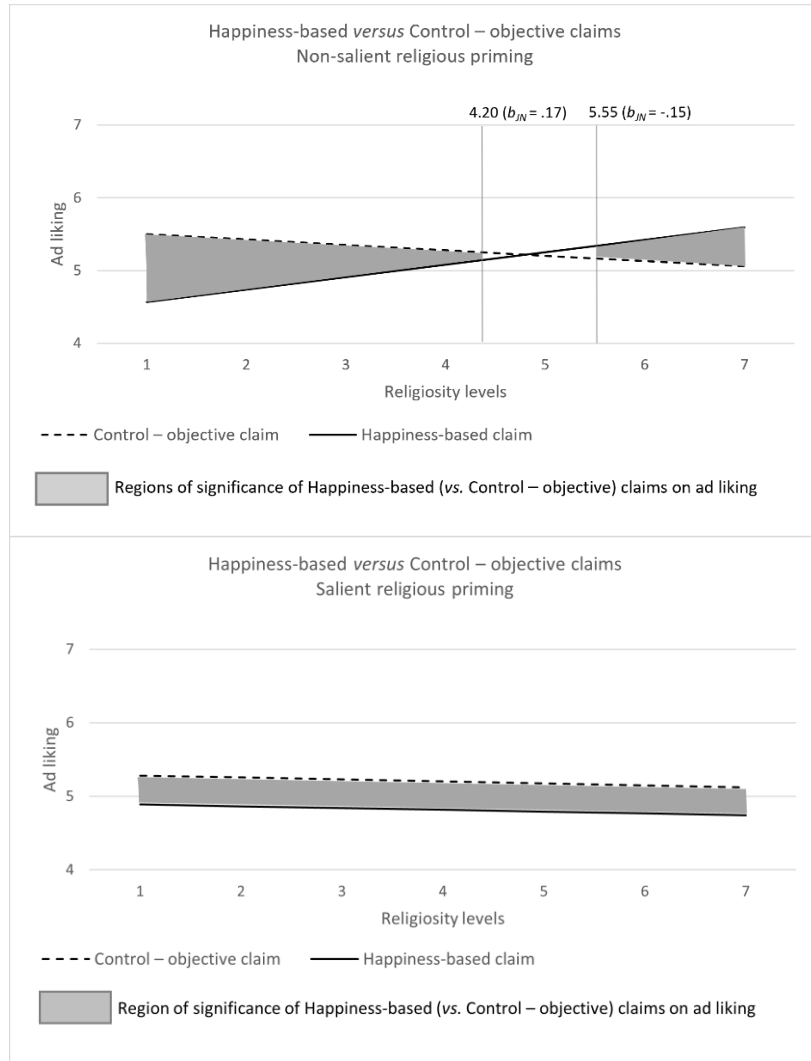
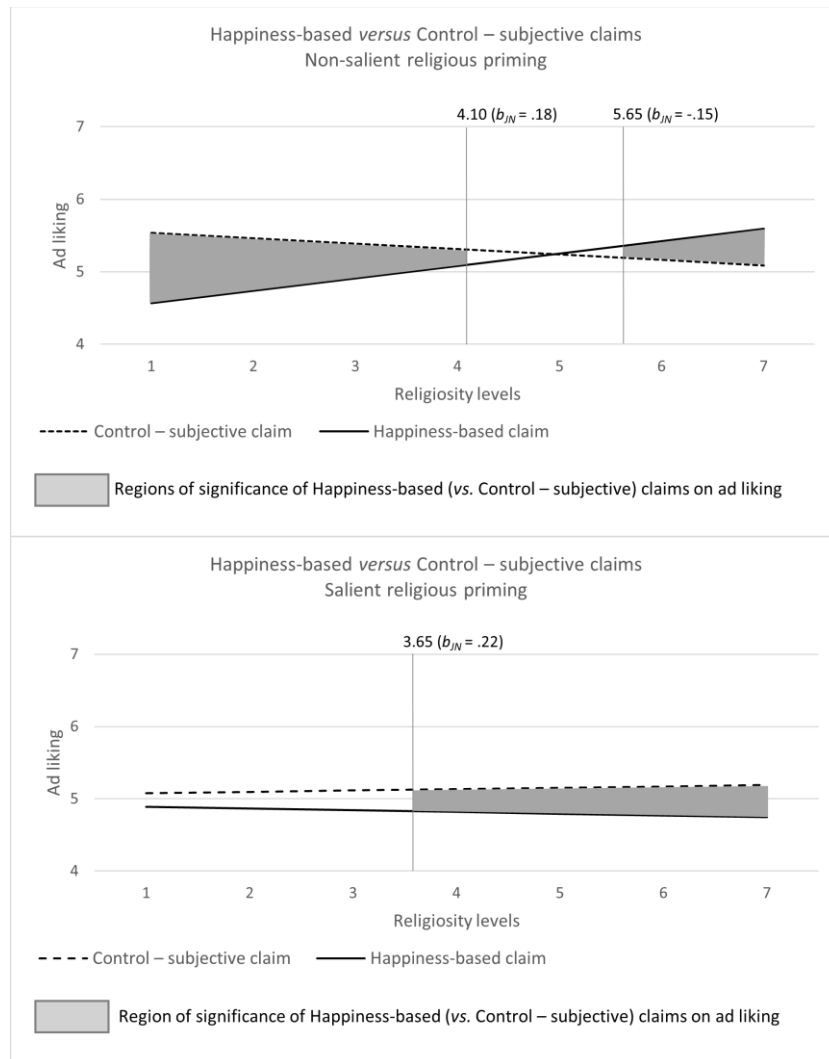


FIGURE 3B.

INTERACTION PLOTS: HAPPINESS-BASED *VERSUS* CONTROL – SUBJECTIVE CLAIMS (STUDY 2).

Promising Happiness in Light of International Advertising Standardization:  
Religiosity and Religious Priming Overshadow Cross-Cultural Factors

Web Appendix

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These materials have been supplied by the author to aid in the understanding of his paper.  
The AMA is sharing these materials at the request of the author.

*WEB APPENDIX A: RELIGIOSITY SCALES USED IN STUDY 1*

**TABLE W1. RELIGIOSITY SCALES USED TO MEASURE INTRINSIC RELIGIOSITY  
AND TO MANIPULATE RELIGIOUS PRIMING.**

<p>Intrinsic religiosity scale (Ward and King 2018)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I enjoy reading about my religion.</li> <li>2. It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer.</li> <li>3. I have often had a strong sense of God's presence.</li> <li>4. I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.</li> <li>5. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.</li> </ol>
<p>Intrapersonal Religious Commitment (Worthington et al. 2003)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life.</li> <li>2. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.</li> <li>3. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection.</li> <li>4. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.</li> <li>5. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.</li> <li>6. I often read books and magazines about my faith.</li> </ol>

*Notes.* Participants in the religious-priming condition answered a series of 11 questions, which included the 5-item intrinsic religiosity scale and six items from the Religious Commitment Inventory scale (Worthington et al. 2003) whose sole purpose was to facilitate the cognitive activation of religious concepts.

WEB APPENDIX B: FICTITIOUS ADVERTISEMENTS USED IN STUDY 1

TABLE W2. FICTITIOUS ADVERTISEMENTS USED IN STUDY 1.

	Counterbalanced condition 1	Counterbalanced condition 2
Air travel	<p><b>RIVIERA AIRLINE</b> HAPPINESS IS IN THE AIR</p> <p><b>DON'T JUST FLY. BE HAPPY.</b></p> <p><small>Riviera Airline ranks highest among traditional carriers for 13th consecutive year according to the J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study (based on a sample of 6,000 travelers between March 2018 and March 2019). RIVIERA-AIRLINE.COM</small></p> <p><b>Have a seat. Enjoy the ride.</b></p> <p><small>Air Tosca ranks highest among traditional carriers for 12th consecutive year according to the J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study (based on a sample of 6,000 travelers between March 2018 and March 2019). More on AirTosca.com</small></p> <p><b>Air Tosca</b> RELAXATION IS IN THE AIR A SkyTeam Member</p>	<p><b>Don't just fly. Be happy.</b></p> <p><small>Air Tosca ranks highest among traditional carriers for 12th consecutive year according to the J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study (based on a sample of 6,000 travelers between March 2018 and March 2019). More on AirTosca.com</small></p> <p><b>Air Tosca</b> HAPPINESS IS IN THE AIR A SkyTeam Member</p> <p><b>RIVIERA AIRLINE</b> RELAXATION IS IN THE AIR</p> <p><b>HAVE A SEAT. ENJOY THE RIDE.</b></p> <p><small>Riviera Airline ranks highest among traditional carriers for 13th consecutive year according to the J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study (based on a sample of 6,000 travelers between March 2018 and March 2019). RIVIERA-AIRLINE.COM</small></p>

Banking services<sup>4</sup>

**P&M Capital helps you get what makes you happy.**  
 Discover our offers:  
 - Attractive loan amounts at low rates  
 - Save money with cashback all year long  
 - Pay with your phone and send cash

**The bank working toward your happiness** **P&M Capital**

---

**The bank where money makes sense** **BEPC Bank**

---

**BEPC Bank helps you get the things you need.**  
 Discover our offers:  
 Apply for loans: mortgage, auto, shopping    Get up to 10% cashback on credit and debit cards    Easy mobile payments

**The bank working toward your happiness** **BEPC Bank**

---

**BEPC Bank helps you get what makes you happy.**  
 Discover our offers:  
 Attractive loan amounts at low rates    Save money with cashback all year long    Pay with your phone and send cash

---

**P&M Capital helps you get the things you need.**  
 Discover our offers:  
 - Apply for loans: mortgage, auto, shopping  
 - Get up to 10% cashback on P&M credit and debit cards  
 - Easy mobile payments

**The bank where money makes sense** **P&M Capital**

Furniture

**HAPPINESS STARTS AT HOME**

**FURNISPACE**  
FURNITURE & DECOR

**DECORLAND**  
HOME FURNITURE

**DECORLAND**

**HAPPINESS STARTS AT HOME**

**DECORLAND**  
HOME FURNITURE

**DECORLAND**

**COMFORT STARTS WITH QUALITY**

**COMFORT STARTS WITH QUALITY**

**FURNISPACE**  
FURNITURE & DECOR

<sup>4</sup> Although devout Muslims might avoid earning and paying interests (riba), it is a well-established practice among banks and financial institutions in the UAE (e.g., First Abu Dhabi Bank: <https://www.bankfab.com/en-ae/personal/loans>, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank: <https://www.adcb.com/en/personal/loans/>).



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## WEB APPENDIX C: RESULTS OF MANIPULATION CHECKS IN STUDY 1

**TABLE W3.** RESULTS OF THE POST-TEST PERTAINING TO THE MANIPULATION OF ADVERTISING CLAIM TYPE (STUDY 1).

		Air travel		Banking services		Furniture		Notebook	
Measure		Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test
<i>Interpretation of the advertised claim as a promise of happiness<sup>1</sup></i>									
Advertising claim type condition	Happiness-based	5.45 (1.14)	$ t(140)  = 9.29,$ $p < .001$	5.39 (1.15)	$ t(140)  =$ $14.45, p < .001$	5.16 (1.24)	$ t(140)  =$ $13.16, p < .001$	5.68 (1.25)	$ t(140)  = 16.13,$ $p < .001$
	Control	4.01 (1.56)		3.04 (1.63)		3.17 (1.80)		2.80 (1.65)	
<i>Perception of differences given other types of claims<sup>2</sup></i>									
Advertising claim type condition	Happiness-based	5.13 (.98)	$ t(140)  = .94,$ $p = .352$	5.01 (1.04)	$ t(140)  = .53,$ $p = .599$	5.20 (1.00)	$ t(140)  = 3.10,$ $p = .002$	4.24 (1.73)	$ t(138)  = .07, p$ $= .944$
	Control	5.05 (1.07)		5.05 (.99)		5.48 (1.05)		4.24 (1.65)	
<i>Mood<sup>3</sup></i>									
Advertising claim type condition	Happiness-based	4.61 (.86)	$ t(140)  = .82,$ $p = .441$	4.40 (1.01)	$ t(140)  = .86,$ $p = .393$	4.88 (1.01)	$ t(140)  = 1.37,$ $p = .174$	4.55 (1.16)	$ t(138)  = 1.56,$ $p = .121$
	Control	4.67 (.94)		4.48 (1.03)		4.77 (1.01)		4.41 (1.10)	

Notes.  $N = 143$  U.S. American Prolific users, females: 54.0%, mean age: 41.4,  $SD = 11.6$ .

<sup>1</sup> “Does the ad include a promise of happiness?” and “Does the ad claim to have the potentiality to bring about happiness?” (1 = Definitely no, 7 = Definitely yes;  $r_s > .50, p_s < .001$ )

<sup>2</sup> The perception of differences given other types of claims relied on measures tailored to each pair of ads. In doing so, we sought to demonstrate that the happiness-based claims differed from the control claims on the interpretation of the claim as a promise of happiness but not on other claims. *Airline*: “How enjoyable do you think traveling with this airline would be based on the ad?” and “How much satisfaction do you think you can expect based on the ad?”; *Banking services*: “How would you describe your mood after seeing the ad above?” and “Based on the ad, how helpful do you think the bank is?”; *Furniture*: “How much quality can you expect based on the ads?” and “How much comfort can you expect based on the ads?”; *Notebooks*: “How much more creative do you think you could be because of the advertised notebook?” (1 = Not at all enjoyable, None, Not at all helpful, None, None, None, Not at all; 7 = Very enjoyable, A lot, Very helpful, A lot, A lot, A lot, Very;  $r_s > .50, p_s < .001$ ).

<sup>3</sup> “How would you describe your mood after seeing the ad above?” (1 = Very bad, 7 = Very good)

**TABLE W4. RESULTS OF THE CONTROL CHECKS (VISUAL APPEAL AND BRAND FAMILIARITY) GIVEN THE COUNTERBALANCED CONDITIONS (STUDY 1).**

Measure	Counterbalanced condition	Air travel		Banking services		Furniture		Notebook	
		Mean (SD)	Test <sup>1</sup>	Mean (SD)	Test <sup>1</sup>	Mean (SD)	Test <sup>1</sup>	Mean (SD)	Test <sup>1</sup>
<i>Happiness-based claims</i>									
Visual appeal	1	3.59 (1.03)	$ t(1018) =.11, p = .911$	3.14 (1.04)	$ t(1019) =1.47, p = .141$	4.01 (.92)	$ t(1016) =1.25, p = .213$	3.71 (1.09)	$ t(1019) =1.88, p = .061$
	2	3.59 (1.03)		3.24 (1.07)		4.08 (.81)		3.83 (.96)	
Brand familiarity	1	2.68 (1.46)	$ t(1018) =.31, p = .758$	2.55 (1.41)	$ t(1019) =.50, p = .619$	2.85 (1.47)	$ t(1016) =.34, p = .754$	2.35 (1.40)	$ t(1019) =1.65, p = .099$
	2	2.71 (1.46)		2.51 (1.42)		2.82 (1.46)		2.49 (1.37)	
<i>Control claims</i>									
Visual appeal	1	3.52 (1.04)	$ t(1019) =1.63, p = .104$	3.15 (1.05)	$ t(1015) =.95, p = .341$	4.01 (.90)	$ t(1020) =1.53, p = .125$	3.72 (1.05)	$ t(1021) =1.85, p = .064$
	2	3.62 (.98)		3.22 (1.02)		3.93 (.89)		3.59 (1.08)	
Brand familiarity	1	2.73 (1.48)	$ t(1019) =.60, p = .546$	2.58 (1.44)	$ t(1015) =.35, p = .727$	2.85 (1.44)	$ t(1020) =1.23, p = .218$	2.35 (1.34)	$ t(1021) =.02, p = .988$
	2	2.67 (1.45)		2.61 (1.43)		2.74 (1.41)		2.35 (1.33)	

<sup>1</sup>We ran a series of t-test analyses comparing the advertisement pictures across the two counterbalanced conditions (Table 1.A.) while keeping the type of appeal constant. As such, comparisons are provided for when advertisements included happiness-based claims on the one hand, and when advertisements included control claims on the other hand.

**TABLE W5. RESULTS OF THE CONTROL CHECKS (VISUAL APPEAL AND BRAND FAMILIARITY) BETWEEN HAPPINESS-BASED AND CONTROL CLAIMS (STUDY 1).**

Measure	Advertising claim type	Air travel		Banking services		Furniture		Notebook		Overall	
		Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test	Mean (SD)	Test
Visual appeal	Happiness-based	3.59 (1.03)	$ t(1019) =.55,$ $p = .580$	3.20 (1.06)	$ t(1016) =.35,$ $p = .726$	4.05 (.90)	$ t(1016) =2.53,$ $p = .012$	3.77 (1.09)	$ t(1019) =3.09,$ $p = .002$	3.47 (.74)	$ t(1023) =1.03,$ $p = .303$
	Control	3.57 (1.01)		3.19 (1.03)		3.97 (.90)		3.66 (1.07)		3.49 (.73)	
Brand familiarity	Happiness-based	2.69 (1.46)	$ t(1019) =.18,$ $p = .856$	2.53 (1.42)	$ t(1016) =1.83,$ $p = .067$	2.83 (1.46)	$ t(1016) =1.00,$ $p = .317$	2.42 (1.37)	$ t(1019) =2.00,$ $p = .045$	2.62 (1.20)	$ t(1023) =.38,$ $p = .704$
	Control	2.70 (1.47)		2.60 (1.43)		2.79 (1.42)		2.35 (1.33)		2.66 (1.24)	

*WEB APPENDIX D: DETAILS AND RESULTS INVOLVING THE EXPLORATORY  
MEDIATOR IN STUDY 1*

As an exploratory mediator, we included the perceived potentiality of the advertised product to bring about happiness: In the absence of religious cues, more (less) religious individuals might find ads promising happiness more (less) likely to make them happy given that past research has shown a positive effect of religiosity on consumers' willingness to accept persuasion messages (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2021; Minton 2015; Sarofim and Cabano 2018). Moreover, religious priming might have a negative effect among more religious individuals given the theorizing we developed regarding the hypothesized mediator (i.e., perceived brand's control over the claim).

We measured the perceived potentiality of the advertised product to bring about happiness by asking participants "would buying the product in this ad help you feel happier?" on a 7-point scale in which 1 = "Definitely no" and 7 = "Definitely yes"). Items were averaged across ads featuring a happiness-based claim ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and ads featuring control claims ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Participants answered this question following the outcome variable on a separate webpage for each advertisement.

We tested the effect of happiness-based (vs. control) claims as a function of religiosity when religious priming was not salient and salient. We found a significant promise type  $\times$  religiosity  $\times$  religious prime cross-level interaction ( $b = -.07, p = .009$ ; Table 3.A.), thus warranting further investigation. Floodlight analyses revealed the same pattern of results as for ad liking.

When religious priming was not salient, we found that the effect of happiness-based (vs. control) claims was significantly negative ( $p \leq .05$ ) among participants whose religiosity

was lower than 3.07 ( $b_{JN} = -.07$ ; 27% of participants) and significantly positive ( $p \leq .05$ ) among participants whose religiosity was higher than 6.08 ( $b_{JN} = .09$ ; 32% of participants).

When religious priming was salient, the effect of happiness-based (vs. control) claims on ad liking was significantly negative ( $p \leq .05$ ) among all participants, including those scoring high on the religiosity measure.

Next, we ran a moderated mediation analysis using the MLMED macro (see Study 2 in the main manuscript for details). The MLMED macro is currently limited to the inclusion of a single level-2 moderator. As such, we ran multilevel conditional process analyses at both levels of our manipulation of religious priming (i.e., non-salient *and* salient). For practical reasons, we ran analyses at one standard deviation below and above the mean of the religiosity measure, indicating low and high religiosity levels, respectively. When religious priming was not salient, we found that advertising claim type predicted ad liking through the perceived potentiality of the advertised product to bring about happiness among participants with low ( $CI_{95}$ : -0.127 to -0.006) and high ( $CI_{95}$ : 0.003 to 0.134) religiosity levels. When religious priming was salient, advertising claim type predicted ad liking through the perceived potentiality of the advertised product to bring about happiness among participants with low ( $CI_{95}$ : -0.147 to -0.035) and high ( $CI_{95}$ : -0.154 to -0.040) religiosity levels.

**TABLE W6. RESULTS OF STUDY 1 (DV = PERCEIVED POTENTIALITY OF THE ADVERTISED PRODUCT TO BRING ABOUT HAPPINESS).**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>
Intercept	-.08	.19
<b>Main Effects</b>		
Advertising claim type (AC)	-.09**	.03
Religiosity (R)	.07***	.06
Religious Priming (RP)	.02	.04
<b>Interactions</b>		
AC × R	.03*	.01
AC × RP	-.17**	.06
R × RP	.03	.03
AC × R × RP	-.07**	.03
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>		
Visual appeal	.70***	.04
Brand familiarity	.22***	.02
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>		
Income	-.01	.02
Materialism	.26***	.03
Mood	.07***	.01
Parameters		15
-2 Log-likelihood		5337.96
AIC		5337.96
ICC		.62

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , †  $p \leq .10$

*Notes.* Advertising claim type: control = -.5, happiness-based = .5; Religiosity: mean-centered; Religious Priming: non-salient = -.5, salient = .5; Cultural context: USA = -.5, UAE = .5.

## WEB APPENDIX E: CORRELATION MATRICES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

TABLE W7. STUDY 1 CORRELATION MATRICES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Cultural context (1=UAE)	1													
2. Religious priming (1=salient)	.01	1												
3. Religiosity	.70**	.00	1											
4. Income	-.17**	.01	-.19**	1										
5. Materialism	.22**	.04	.14**	.15**	1									
6. Mood	.13**	-.01	.22**	-.29**	-.12**	1								
7. Ad liking: happiness	.15**	-.07*	.24**	-.09**	.16**	.25**	1							
8. Ad liking: control	.10**	-.02	.16**	-.07*	.11**	.24**	.64**	1						
9. Exploratory mediator: happiness	.27**	-.04	.34**	-.11**	.27**	.24**	.75**	.54**	1					
10. Exploratory mediator: control	.25**	.01	.28**	-.12**	.24**	.27**	.59**	.72**	.79**	1				
11. Visual appeal: happiness	.31**	-.06	.35**	-.14**	.19**	.26**	.68**	.55**	.66**	.59**	1			
12. Visual appeal: control	.31**	-.04	.35**	-.18**	.18**	.24**	.56**	.63**	.58**	.62**	.83**	1		
13. Brand familiarity: happiness	.38**	-.01	.36**	-.11**	.19**	.15**	.40**	.32**	.48**	.43**	.49**	.45**	1	
14. Brand familiarity: control	.35**	-.02	.33**	-.12**	.15**	.15**	.37**	.35**	.44**	.45**	.45**	.46**	.86**	1
Mean	.52	.50	4.62	4.23	3.94	2.12	4.73	4.79	4.12	4.18	3.47	4.49	2.62	2.62
SD	.50	.50	2.08	1.64	.94	2.33	1.06	1.03	1.37	1.38	.74	.73	1.18	1.20

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Notes. Cultural context and religious priming were dummy coded for the correlation matrix.



**TABLE W8. STUDY 2 CORRELATION MATRICES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Cultural context (1=UAE)	1																		
2. Religious priming (1=salient)	.04	1																	
3. Religiosity	.33**	0.02	1																
4. Materialism	.42**	0.04	.23**	1															
5. Mood	-0.01	-0.01	.27**	.19**	1														
6. Product attitude	-0.03	-0.00	.14**	.16**	.26**	1													
7. Familiarity	.29**	0.05	.19**	.40**	.23**	.31**	1												
8. DV: Hap.	-.09**	-.12**	.10**	.08*	.12**	.17**	.11**	1											
9. DV: Obj.	-.18**	0.00	-0.01	.07*	.18**	.26**	.21**	.27**	1										
10. DV: Sub.	-.13**	-0.02	0.03	0.06	.13**	.26**	.20**	.34**	.46**	1									
11. Med Cont.: Hap.	.22**	0.02	.22**	.27**	.26**	.22**	.38**	.27**	.19**	.19**	1								
12. Med Cont.: Obj.	-.33**	-0.05	-0.02	-0.02	.20**	.26**	.07*	.15**	.42**	.23**	.23**	1							
13. Med Cont.: Sub.	-.19**	-0.00	0.04	.08*	.21**	.23**	.14**	.19**	.26**	.39**	.41**	.54**	1						
14. Med Sin.: Hap.	.25**	0.06	-0.03	.09**	-.13**	-.14**	.06*	-.19**	-.13**	-.12**	-.29**	-.19**	-.22**	1					
15. Med Sin.: Obj.	.47**	.09**	.09**	.20**	-.08*	-.11**	.20**	-.08*	-.22**	-.14**	.07*	-.37**	-.24**	.62**	1				
16. Med Sin.: Sub.	.35**	.07*	0.06	.16**	-.08*	-.09**	.19**	-.12**	-.15**	-.30**	-0.01	-.22**	-.31**	.64**	.70**	1			
17. Vis. App.: Hap.	-0.03	0.01	.09**	.12**	.20**	.19**	.22**	.40**	.29**	.22**	.42**	.23**	.30**	-.27**	-.15**	-.12**	1		
18. Vis. App.: Obj.	-0.05	0.00	.10**	.15**	.25**	.29**	.24**	.26**	.53**	.27**	.26**	.42**	.34**	-.16**	-.25**	-.12**	.52**	1	
19. Vis. App.: Sub.	-0.03	-0.02	.12**	.13**	.21**	.24**	.21**	.26**	.28**	.56**	.27**	.24**	.45**	-.18**	-.18**	-.25**	.45**	.52**	1
Mean	.49	.52	5.29	4.08	5.38	5.03	2.74	5.09	5.24	5.22	4.45	5.38	5.21	2.78	2.54	2.56	5.49	5.55	5.50
SD	.50	.50	1.47	1.66	1.30	1.65	1.95	1.49	1.37	1.37	1.66	1.31	1.26	1.26	1.33	1.26	1.26	1.24	1.25

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Notes. Cultural context and religious priming were dummy coded for the correlation matrix.

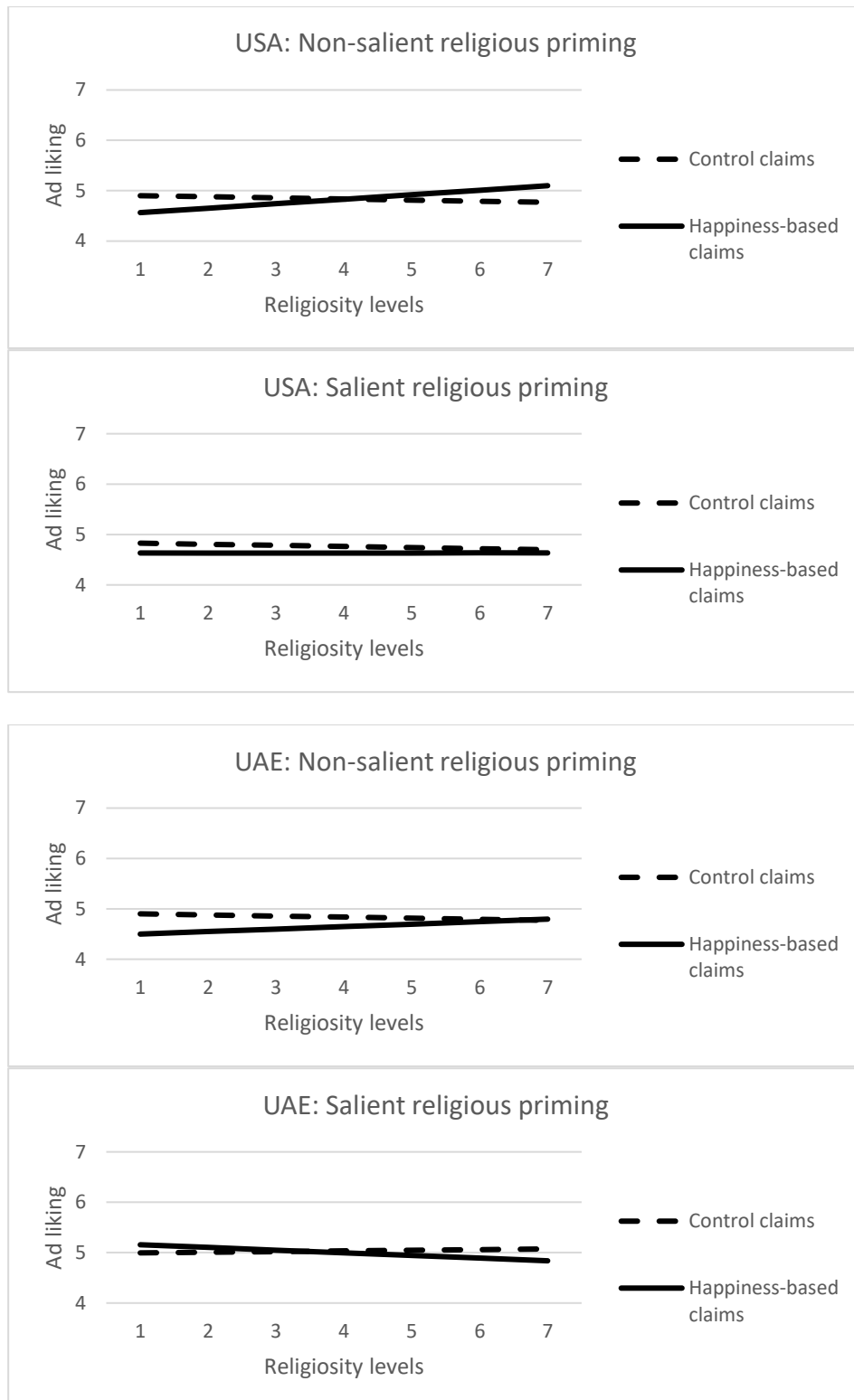
## WEB APPENDIX F: ANALYSES PER COUNTRY (USA AND UAE) IN STUDY 1

**TABLE W9.** RESULTS OF STUDY 1 (MODEL 3) PER SUBSAMPLE (I.E., USA AND UAE) (DV = AD LIKING).

Variables	USA subsample		UAE subsample	
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error
Intercept	1.09***	.17	1.06***	.24
<b>Main Effects</b>				
Advertising claim type (AC)	-.03	.04	-.05	.07
Religiosity (R)	.03*	.02	-.02	.04
Religious Priming (RP)	-.02	.08	.11	.14
<b>Interactions</b>				
AC × R	.07***	.02	-.01	.04
AC × RP	-.18	.09	-.05	.14
R × RP	.04	.03	-.06	.08
AC × R × RP	-.09*	.04	-.10	.09
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>				
Visual appeal	.87***	.04	.76***	.05
Brand familiarity	.12***	.02	.10**	.03
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>				
Income	.00	.02	.02	.02
Materialism	.04	.02	.13**	.04
Mood	.06***	.01	.04**	.01
Parameters		15		15
-2 Log-likelihood		1890.66		2506.61
AIC		1920.66		2536.61
ICC		.31		.46

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ 

Notes. Advertising claim type: control = -.5, happiness-based = .5; Religiosity: mean-centered; Religious Priming: non-salient = -.5, salient = .5; Cultural context: USA = -.5, UAE = .5.

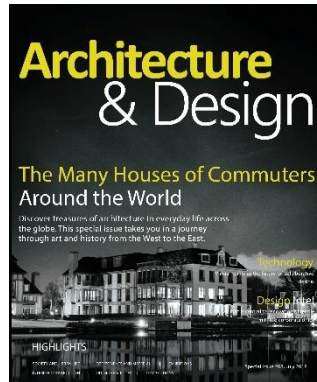
**FIGURE W1. INTERACTION PLOTS PER SUBSAMPLE (STUDY 1).**

WEB APPENDIX G: MATERIALS FOR THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGIOUS PRIMING IN STUDY 2

TABLE W10. LINKS TOWARD THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE FICTITIOUS WEB MAGAZINE USED IN STUDY 2 (COVER AND FIRST FOUR PAGES PROVIDED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES).

English: <https://www.flipsnack.com/jk8826/neutral-Priming-cmqrfq0n30.html>  
Arabic: <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/d67e2627a7.html>

Non-salient religious priming



Waterloo, Britain's Largest and Busiest Station

Waterloo has always been a place for important arrivals and departures, whether city commuters or holiday makers.



Historic: The first terminus of the London & Southampton Railway at Nine Elms, Waterloo Station was opened in 1838 by the London & South Western Railway as part of extending the railway to the former docks. This early station, known as Central Station, had no platforms.

Over 20 years, Waterloo became a bustling station. 1853, 21 platforms under a huge iron-and-wood roof, it became built and air. While it served for its architecture, the new central building to the front of the station housed the railway offices and facilities for passengers including a large booking hall and refreshment rooms with wine shops and shops with seating for people waiting in the dining room and below the second rail in the bars.



The iconic clock tower included a grand clock tower which was replaced by a modern clock tower in 1961.

Special Size: The Many Houses of Commuters around the World

In 1838, the London & South Western Railway set out plans to completely rebuild and expand the station. With Waterloo now deemed to have a long platform, and with the old station becoming a series of narrow paths that would crisscross the building, the London & South Western Railway decided on a total rebuild in a property to be called Central Station.

Over 20 years, Waterloo became a bustling station. 1853, 21 platforms under a huge iron-and-wood roof, it became built and air. While it served for its architecture, the new central building to the front of the station housed the railway offices and facilities for passengers including a large booking hall and refreshment rooms with wine shops and shops with seating for people waiting in the dining room and below the second rail in the bars.



The iconic clock tower included a grand clock tower which was replaced by a modern clock tower in 1961.

An 18th-century clock tower was built to house a clock tower on the wall that died in the 19th century. The clock tower was replaced by a modern clock tower in 1961. The clock tower was built to house a clock tower on the wall that died in the 19th century. The clock tower was replaced by a modern clock tower in 1961.

The iconic clock tower included a grand clock tower which was replaced by a modern clock tower in 1961.

Istanbul's Sirkeci Railway Station in Turkey Used to Connect the East and the West.

The Sirkeci railway station, built in 1890 by the Oriental Railway, was once the eastern terminus of the world-famous Orient Express.



Sirkeci Railway Station, a landmark on the European side of the city, in the middle of the industrial revolution, the Ottoman authorities concluded that to show the country's progress with the world was necessary. Having witnessed the country's transformation, it was an opportunity that from the capital state.

The Sirkeci building is a prime example of the Ottoman-Gothic aesthetic conceived by the German architect August Zorn. The station, which stands at the top of the European side, features a series of arches, a clock tower, and a large glass window.



The Sirkeci building is a prime example of the Ottoman-Gothic aesthetic conceived by the German architect August Zorn.

Special Size: The Many Houses of Commuters around the World

The Sirkeci building, which stands on a plot of 1,200 square meters, is one of the most famous examples of Ottoman architecture. It was built by the Ottoman authorities to connect the East and the West. The building was built in 1890 by the Oriental Railway, which was once the eastern terminus of the world-famous Orient Express.



The Sirkeci building is a prime example of the Ottoman-Gothic aesthetic conceived by the German architect August Zorn. The station, which stands at the top of the European side, features a series of arches, a clock tower, and a large glass window.

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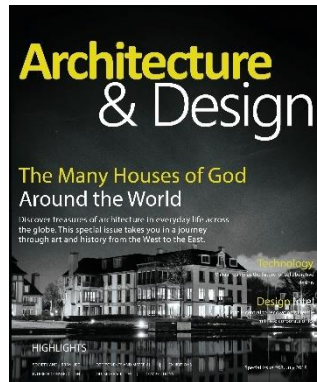
The Sirkeci building is a prime example of the Ottoman-Gothic aesthetic conceived by the German architect August Zorn. The station, which stands at the top of the European side, features a series of arches, a clock tower, and a large glass window.

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Salient religious priming

English: <https://www.flipsnack.com/jk8826/religious-Priming-xjab5ask9s.html>  
Arabic: <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/f498de3293.html>



Westminster Abbey, Britain's Most Famous Church

Westminster Abbey is not only the historic scene of royal weddings, it is also an architectural masterpiece.



The magnificent Westminster Abbey stands in the City of Westminster, London. It remains a center for regular worship and a national shrine. The Abbey was built in the 10th century and is the final resting place of many of the most important figures in the country.

Over the centuries, it has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love. Westminster Abbey has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love.



The nave of Westminster Abbey is a masterpiece of Norman architecture, built in the 11th century.

Special Size: The Many Houses of God around the World

Legend tells that Saint Peter, the first Christian king of the East Saxons, founded a church on a small island in the River Thames, then known as Peter's Island. The island was later renamed St. Peter's Church, and the church was later renamed Westminster Abbey.

The magnificent Westminster Abbey stands in the City of Westminster, London. It remains a center for regular worship and a national shrine. The Abbey was built in the 10th century and is the final resting place of many of the most important figures in the country.

Over the centuries, it has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love. Westminster Abbey has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love.

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The magnificent Westminster Abbey stands in the City of Westminster, London. It remains a center for regular worship and a national shrine. The Abbey was built in the 10th century and is the final resting place of many of the most important figures in the country.

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Istanbul's Blue Mosque in Turkey Sits where the East Meets the West

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque, gained in popularity after Pope Benedict XVI's visit in 2006.



The Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul is a masterpiece of Ottoman architecture. It was built in the 17th century and is the final resting place of many of the most important figures in the country.

Over the centuries, it has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love. The Sultan Ahmed Mosque has been a place of worship, a place of learning, a place of justice, a place of power, a place of peace, a place of hope, a place of faith, and a place of love.



The interior of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is a masterpiece of Ottoman architecture, built in the 17th century.

Special Size: The Many Houses of God around the World

The mosque is known as the Blue Mosque because of the blue tiles that cover the interior walls. The mosque is built with more than 20,000 handmade tiles, each made of a different shade of blue. The mosque is a masterpiece of Ottoman architecture.

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul is a masterpiece of Ottoman architecture. It was built in the 17th century and is the final resting place of many of the most important figures in the country.

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**TABLE W11. ATTENTION CHECKS USED IN RELATION TO THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGIOUS PRIMING IN STUDY 2.****Non-salient religious priming**

This is a reading test designed to determine whether you read the magazine. With less than 3 good answers, you will not be able to proceed and your participation will not count.

Where is located the station described in the first article (pages 9-10)?

- Turkey  
 Russia  
 India  
 Great Britain

Where is located the station described in the second article (pages 11-12)?

- Great Britain  
 Turkey  
 Russia  
 India

Where is located the station described in the third article (pages 13-14)?

- Russia  
 Great Britain  
 Turkey  
 India

Where is located the station described in the fourth article (pages 15-16)?

- Russia  
 Turkey  
 Great Britain  
 India

**Salient religious priming**

This is a reading test designed to determine whether you read the magazine. With less than 3 good answers, you will not be able to proceed and your participation will not count.

What type of building is described in the first article (pages 9-10)?

- a mosque  
 a church  
 a synagogue  
 a Hindu temple

What type of building is described in the second article (pages 11-12)?

- a mosque  
 a Hindu temple  
 a church  
 a synagogue

What type of building is described in the third article (pages 13-14)?

- a Hindu temple  
 a mosque  
 a synagogue  
 a church

What type of building is described in the fourth article (pages 15-16)?

- a church  
 a mosque  
 a synagogue  
 a Hindu temple

*Notes.* Presentation order of answer options was randomized.

WEB APPENDIX H: RESULTS OF MANIPULATION CHECKS AND POST-TEST IN  
STUDY 2

**TABLE W12.** RESULTS OF THE MANIPULATION CHECKS PERTAINING TO  
RELIGIOUS PRIMING (STUDY 2).

	Non- salient	Salient	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Test
<i>Religious priming</i>			
To what extent the magazine made you think about religion?			
To what extent reading the magazine led you to think about how religion plays a role in your daily life?	2.72 (1.90)	4.42 (1.90)	$ t(979)  = 13.88, p < .001$
1 = The magazine did NOT make me think about religion AT ALL, Not at all; 7 = The magazine made me think about religion A LOT, A lot ( $r = .78, p < .001$ )			
<i>Overall attitude toward the magazine articles</i>			
Overall, I consider the magazine to be:			
Bad // Good	5.60 (1.28)	5.70 (1.26)	$ t(979)  = .87, p = .383$
Unpleasant // Pleasant			
7-point semantic differential scale ( $r = .82, p < .001$ )			
<i>Overall readability of the magazine articles</i>			
Overall, I consider the magazine to be:			
Easy to read // Difficult to read	3.06 (1.75)	3.15 (1.86)	$ t(979)  = .94, p = .349$
Easy to understand // Difficult to understand			
7-point semantic differential scale ( $r = .87, < .001$ )			

**TABLE W13. RESULTS OF THE POST-TEST PERTAINING TO THE MANIPULATION OF ADVERTISING CLAIM TYPE (STUDY 2).**

	Mean (SD)	Test Repeated- measure ANOVA	Planned comparisons
<i>Interpretation of the advertised claim as a promise of happiness<sup>1</sup></i>			
	Happiness-based (H) 4.60 (2.11)		<i>H vs. O: <math>F(1, 244) = 182.95.36, p &lt; .001</math></i>
Advertising claim type conditions	Control – Objective (O) 2.80 (1.85)	$F(2, 243) = 123.36, p < .001$	<i>H vs. S: <math>F(1, 244) = 99.51, p &lt; .001</math></i>
	Control – Subjective (S) 3.09 (1.84)		
<i>Perceived unfalsifiability of the advertised claim<sup>2</sup></i>			
	Happiness-based (H) 3.51 (1.93)	$F(2, 243) = 30.97, p < .001$	<i>H vs. O: <math>F(1, 244) = 62.89, p &lt; .001</math></i>
Advertising claim type conditions	Control – objective (O) 4.28 (1.77)		<i>H vs. S: <math>F(1, 244) = 3.52, p = .062</math></i>
	Control – subjective (S) 3.72 (1.81)		
<i>Mood<sup>3</sup></i>			
	Happiness-based (H) 4.93 (1.28)	$F(2, 243) = .12, p = .891$	<i>H vs. O: <math>F(1, 244) = .20, p = .658</math></i>
Advertising claim type conditions	Control – objective (O) 4.91 (1.20)		<i>H vs. S: <math>F(1, 244) = .18, p = .676</math></i>
	Control – subjective (S) 4.90 (1.20)		

Notes.  $N = 245$  U.S. American Prolific users, females: 51.4%, mean age: 42.2,  $SD = 11.3$ .

<sup>1</sup> “Does the ad include a promise of happiness?” and “Does the ad claim to have the potentiality to bring about happiness?” (1 = Definitely no, 7 = Definitely yes;  $r_s > .76, p_s < .001$ )

<sup>2</sup> “The claim featured in the ad is:” “unsupported by evidence // supported by evidence” and “unsubstantiated // substantiated” (7-point semantic differential scale;  $r_s > .89, p_s < .001$ )

<sup>3</sup> “How would you describe your mood after seeing the ad above?” (1 = Very bad, 7 = Very good)

**TABLE W14. RESULTS OF THE MANIPULATION CHECK PERTAINING TO THE VISUAL APPEAL OF THE ADS (STUDY 2).**

Advertising claim type	Counterbalanced condition	Mean (SD)	Test
Control – objective	1	5.62 (1.22)	$F(2, 985) = 1.88, p = .153$
	2	5.58 (1.29)	
	3	5.44 (1.21)	
Control – subjective	1	5.34 (1.32)	$F(2, 990) = 7.42, p = .001$
	2	5.44 (1.32)	
	3	5.70 (1.25)	
Happiness-based	1	5.69 (1.16)	$F(2, 986) = 19.41, p < .001$
	2	5.14 (1.35)	
	3	5.62 (1.19)	

Notes. See Table W15 for the counterbalanced conditions.

WEB APPENDIX I: FICTITIOUS ADVERTISEMENTS USED IN STUDY 2

TABLE W15. FICTITIOUS ADVERTISEMENTS USED IN STUDY 2.

Advertising claim type	Counterbalanced condition 1	Counterbalanced condition 2	Counterbalanced condition 3
Happiness-based	<p>Fueling life with Happiness</p>	<p>Fueling life with happiness</p>	<p>Fueling life with happiness</p>
Control – objective	<p>Organic made easy</p>	<p>Organic made easy</p>	<p>Organic made easy</p>
Control – subjective	<p>Powering you with nature's finest</p>	<p>Powering you with nature's finest</p>	<p>Powering you with nature's finest</p>



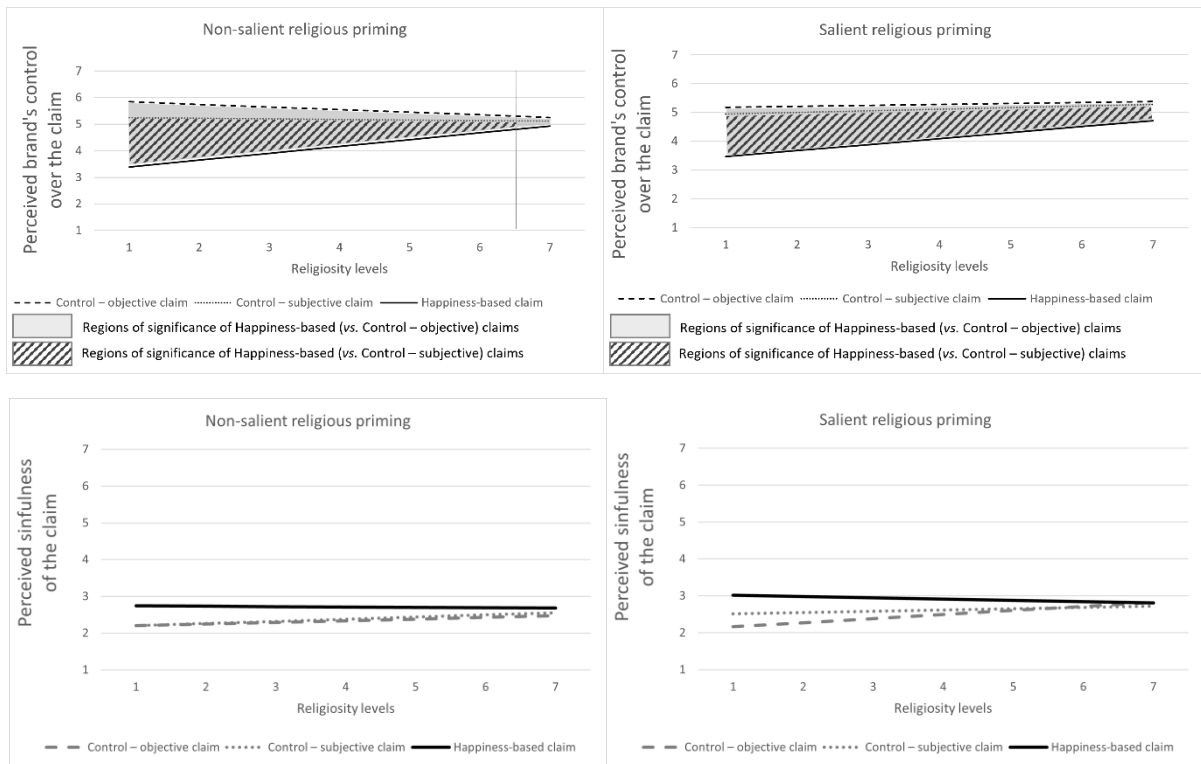
## WEB APPENDIX J: MODERATED MEDIATION ANALYSES IN STUDY 2

TABLE W16. RESULTS OF STUDY 2 (DV = MEDIATORS).

Variables	Perceived brand's control over the claim				Perceived sinfulness of the claim			
	With covariates		Without covariates		With covariates		Without covariates	
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error
Intercept	1.14***	.29	4.43***	.05	4.13***	.21	2.78***	.21
<b>Main Effects</b>								
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. control – objective (H vs. O)	.88***	.06	.95***	.05	-.23***	.04	-.27***	.03
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. control – subjective (H vs. S)	.71***	.06	.74***	.05	-.22***	.04	-.22***	.04
Religiosity (R)	-.15***	.04	.23***	.03	-.03	.03	-.02	.03
Religious Priming (RP)	-.13	.12	-.13	.09	.15 <sup>†</sup>	.08	.17*	.08
<b>Interactions</b>								
H vs. O × R	-.25***	.04	-.26***	.04	.10***	.03	.10***	.02
H vs. S × R	-.23***	.04	-.21***	.04	.02**	.02	.07**	.02
H vs. O × RP	.06	.11	.03	.11	.10	.07	.07	.07
H vs. S × RP	.19 <sup>†</sup>	.11	.17	.11	.04	.07	.04	.07
R × RP	-.07	.06	-.05	.06	-.03	.06	-.02	.06
H vs. O × R × RP	.20*	.08	.17*	.07	.09 <sup>†</sup>	.05	.09 <sup>†</sup>	.05
H vs. S × R × RP	.30*	.08	.13 <sup>†</sup>	.07	-.02	.07	.00	.07
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>								
Visual appeal	.37***	.03			-.23***	.02		
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>								
Income	.03*	.02			.05*	.03		
Materialism	.02	.02			.10***	.03		
Mood	.09 <sup>†</sup>	.04			-.08*	.03		
Product attitude	.10**	.03			-.10***	.03		
Brand familiarity	.05***	.03			.13***	.02		
Parameters	20		14		20		14	
-2 Log-likelihood	8312.11		9991.24		7142.75		8391.62	
AIC	8352.11		9995.24		7146.75		8.95.62	
ICC	.24		.33		.63		.66	

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$

Notes. Religiosity: mean-centered; Religious Priming: non-salient = -.5, salient = .5; Cultural context: USA = -.5, UAE = .5.

**FIGURE W2. INTERACTION PLOTS FOR THE MEDIATORS (STUDY 2).**

*Notes.* Analyses revealed non-significant 3-way cross-level interactions on the perceived sinfulness of the claim, thus making further analyses unwarranted.

## WEB APPENDIX K: ANALYSES PER COUNTRY (USA AND UAE) IN STUDY 2

**TABLE W17.** RESULTS OF STUDY 2 PER SUBSAMPLE (I.E., USA AND UAE) (DV = AD LIKING).

Variables	USA subsample		UAE subsample	
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Coeff.	Std. Error
Intercept	1.61***	.29	1.76***	.25
<b>Main Effects</b>				
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. control – objective (H vs. O)	.23**	.07	.12	.08
Advertising claim type: Happiness vs. control – subjective (H vs. S)	.19**	.07	.18*	.08
Religiosity (R)	.07*	.04	.15**	.04
Religious Priming (RP)	-.58***	.12	-.47**	.14
<b>Interactions</b>				
H vs. O × R	-.06	.04	-.19*	.07
H vs. S × R	-.05	.04	-.19**	.07
H vs. O × RP	.69***	.13	.31	.17
H vs. S × RP	.62***	.13	.27	.17
R × RP	-.23**	.07	-.18 <sup>†</sup>	.11
H vs. O × R × RP	.29***	.08	.31*	.11
H vs. S × R × RP	.30***	.08	.38**	.13
<b>Level 1 Covariates</b>				
Visual appeal	.56***	.03	.46***	.03
<b>Level 2 Covariates</b>				
Income	.02	.03	.01	.03
Materialism	.04	.26	.00	.04
Mood	-.05 <sup>†</sup>	.04	-.01	.04
Product attitude	.09**	.03	.08**	.03
Brand familiarity	.03	.03	.06	.03
Parameters	20		20	
-2 Log-likelihood	3390.49		4675.16	
AIC	3394.49		4679.16	
ICC	.31		.25	

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$

Notes. Religiosity: mean-centered; Religious Priming: non-salient = -.5, salient = .5; Cultural context: USA = -.5, UAE = .5.

**FIGURE W3. INTERACTION PLOTS PER SUBSAMPLE (STUDY 2).**