

Unpacking the relationship between materialism, status consumption and attitude to debt

The role of Islamic religiosity

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Abstract

Purpose – Religion and ideology are often associated with anti-capitalism and anti-consumption. Although consumer researchers have studied both topics, examination of whether materialistic values translate into status consumption and whether religiosity has an effect on the relationship between status consumption and consumer attitude to debt remains scant. This paper investigates how religiosity affects these relationships in Turkey where consumption is de-stigmatized among a new economic elite with strong ties to Islamism.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper investigates the relationship of materialism to status consumption and the mediating role of Islamic religiosity on the relationship between status consumption and attitude to debt. Structural equations modeling was used on a judgmental sample of 267.

Findings – The results showed that the materialistic values positively affect status consumption for the Islamists. This paper concludes that Islamic religiosity, not only does not reject consumption but also augments the relationship between status consumption and consumer attitude to debt.

Originality/value – The findings have shown that previous studies that identify Islam as a threat to consumerism have overseen the class struggles and the role of status consumption. This paper successfully provided empirical evidence that the religiosity not only does not reject consuming but intensifies the relationship between status consumption and attitude to debt for those with Islamist dispositions.

Keywords Materialism, The Muslim consumption pattern, Islamic marketing, Attitude to debt, Islamic religiosity, Status consumption

Paper type Research paper

Historical background

The quest for material goods appears to have a central role in everyday life of most Turks. A cross-national survey conducted by Ipsos Mori in 2014 in 20 countries (Ipsos Mori, 2014) shows that 57 per cent of the Turkish population, following Chinese (71 per cent) and Indian (58 per cent), are most likely to measure their success by what they own. Although its high current materialism score, the materialist ideology was not spread into the consumer context in Turkey to fulfil its promise of consuming for happiness until “24th of January 1980 Decisions” where Turkey took its first steps to become an open market economy with the then undersecretary Turgut Ozal’s announcement, who would later become the prime minister and also the president of the economic stability reform package. Following the 1980 military coup and the subsequent withdrawal of the



generals from politics in 1983, Turgut Ozal accelerated Turkey's transition from being an import substitution economy to become a liberal economy (Ozcan and Turunc, 2011) in 1989.

The degree to which Turks adopted the Western model of materialistic life style does not solely originate from Turkey's recent change from a planned economy to a demand economy. The scarcity of consumer goods and the enormous amount of time and energy that had to be spent to acquire basic material goods prior to the liberalization of the economy had already yielded the pursuit of material goods a quintessential aspect of everyday life in Turkey like it had in East Germany because of scarcity of consumer goods prior to their economic reform (Veenis, 1999). What is surprising and worth investigating is the fact that despite scoring the highest and the second highest in Ipsos Mori's Materialism Index, China and India have respective domestic saving/gross domestic product rates of 52 and 28 per cent (as of the end of 2013), whereas Turkey attains an alarming rate of 14 per cent (World Bank, 2015) with the second highest amount of monthly consumer goods import of \$2,812,379,000 in December 2013 since January 1989 according to the Central Bank of Republic of Turkey (TMB, n.d.).

It is worth noting that the spread of materialistic values that appears to have taken its toll economically in Turkey is manifested by declining and low domestic saving rates and high imports of consumer goods under the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) government with a conservative-religious identity (Onis, 2011) that rule for the past 13 years. Religiosity is found to be a characteristic of AKP voter that makes up for around 50 per cent of actual votes in the two previous parliamentary elections (Baslevant *et al.*, 2005; Carkoglu, 2008). This religious and conservative group of voters, who once were considered peripheral, constitutes the newly affluent middle class of Turkey (Toledano, 2011) and represents the new immigrant class in major cities that is emerging as the new economic elite of the country (Guida and Tuna, 2009).

The transition to a liberal economy where Turkey opened up to world markets is argued to be closely tied to the rise of Islamism in the country (Onis, 1997). The feelings of resentment towards the Western life style and consumption are due to negative events (bankruptcies and associated suicides) experienced following the neoliberal policies of the 1980s. Therefore, the periphery that is mainly conservative and resentful towards the economic transformations heavily stigmatized the spreading of modernization and Western way of life which was equated to consumerism. The ex-periphery, currently considered to be central economic elite of the country, appears to be creating their identities through consumption, ornamented with Islamic touches. The de-stigmatization of consumption among the religious new elite, from a sociological perspective, requires power (Sandikci and Ger, 2010). This power is granted to the new elites that emerged from the periphery (Yilmaz, 2005) by the AKP government in Turkey (Guida and Tuna, 2009). Therefore, to understand whether this new economic elite with explicit Islamist dispositions validates their status via status consumption is crucial.

Islamic religiosity has often been associated with anti-consumption, anti-capitalistic, anti-Western ethos (Ahmed, 2004; Gellner, 1992), anti-consumerism (Turner, 1994) or in clash with the global consumer world (Barber, 1996). Consequently, little is known about the relationship between materialism and Islamic religiosity in transitional economies such as Turkey where a newly affluent religious social class has emerged as the new economic elite of the country. According to Sandikci and Ger's (2010) study on Turkish

women who adopt Islamist values, Islamist politics is deeply embedded in consumer culture where women do not counter modernity and consumerism, but they craft it to a religious and modern consumption kind. Similarly, other recent studies have argued that newly affluent Muslim middle classes often construct their identities through commodities and consumption practices (Fealy and White, 2008; Fischer, 2008; Pink, 2010) that ranges from “memoirs, novels, lifestyle magazines and newspapers to television channels; from religious education centres and halal markets and restaurants to holiday resorts and posh gated communities” (Gokariksel and McLarney, 2010) within the specifics of Turkey. This Islamist de-stigmatization of consumption of the market that encompasses institutions, actors, practices and discourses (Venkatesh and Peñaloza, 2006) lured the conservative, religious new elite into consumption by increasing the appeal and visibility of Islamist mode of consuming (Sandikci and Ger, 2010).

Izberk-Bilgin (2012) argues that the Turkish citizens with explicit Islamic dispositions constitute the class with low economic and cultural capital that cannot participate in the middle-class consumption. Considering Sandikci and Ger's (2010) ethnographic study where they have found participants' wardrobes filled with brand-name handbags and shoes to mark their status provides empirical evidence that the new elite may be enacting a “Western Lifestyle myth”, an idealized Turkish view of “middle class consumption in the West, particularly the USA” (Ustuner and Holt, 2010, 52) to prove their newly found status. Although Ali Babacan, the deputy for the Prime Minister responsible for the economy, warns against the dangers of the low domestic saving rates and despite the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu prioritizes increasing saving rates during the announcement of the tenth Transition Program (ODOP); they may be overseeing the fact that it might be their own electorate who are now enjoying a modified Western, materialistic life style to gain status in society at the expense of incurring debts as the new affluent middle class. This study will contribute to the extant literature by investigating the mediating effect of Islamic religiosity on the status consumption–indebtedness relationship to discover consumers' inclination to incur in an economy where Islamism is rising.

Literature review

Historically, the effect of dimensions of culture on human nature has long been a focus of interest in various domains including psychology (Freud, 1928; Durkheim, 1951), economics (Weber, 1930) as well as philosophy (Muscio, 1918). Having established an understanding of the effect of culture on individuals wants, desires, values and decision-making processes (Hofstede, 1983), scholars with a consumer research perspective examine the effect of culture on various consumer behaviours to this day (Podoshen *et al.*, 2014; Lee and Workman, 2014; Cohen, 2014; Petersen *et al.*, 2015; Gentina *et al.*, 2014).

The use of cultural factors as consumer behaviour predictors is based on the assumption of the non-existence of environmental changes that may accelerate a change in cultural values (Leung *et al.*, 2005). Considering that the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries are often associated with politic, economic and sociologic turbulences on a global scale (Leung *et al.*, 2005), the employment of cultural values as predictors of consumer behaviour would be inoperable. Having established

that the sub-dimensions of culture may not be practical during turbulent atmospheres, the identification of a factor that shall remain relatively stable is crucial.

McDaniel and Burnett (1990) suggest that religiosity, different from other human values, is a stable and observable phenomenon across long time periods even though it is a sub-dimension of culture. Geertz (1993) and Khraim (2010) conceptualize religiosity as the central component of culture, which conceives individuals a static and stable individual identity in changing and evolving societies like Turkey. Considering the rapidly increasing urbanization rates (from 59 per cent in 1990 to 78 per cent in 2013) (Ceritoglu and Eren, 2014), two post-modern military coups (28 February 1997 and 27 April 2007), several economic crises and a major change in the political atmosphere, employing sub-dimensions of culture (e.g. nation, race, power distance index, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation vs short-term normative orientation, indulgence vs restraint) to understand consumer behaviour in the Turkish consumer context does not appear fruitful.

The study of religion and its effect on consumer behaviour is not an unstudied area in the Turkish consumer context (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Sandikci and Ekici, 2009; Sandikci and Ger, 2010). These studies, although they are pioneers, adopt a more qualitative approach where they scrutinize brand selection, politically motivated brand rejection and consumption practices of turban, respectively. This study, by adopting a more quantitative approach, will explore the role of religiosity in explaining the relationships between materialism, status consumption and indebtedness.

Materialism

Materialism is defined as the importance given to owning and acquiring material goods, in achieving major life goals or attaining desired states (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Materialism is argued to first emerge in the West in fifteenth sixteenth century Europe (Braudel, 1973; Mukerji, 1983). Although McKendrick *et al.* (1982) suggest that materialism was very much in existence even back in ancient civilizations, the search of psychological well-being via discretionary consumption became available to masses within the past few hundred years (Belk, 1985; Mason, 1981). In Turkey, the spread of discretionary consumption for happiness did not happen until the 1990s with the country's transition from planned to demand economy where the consumer goods were available with abundance for the first time.

The operationalization of attitude measures of materialism dates back to the 1960s where Campbell (1969) a scale of attitudes towards materialism in society followed by Moschis and Churchill's (1979) materialism scale that encompasses attitudes towards money and possessions. De Young (1985-1986) is another example that does not infer the operationalization of materialism from other constructs like Inglehart's (1981) or Belk's (1984) materialism measures. Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest that with the exception of Belk's (1984) materialism scale, other developed scales do not conform to the scale development procedures specified by Churchill (1979) and Nunnally (1978). Belk's (1984) materialism scale, although heavily cited, shows low reports of scale reliability in 12 separate data collections (Richins and Dawson, 1992).

For the reasons given above, this study adopts Richins and Dawson's (1992) definition and measurement of materialism. Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale encapsulates three factors named centrality, success and happiness. These three

factors are based on a literature review on materialism (Belk, 1983; Fournier and Richins, 1991; Richins and Dawson, 1992). The centrality factor relates to acquisition centrality and reflects the situation in which materialists place the possessions and their acquisitions at the centre of their lives (Richins and Dawson, 1992). The success factor encompasses possession-defined success and is defined as “to judge their own and others’ success by the number of quality of possessions accumulated” (Richins and Dawson, 1992 304). Bois (1955) suggests, for instance, that materialists equate material well-being to evidence of success. The happiness component reflects the essential place of acquisition and possession of material objects for satisfaction and well-being in life. The pursuit of happiness for materialists revolves more around on material objects than does around personal relationships, experiences or achievements (Richins and Dawson, 1992). The centrality of acquisitions, possession-defined success and acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, therefore, are the sub-dimensions of Richins and Dawson’s (1992) materialism scale that this study adopts as part of this study.

Materialism–status consumption

The discussion on the materialism–status consumption relationship primarily requires an identification of the two phenomena being different from one another. Status consumption, which is defined as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolizes status both for the individual and surrounding significant others” (Eastman *et al.*, 1999), is argued to be different than materialism. Status consumers place importance only on products they feel have status qualities (Eastman *et al.*, 1997). Materialistic individuals, however, place more importance on the ownership of products (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Kasser (2002) and Shafer (2000) suggest that materialism is associated with status consumption. Additionally, Eastman *et al.* (1999) show that materialism and status consumption are related but dissimilar phenomena with a 0.49 correlation between status consumption and Richins and Dawson’s (1992) materialism scale.

Status consumption theory, commonly known as trickle-down theory, which was initiated by Veblen (1899/1970) and Simmel (1904/1957) suggest that the wealthy depend on the consumption of expensive goods and services as pecuniary symbols. The status consumption theory argues that the desire for and the consumption of pecuniary symbols trickles-down the class hierarchy as each class seeks to emulate the class above (Simmel, 1904/1957). The trickle-down effect adopts an economic perspective to explain the spread of status consumption in different class hierarchies. In societies where the classes are separated from each other ideologically, the economics perspective of the spread of status consumption may not suffice. Following the liberalization of the country, the Western life style was quickly adopted by the economic elite of the time who were secular. The conservative and resentful periphery stigmatized the spread of modernization and Western way of life and united around Islam that mainly opposes the “Western degeneration”. Thirteen-year government of AKP that is deeply embedded in consumer culture (Sandikci and Ger, 2010), supported by the ex-periphery and the power it grants to the ex-periphery (the new economic elite), de-stigmatized consumption among the religious new elite with the support of the political power that led the creation of brands with Islamic connotations.

Islamist politics in Turkey are well embedded in consumer culture. The Islamist movement is using the consumerist ideology to reshape the society as a whole supported by and combined with intensified political, economic and moral relationships (Sandikci and Ger, 2010). The emergence of the new economic elites with explicit Islamist dispositions, therefore, is by no means in conflict with the consumerist ideology in Turkey. The rise of brands with religious connotations such as Aytac (sausages), Ihlas (home appliances), Yimpas (supermarket), Sarar (clothing) and Ulker (confectionaries) are identified by Sandikci and Ekici (2009). This list can be developed further with other brands with well-known religious connotations such as BIM (supermarket) or Armine (*tesettur*[1] clothing). The adoption of materialistic values by the new economic elites should not come as a surprise. If approached from Bourdieu's (1984-1985) perspective, the differences of lifestyles between the new elite with explicit Islamist dispositions and the ex-centre, ex-elite in Turkey may be argued to be mainly symbolic. Both the new and the ex-economic elite embrace materialistic values via different consumption preferences (Islamic doppelgängers or not) to establish symbolic boundaries (status boundaries) between individuals that belong to different locations in the present class structure. The significance and power of consumerism in the formation of a new social order where the ex-periphery becomes the new economic elite and demonstrate their new found status via status consumption. Therefore, the arguments regarding the conflicting nature of religion and materialism may not apply to Turkish consumer context where the dynamics of the society is changing. Accordingly, following hypothesis is constructed:

- H1. Materialism positively and directly affects status consumption for those with explicit Islamist dispositions.

Status consumption–religiosity–indebtedness association

In an interview, Sehminur Aydin, a Muslim businesswoman in Turkey, gave to *New York Times* as part of an article that investigates the spending pattern and conflicting religious feelings of the new economic elite of Turkey, said: "Muslims here used to be tested by poverty. Now they are being tested by wealth" (Tavernise, 2008, p. 3). Aydin thinks the Muslims are being tested because of an Islamic concept called *Israf* which forbids consuming more than one needs. Similarly, Belk (1985) suggests that religion plays an important role in the individual differences in the manifestations of materialism and argues that these differences occur because all major religions oppose excessive consumption (Belk, 1983). In the same vein, Kozinets and Handelman (2004), Turner (1994) and Webb (2005) argue that religiosity, particularly Islam, is the most powerful threats to global consumerist ideology.

A literature search on the effect of religiosity on consumption preferences and whether Islam is in opposition with consumer ideology proves otherwise. According to Izberk-Bilgin (2012), although those with explicit Islamist dispositions oppose consumerist ideology at a discursive level, in practice, they are well familiar with the market, simply preferring Islamic doppelgänger brands that are congruent with Islamist mores. Similarly, Sandikci and Ger (2010) conclude their research by suggesting that those with Islamic dispositions craft a new, hybrid consumer identity that is modern and religious, tasteful and modest. Furthermore, in a study where the concept of politically motivated brand rejection is investigated, Sandikci and Ekici (2009) suggest that those with Islamic dispositions, instead of a downright

rejection of consumerist ideology, prefer purchasing the brands with Islamic connotations.

Bourdieu (1984-1985) argues that with the minutiae of everyday consumption, each individual constantly symbolizes their social similarity with their social collectivities, while simultaneously classifying all others as different. The newly affluent economic elite of the country, the ex-periphery, in an attempt to prove that they are moving up in the classification struggles appears to be invested in status consumption which trickled-down from the old economic elite now that new brands with Islamic connotations are available to them.

Page (1992) provides evidence of consumer debts doubling in the USA as a result of a focus on status consumption. Additional evidence of the relationship between status consumption and indebtedness is also provided in the literature (Fan, 2000; Roberts and Jones, 2001). However, there are no previous studies that focus on the relationship between religiosity and indebtedness defined as “a state of obligation to repay another” (Greenberg, 1980, p. 4) or the mediating effect of religiosity on status consumption–indebtedness association. Nevertheless, the daily experiences in Turkey adumbrate that those with explicit Islamist dispositions spend beyond their means to prove their new found economic status. Therefore, to test and to add to the literature, the following hypotheses are constructed:

H2. Status consumption directly and positively affects attitudes to debt.

H3. Religiosity indirectly and positively affects the relationship of status consumption to attitudes to debt for those with explicit Islamist dispositions.

Research methodology

Method of analysis

The relationship between materialism, status consumption, religiosity and indebtedness was analysed with a mediation analysis technique (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Zhao *et al.* (2010) propose a two-dimensional approach consisting of three patterns that are consistent with mediation and two patterns that are consistent with non-mediation. Complementary mediation is existent when both the mediated effect and the direct effect exist and have the same relational direction. Second type is competitive mediation, and it is present when the mediated effect and the direct effect both exist but have opposite relational direction. Third type is indirect-only mediation, and it is present when there is a mediated effect but no direct relationship. Fourth is direct-only non-mediation which exists when there is no mediation effect, but a direct effect exists. The final type of pattern is no-effect non-mediation, where neither direct effect nor indirect effect exists. This analytical approach offers empirical evidence to support or not support the hypothesized relationships.

Bootstrapping the sampling distribution and examining the bias-corrected confidence intervals with the empirically derived bootstrapped sampling distribution assessed the indirect effects (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). This method, which makes no assumptions regarding the shape of the distribution of the variables (Efron and Tibshirani, 1993; Mooney and Duval, 1993), is used to circumvent the power problem produced by asymmetries and other forms of non-normality in the sampling distribution (Shrout and Bolger, 2002).

To test whether the model fits the data, the absolute fit of the overall model was analysed employing chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/df), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI). The CMIN/df tests the discrepancy between the predicted and observed model. Although it is very sensitive to sample size, non-significant model is evidence of model fit (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). A value that ranges from 5 to 1 to 2 to 1 is considered and interpreted as acceptable (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999). CFI compares the fits of a target model to the fit of a model where the variables are assumed to be uncorrelated. A value over 0.90 indicates a good fit (Bentler, 1990). GFI presents evidence of how well the theoretical model reproduces the observed correlation. A GFI value larger than 0.90 represents a good fit to the data (Kelloway, 1998).

Sample and measures

This study empirically tested the direct effect of materialism on status consumption as well as the mediating effect of religiosity on status consumption–indebtedness association for the new economic elite of the country. A total of 267 questionnaires were collected from a judgmental sample of individuals who are over 18 years old with explicit Islamist dispositions in Fatih, a municipality in the old town Istanbul known to be religious. Therefore, the questionnaires were only collected from 126 males and 141 females carrying explicit religious symbols such as *çar°af*, *turban*, *gown*, *shalwar* and *religious hats*. Structured questionnaires were used in face-to-face interviews. The scales that were employed were drawn from the relevant literature. The questionnaires included Richins' (2004) three-factor materialism scale, Rehman and Shabbir's (2010) five-factor Islamic religiosity scale, Eastman *et al.*'s (1999) single-factor status consumption tendencies and Ponchio and Aranha's (2008) single-factor attitude to debt scale. All items are measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaires also included demographic questions on age, education level, income and sex. Table I which provides the measures employed and Table II which shows the descriptive statistics may be found in Appendix. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

Results

The model tested provided good fit with a CMIN/df value of 2.257, a CFI value of 0.946 and a GFI value of 0.948. The hypothesized positive, direct effect of materialism on status consumption for those with explicit Islamist dispositions (*H1*) was found to be significant for each sub-dimensions of Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale. Centrality ($\beta = 0.184, p < 0.05$), success ($\beta = 0.355, p < 0.05$) and happiness ($\beta = 0.216, p < 0.05$) have positive, direct effects on status consumption. Also, the hypothesized positive, direct effect of status consumption on consumer attitude to debt (*H2*) was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.463, p < 0.05$). The standardized total effect of status consumption on consumer attitude to debt also was found to be positive and significant ($\beta = 0.503, p < 0.05$), providing empirical evidence of a positive indirect effect of materialism measures on consumer attitude to debt.

To test whether Islamic religiosity positively and indirectly mediates the relationship between status consumption and consumer attitude to debt, Zhao *et al.*'s (2010) mediation technique was employed. The indirect effect of status consumption to consumer attitude to debt through the five-factor Islamic religiosity scale was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.040, p < 0.05$). The positive total effect of status consumption on

	Measure	Scale
Materialism	Richins and Dawson (1992)	Ranging from 1 to 5 1 = completely disagree 5 = Completely agree
Status consumption tendencies	Eastman <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Ranging from 1 to 5 1 = completely disagree 5 = Completely agree
Islamic religiosity	Rehman and Shabbir (2010)	Ranging from 1 to 5 1 = completely disagree 5 = Completely agree
Attitudes to debt	Ponchio (2006)	Ranging from 1 to 5 1 = completely disagree 5 = Completely agree
Income	On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates 0-1500TL per month 5 the 5000TL+ per month. We would like to know in what group you are. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions and other incomes that come in	Ranging from 1 to 5 1 = lowest group 5 = highest group
Age	You are ___ years old	_____
Sex	By observation	1 = Female 0 = Male
Education	On this card is an education scale on which 1 indicates “do not know how to read and write” 7 indicates “has a PhD. We would like to know in what group you are.” Please, specify the appropriate number	Ranging from 1 to 7 1 = Do not know how to read and write 7 = Has a PhD

Table I.
Measures employed

consumer attitude to debt was augmented with the addition of Islamic religiosity scale, although the direct effect of status consumption on the factors of Islamic religiosity scale was negative: Ideological ($\beta = -0.196, p < 0.05$), ritualistic ($\beta = -0.125, p < 0.05$), intellectual ($\beta = -0.113, p < 0.05$), experimental ($\beta = -0.146, p < 0.05$) and consequential ($\beta = -0.145, p < 0.05$). The direct effects of all five factors of Islamic religiosity scale: Ideological ($\beta = -0.024, p > 0.05$), ritualistic ($\beta = 0.001, p > 0.05$), intellectual ($\beta = 0.083, p > 0.05$), experimental ($\beta = -0.122, p > 0.05$) and consequential ($\beta = -0.115, p > 0.05$), on consumer attitude to debt were found to be insignificant. Considering that there are no direct relationships between the dimensions of Islamic religiosity and consumer attitude to debt as suggested and their positive mediating effect, we may suggest that religiosity in Turkey may not be a threat to consumerist ideology as suggested (Belk, 1983; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Turner, 1994). The demographic variables that were employed as control variables provided evidence that only the education level had a direct and positive effect on consumer attitudes to debt ($\beta = 0.051, p < 0.05$). Age, income or sex does not have any effect on consumer attitudes to debt for those with explicit Islamist dispositions. The positive effect of education on attitude to debt showed that the consumers with higher education levels are more inclined to incur debts than the consumers with low education levels.

	Centrality	Success	Happiness	Status consumption	Attitude to debt	Islamic religiosity	Age	Income	Sex
Mean	2.462	2.471	2.848	2.498	2.4164	4.350	3.34	1.34	1.53
SD	0.624	0.669	0.631	0.827	0.631	0.583	1.599	1.033	0.50

Table II.
Descriptive statistics

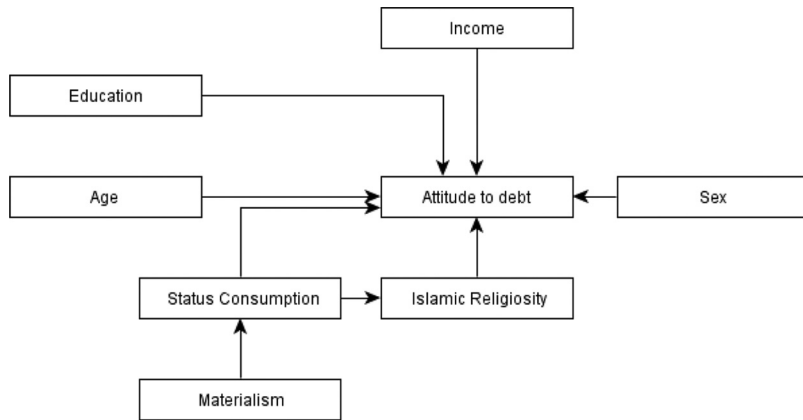


Figure 1.
Research model

Implications

Theoretical implications

The relationship between materialism and status consumption was tested via the use of a sample consisted only of individuals with explicit Islamist dispositions in a highly materialistic country, Turkey. The results showed that materialism and its three sub-dimensions (namely, centrality, happiness and success) positively and directly affect status consumption of those with explicit Islamist dispositions. This finding is important, as it shows an attempt from the new economic elite's part to prove their newly found status via status consumption, as suggested by Bourdieu (1984-1985). The fact that centrality, success and happiness factors positively affect status consumption show the degree to which those with explicit Islamist dispositions are invested in status consumption which trickled-down (Veblen, 1899/1970; Simmel, 1904/1957) from the old-elite.

Another significant finding opposes the arguments that conceptualize religions and particularly Islam as an ideology that restricts excessive consumption or as a threat to global consumerist thought (Belk, 1983; Turner, 2005; Webb, 2005). The results showed that status consumption translates into consumer attitude to debt for those with Islamist dispositions. This partially provides empirical evidence to suggest that the new economic elite may be that much invested to solidify their new social status even by acquiescing to incur debts on this desire. Although *Israf* (spending beyond one's means) is one of the main notions of Islam, our results indicate no results of a direct relationship of Islamic religiosity and consumer attitude to debt. All five sub-dimensions of Islamic religiosity (ideological, ritualistic, intellectual, experimental and consequential) failed to show a significant direct effect. This also implies that the forbidding nature of Islam against excessive consumption does not apply to the Turkish consumptionscape.

The positive mediating effect of Islamic religiosity on the relationship between status consumption and consumer attitude to debt further corroborates this paper's position which opposes Belk's (1983); Turner's (2005) and Webb's (2005) elaborations that situates religion as the nemesis of the consumerist ideology. Therefore, one may argue that previous research are not generable to societies where there class changes. In case, as in the example of Turkey, the religious become the new economic elite and they often materialize their class struggles through consumption (Bourdieu, 1984-1985). The fact

that Islamic religiosity is not directly related to consumer attitude to debt but it positively mediates status consumption–consumer attitude to debt association is of proving nature of that argument. Finally, one should note that demographic variables such as age, income and sex do not have a significant effect on consumer attitude to debt for those with explicit Islamist dispositions. Only the education level has a positive effect on consumer attitude to debt which shows the education level may be an augments of indebtedness for those with explicit Islamist dispositions in Turkey.

Executive implications

A vital managerial implication of this study is the identification of Islamic religiosity as an augments of status consumption–consumer attitude to debt relationship. This finding implies that those with explicit Islamist dispositions would be more likely to purchase products/services that reflect status at the expense of incurring debts. Therefore, firms that potentially target religious individuals should be aware of the fact that they would be more willing to purchase their offerings as long as they reflect status. Brands operating in *tesettür* industry that reflect high-status, haute-couture religious-wear may be already found in Turkey (Gokariksel and Secor, 2010).

The identification of education only as a demographic variable that has an impact on attitude to debt for those with Islamist dispositions is another important finding that has a managerial value. High education, for the Islamists in Turkey, equates to an attitude to debt which may be taken into consideration for the banking sector. At the time this study was being written, no evidence of a study that focuses on this particular aspect was found. A more in-depth study on this issue may be productive for this specific sector as credit card debts is becoming a major concern in the industry (Akin *et al.*, 2013). Another implication of this research is the identification of those individuals who are more likely to incur debts as a result of status consumption and Islamic religiosity in Turkey.

Note

1. Religious womenswear.

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