

# **The Role of Religious Sensibilities on The Relationship Between Religious Rules And Hedonic Product Consumption Behavior In Turkey**

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**Abstract:** *No matter what the religion is the impact of the religious beliefs cannot be neglected on consumer behavior. In Islamic countries or wherever Islamic population has a large market, the Muslim consumer is ultra-sensitive on their beliefs. With a global point of view “Halal food” looks like the main concern of Muslim consumers but there are several other rules that especially global companies should strictly follow in Muslim target markets. Islamic rules which can be applied in marketing vary from bribery to hoarding. Countries governing under Islamic Shari’ah apply these rules as law articles which mandate people to follow. In other countries with major Islamic populations like Turkey which adopts modern law systems do not directly follow Islamic rules in business and marketing. But in these countries also Islamic rules has an impact on consumer behavior. Ethical systems and religious lifestyle in these countries reveals Islamic sensitivities other than law. In this study it is examined the impact of Muslim consumers’ religious rules on hedonic consumption and the mediating role of religious sensibilities on this relationship. A qualitative approach has been followed in the research and focus group interview method has been conducted.*

**Keywords :** *Muslim consumer, hedonic consumption, consumer behavior*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In all religions, religious beliefs have some variety of impacts on consumer behavior. While in some religions these effects are negligible, in countries which have higher Islamic populations, the Muslim consumer is usually ultra-sensitive about their beliefs. Since “Halal food” looks like the main concern of Muslim consumers, there are several other rules that global companies should strictly follow in Muslim target markets.

Islamic rules which can be applied in marketing vary from prohibition of bribery to avoiding waste consumption. Countries governing under Islamic Shari’ah apply these rules as law articles which mandate people to follow. In other countries with major Islamic populations like Turkey which adopts modern law systems do not directly follow Islamic rules in business. But ethical system in these countries reveals Islamic sensitivities other than law.

To satisfy their emotions and to fulfill their desires people consume some products and this kind of consumption is called hedonic consumption. It differs from utilitarian consumption with its rationale. Since utilitarian consumption occurs to satisfy the survival needs, hedonic consumption occurs only to satisfy feelings.

Sheffield (2006) provides a broad and interdisciplinary approach and redefines marketing with a theological point of view. On the business, The Islamic perspective is gaining accelerated importance (Alserhan & Alserhan, 2012). Especially luxury consumption as a part of hedonic consumption behavior creates a rapidly developing market in Muslim population. Extravagance and waste are strictly forbidden by Islamic rules and this hedonic behavior can be accepted as “tabzir” with a simple explanation spending resources for the products that people can live easily without.

In this study it is examined the impact of Muslim consumers’ sensibilities and Islamic rules on the consumption of hedonic products in Turkey. In the first part of the study it is made an extensive literature review on the subject, in the second part hypotheses has been generated according to conceptual framework, in the third part findings of the study explained and in the last part limitations of the study and directions for future research have been listed.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hedonic consumption is a relatively new research field for psychologists and marketing researchers and it has a research interest for more than 30 years. More than thirty years ago, the study of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) advocated greater attention to hedonic consumption and the myriad ways in which consumers seek pleasure and enjoyment. (Alba & Williams, 2013)

In the literature today, it can be found many articles on hedonic behavior and hedonic consumption. Hirschman & Holbrook (1982a) define hedonic consumption as a part of consumer behavior which is related the interaction of multiple sensors and emotional sides of peoples’ experience with the products they consume. Hedonic consumption refers consuming to feel a situational pleasure of consuming situation itself. Usually hedonic

consumption aspects are not directly related to the product itself. Consumer may seek those pleasure and enjoyment (Alba & Williams, 2013) in the buying process. Hedonic consumption focuses on consumption's experiential side offers which is subjective and can be described with words "sensation seeking, emotional arousal and fantasizing" (Lacher, 1989).

It is not clear how to decide if a product is hedonic or utilitarian or it is not easy to define a behavior as hedonic. Most consumption behavior may have utilitarian and hedonic side together and researchers should focus on the rationale of the behavior to tell the difference. It is always possible to see simple utilitarian goods as hedonic ones. Dhar & Wertenbroch (2000) explains this situation with the example of buying detergent because of its scent. Utilitarian products may also turn to hedonic objects over time: retro products, antiques etc. And different consumers may attach different levels of hedonic meaning to the same product. But the products that cannot be used for utilitarian purposes are directly hedonic products.

*"Hedonic alternative tends to be rated more highly than a comparable utilitarian alternative when each is presented singly, but the utilitarian alternative tends to be chosen over the hedonic alternative when the two are presented jointly" (Okada, 2005).*

This means that if consumer may find both utilitarian and hedonic product together, tend to choose utilitarian one. This approach neglects the meaning of hedonic product and the reason why consumer choose hedonic one. If utilitarian product can be chosen in lieu of hedonic product, it shows that consumer is making his/her decision by comparing their utilities.

Researches who study on psychology and marketing have a huge interest in the experiences of consumers, including their behaviors' hedonic and utilitarian outcomes (Babin & Darden, 2004). Excessive buying behavior of hedonist consumers creates hedonic adaptation. This adaptation can be defined as the decrease in the affective intensity of good and bad situations (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999). If consumer buys hedonic products multiple times, buying situation will no longer give pleasure to them because of the adaptation.

Not only products but also positive and negative situations may end up with hedonic adaptation. (Lyubomirsky, 2012) Six studies examined by Nelson & Meyvis (2008) demonstrate that interrupting a consumption experience may create more enjoyable experiences if the experience was enjoyable at first but if the experience is an unpleasant one, interruption can make it irritating. Some studies on hedonic consumption and hedonic adaptation can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 1: Studies on Hedonic Consumption and Hedonic Adaptation**

Hedonic Consumption	(e.g. Alba & Williams, 2013; Babin & Darden, 2004; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Caporale, Policastro, Tuorila, & Monteleone, 2009; de Witt Huberts, Evers, & de Ridder, 2012; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Jones, Reynolds, & Arnold, 2006; Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012; Lacher, 1989; Lim & Ang, 2008; Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Okada, 2005; Tifferet & Herstein, 2012; Wakefield & Barnes, 1996; Zhong & Mitchell, 2010)
Hedonic Adaptation	(e.g. Armenta, Bao, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2014; Bagenstos & Schlanger, 2007; Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Lyubomirsky, 2012; Nicolao, 2010; Perez-Truglia, 2012; Quoidbach & Dunn, 2013; Riis et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012)

In retail shopping, main motivations to engage consumers have two dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic (Childers, Carr, Peck, & Carson, 2001). Retail shopping creates a value for consumers and this value is not restricted only with the value of the product bought but the shopping itself also creates a value. In their study Jones et al. (2006) mentioned that most of the previous researches were not focused on the outcomes of shopping value.

The Republic of Turkey, located between Europe and Asia has 99.8 % Muslim population. Not all Muslim population lives under the rules of Islamic Law (Shariah). In secular countries like Turkey, Azerbaijan, the majority of the population is Muslim. Even if the country is not governing by Islamic Shari'ah rules but Islamic rules and sensitivities have a huge impact on the consumption behavior of the population. Purchasing habits of Turkish people has influenced both from Islamic traditions and modern world requirements. Turkey has near 400 shopping malls more than any European country and retail shopping is a part of society's daily life.

Luxury product consumption has a great interest and Turkey has its own luxury brands and mainly in larger cities stores of world's most famous luxury brands. Luxury market in the country has good profit margins and this situation creates a large target market for global luxury brands. Not only for luxury products, but also all other hedonic products have a huge shopping interest in the retail environment.

Business between Muslim people and others have been shaped by Islamic business values. These values have genuine effects on consumer behavior. In their study Alserhan & Alserhan (2012) classifies Islamic business values and rules as follows:

- Bribery (rashwa) has been prohibited.
- Fraud and cheating in any kind of business have been prohibited.

- Discrimination has been prohibited.
- Greater social responsibility has been encouraged.
- Gambling and lotteries prohibited.
- Earnings from alcoholic drinks prohibited.
- Hoarding, extravagance and wasting have been prohibited.

Khraim (2010) argues that religion has a significant role in consumer behavior. Religion has a huge impact in our lives bot socially and culturally but its importance is disregarded in marketing theories (Yousaf, 2014). In his study, Arham(2010) argues that most of the elements of modern marketing theory can be applied in Muslim consumers. Also Islamic religious teachings can be applied in modern marketing theory but in Islamic Marketing area advancement of knowledge requires reflexivity and self-critique (Jafari, 2012).

*“Religious commitment affects individuals' attitudes towards consumption patterns, as well as their social behavior. When making decisions about buying a new product, different factors influence the consumers. Most of these factors have been investigated in many studies; however, religion, as key factor in consumers' lives, has largely been neglected in this area”*(Behboudi, Vazifehdoust, Najafi, & Najafi, 2014).

There are limited researches and publications on marketing in emerging markets and reaching especially Islamic markets require efficient and effective specialized marketing strategies (Marinov, 2006).

In their study, Hashim & Hamzah (2014) argue that Islam should be accepted as a way of life and the marketing code of conduct should be guided by the main references of Islamic rules: Quran and Hadith. But Islamic marketing theory, models and approaches are rather limited and under development according to Islamic worldview (tasawwur) and Islamic epistemology (Adnan, 2013). Religious aspects not only affect consumers' behavior but also their reaction to advertising messages (Islam & Alam, 2013). For Muslim target markets, in their marketing communication efforts marketers usually use Islamic symbols and cues (Yousaf, 2014) not only in counties governing by Islamic Shari'ah rules but also in countries which have large Muslim populations.

El-Bassiouny (2015)'s study argues Islamic Shari'ah compliance in traditional marketing. Alom & Haque(2011) refer Islamic world-view as an integration of religious, cultural and universal values which can help the welfare of the world and create socioeconomic justice by visualizing a consumer oriented marketing environment. But in the Islamic marketing area the lack of extensive research limits its effect to a certain extent (Saeed and Karamat Baig, 2013) and in their studies Sandikci (2011); Soesilowati(2010) indicate that Muslim consumers cannot be assumed as a “homogeneous and preexisting market segment”. In Alserhan and Alserhan (2012)'s study it is also argued the issue of homogeneity of Muslim consumers as a market segment. For Muslim population, buying behavior of the consumers affected by the religious beliefs and this affects the advertising appeals that can be used in Muslim target markets (Behboudi et al, 2010). This study also indicates that Muslim consumers can be accepted as a behavioral market segment.

In the literature there are many studies on Islamic business and Islamic Marketing. Some studies which have high academic influence on Islamic Marketing and the specified research area of marketing of Islamic banking products can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 2: Islamic Marketing in Literature**

Study Area	Studies in Literature
Studies on Islamic Marketing	(e.g. Abdullah & Ahmad, 2010; Adnan, 2013; Hussnain, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Kadirov, 2014; Koku & Savas, 2014; Marinov, 2006; Wilson & Grant, 2013)
Studies on marketing Islamic Banking Products	(e.g. Elbeck & Dedoussis, 2010; Hassan, Chachi, & Latiff, 2008; Kamarulzaman & Madun, 2013; Loo, 2010; Naser & Moutinho, 1997; Tameme & Asutay, 2012)

In Islamic markets there are two main product categories: legitimate (halal) and illegitimate (haram) products. Halal products are the products permitted to consume by Islamic rules and only products in this category can be marketed for Muslim target markets. Haram products are the products strictly forbidden to consume by Muslim consumers. In countries governing by Islamic Shari'ah rules like Saudi Arabia it is forbidden to market these products but in Turkey where secularism apply, it is possible to market haram products like alcoholic drinks. Other Islamic product types can be seen in Table 2 below:

**Table 3: Islamic Product Categories**

Islamic Products			Haram Products	Mushtabeh Products
Halal Products				
Wajib	Mandoob	Makrooh	Products forbidden to consume	Products Muslims should refrain
Products mandatory to consume	Preferable products	Products discouraged to consume		

In his study Abdul Cader(2015) also mentions that the Quran, Prophet Mohammed’s sayings and behaviors, his companion’s examples and Islamic scholars’ interpretations are the essential sources of Islamic marketing and this sources arrange relationships between consumers and sellers. In their research, Anwar(2011) argued the issues that cannot be accepted in Islamic marketing system with an Islamic point of view as “over-zealous marketing to over-dressing the product”.

*“Islamic economists meanwhile refer to Islamic sources such as Quran, Sunnah, Ijma’, Qiyas (normative) and refer to conventional theories that are not contradicting with Shari’ah in clarifying their economic issues” (Ramli & Mirza, 2007).*

Classifying products or other things as un-Islamic is not a rule of the religion it is a human behavior. This human behavior can be named as “Islamic or religious sensibilities”. Religiosity triggers religious sensibilities. In their study Alam et.al. (2001) verify that religiosity plays a mediator role in the relationship of “Muslim consumers’ behavior” and “relative and contextual variables”. In Turkey, where most of them population is Muslim, consumers have sensibilities on some issues they accept un-Islamic. These issues conclude sensibilities on suspicious food (if they do not know the food contains pork or alcohol), productions of the countries they accept as enemies of Islam.

*“The Muslim consumer is ultra-sensitive and the Muslim masses are easily swayed against anything that can be classified as un-Islamic be it a country, a company, a product, a process and so on” (Alserhan & Alserhan, 2012).*

Controversial, sensitive and vulgar issues in marketing and their reflections on advertisements and other marketing communications create sensibilities on Muslim consumers. In Islamic society many products can be accepted vulgar even if they actually are health products (hygienic pads, contraception products, condoms etc.) or basic clothing (pants, bras, stockings, boxers etc.)

### III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Conceptual model that show the mediator role of religious sensibilities on the relationship between religious rules and hedonic consumption can be seen on Fig.1 below:

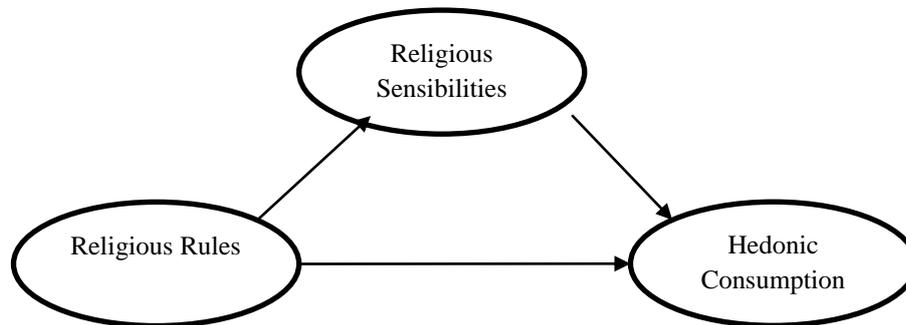


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Research

In the conceptual model, Religious Rules can be accepted as an independent variable and Hedonic Consumption as a dependent variable. The variable Religious Sensibilities affected by religious rules and affects hedonic consumption and can be accepted as a mediator variable. According to the conceptual model of the research directional hypotheses has been generated and explained below:

In Khraim (2010)’s study it is argued that religion has a significant role in consumer behavior. Literature review on the relationship between religious rules and consumer behavior show a relationship between two variables and since hedonic consumption is a specific type of consumer behavior hypothetically there is a relationship between two variables. Especially for Muslim consumer religious rules creates a dominating effect on their product choices and acts as a consumer.

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a negative effect of independent variable (Religious Rules) on dependent variable (Hedonic Consumption).*

The study of Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002) shows that advertisements can trigger of Muslim consumers’ sensibilities on advertisements. Alserhan (2006)’s study shows that Muslim people are over-sensitive on consuming products. Many other studies argue the sensibilities of Muslim people as consumers.

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a negative effect of mediator variable (Religious Sensibilities) on dependent variable (Hedonic Consumption).*

Islamic rules create sensibilities on people. Alam et.al. (2001)’s study shows that religiosity affects sensibilities of Islamic Society.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive effect of religious rules on Islamic sensibilities.

This study is trying to find an answer to the question on the mediating impact of the mediator variable on the negative relationship between independent and dependent variable.

H<sub>4</sub>: Mediator variable (Religious Sensibilities) plays a mediating role in the negative relationship between religious rules and hedonic consumption.

**IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS**

To reach a consensus on the subject a focus group study has been conducted. In their study Grudens-Schuck, Allen, & Larson (2004) explained the fundamentals of focus group study. As also Krueger(1997) mentioned 6-8 participants is preferable for an efficient focus group study. In this study 7 participants attended to each focus group and five groups were constructed. Each group named from G1 to G5. Participants have been chosen between candidates from Muslim population. Demographic distribution of participants can be seen in Table 4:

**Table 4: Demographic Distribution of Participants**

Age	0-18	0	Education	High School or less	0	Religion	Muslim	30	Income Level	Less than 1000 \$	14
	18-25	14		University Student	12		Not specified	5		1000-1500	6
	25-35	12		Bachelors	10		Other	-		1500-2500	10
	35-45	9		Masters	10					2500-3500	3
	45+	0		PhD	3					3500+	2

The usage of focus groups in social sciences has a great interest between researchers. To verify the method many studies have been conducted. The history and nature of the focus group study have been explained (Liamputtong, 2010), group dynamics in focus groups have been argued (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010), conducting focus groups explained (Stewart & Furse, 1985) and reporting focus group data studied (Krueger, 1997; Sim, 1998). Other studies about the usage are Breen (2006); Duggleby (2005); Kidd & Parshall (2000); Morgan (2002); Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran (2009).

As a qualitative research method focus group interviewing is very appropriate for researching motivations, decisions and priorities of the participants (Berg and Lune, 2014). This study also investigates priorities of the consumers between rules and sensibilities.

In the focus group study researcher led each group and in the first step to find an answer to H<sub>1</sub> Islamic rules must be followed in marketing has been argued with the participants. In this step open-ended word association questions have been asked and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) pictures have been given to participants. Thematic apperception test is a type of open ended question research and rely on the storytelling of the attendees about the pictures given on the study (Freed & Eccker, 1946). Summary of the results can be seen in the Table 5 below:

**Table 5: Focus Group Interview Summary for H<sub>1</sub>**

Session	Number of Participants	Inspected Inquiries and Inspection Method	Summary of the Results
G1-5/1	7x5	Word Association Test on Religious Rules and Hedonic Consumption	It is observed that especially words bribery, discrimination, cheating, gambling perceived as sinful and cannot be used in marketing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bribery cannot be used in any marketing efforts of companies but promotions cannot be accepted as bribery.</li> <li>- Any kind of discrimination cannot be used in marketing efforts of companies including advertisements.</li> <li>- What can be accepted as gambling was a discussion issue.</li> <li>- In Islam consuming alcoholic drinks is a sin but marketing alcoholic drinks without marketing communications give consumers free will to buy it and can be acceptable.</li> <li>- Words associated with hedonic consumption also accepted as not right for the religion but created a slighter negative effect on participants.</li> </ul> Hoarding, extravagance and waste can be accepted as a part of hedonic consumption. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hedonic consumption can be controlled by consumers and as a result products associated with hedonic consumption can be marketed.</li> <li>- Marketing communications of hedonic products should not encourage consumers to hoard, unnecessary spending and wasting.</li> </ul>
		Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with photos associated hedonic consumption	Pictures of jewelry, luxury watches, luxury cars and expensive cosmetics given to participants and they created short stories as Muslim consumers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better income levels encourage hedonic consumption.</li> <li>- Negative psychological moods can encourage hedonic consumption.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hedonic consumption can result discrimination.</li> <li>-Advertising can encourage consumers to consume hedonically.</li> </ul>
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At the end of the first session, participants agreed that religious rules have a negative effect on hedonic consumption. H1 of the study accepted. In the second session of the study H2 is tested and the summary of the results can be seen in Table 6 below:

**Table 6: Focus Group Interview Summary for H2**

Session	Number of Participants	Inspected Inquiries and Inspection Method	Summary of the Results
G1-5/2	7x5	Word Association test of religious sensibilities	It is observed that anything against religious sensibilities even if they cause any sin or not should not be marketed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anything against the religion itself, or its holy book and its prophet is the main cause for sensibilities.</li> <li>- Other causes of religious sensibilities are based on the things against religious way of life.</li> <li>- Products that cause the main reasons of religious sensibilities should not be promoted and marketed.</li> <li>- Some hedonic products can trigger of religious sensibilities.</li> <li>- Marketing communications that trigger off religious sensibilities can create sensibilities against the hedonic product marketed.</li> </ul>
		Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with photos associated hedonic consumption	In this part of the study printed advertisements which may trigger of religious sensibilities have shown to participants. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No matter what is marketed marketing communications should not trigger of religious sensibilities.</li> <li>-Hedonic products with marketing communication messages against religious sensibilities create a negative impact on the product.</li> </ul>

At the end of the second session, participants agreed that religious sensibilities have a negative effect on hedonic consumption. H2 of the study accepted. In the third session of the study H3 is tested. In this part of the study word associations and pictures have not been used by the moderator of the group. Summary of the results can be seen in Table 7 below:

**Table 7: Focus Group Interview Summary for H3**

Session	Number of Participants	Inspected Inquiries and Inspection Method	Summary of the Results
G1-5/3	7x5	Discussion of religious rules on religious sensibilities	Moderator of the session leaded participants to share their opinions about the subject one by one. At the end of this process a discussion period have been moderated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Religious rules are not the main reason of religious sensibilities but they have an effect that cannot be neglected.</li> <li>- Even if religious rules are not against all religious sensibilities, products prohibited by religion may cause religious sensibilities.</li> </ul>

At the end of the third session, participants agreed that religious rules have a positive effect on religious sensibilities. H3 of the study accepted. In the fourth session of the study H4 is tested and the summary of the results can be seen in Table 8 below:

**Table 8: Focus Group Interview Summary for H4**

Session	Number of Participants	Inspected Inquiries and Inspection Method	Summary of the Results
G1-5/4	7x5	Discussion of the mediating effect of religious sensibilities in the relationship of religious rules and hedonic consumption	Moderator of the session leaded participants to share their opinions about the subject one by one. At the end of this process a discussion period have been moderated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-As there was a consensus of opinion in the first and second sessions, religious rules and sensibilities have a negative impact on hedonic consumption.</li> <li>- Subjects causing religious sensibilities may have an increasing effect on the relationship between religious rules and religious sensibilities.</li> <li>- Hedonic consumption is prohibited by religion and if these products are against religious sensibilities this situation may increase the effect of religious rules on religious sensibilities.</li> </ul>

At the end of the fourth session, participants agreed that religious sensibilities have a positive effect on the negative relationship between religious rules and hedonic consumption. H4 of the study accepted.

At the end of the four sessions of focus group interview the study reached a consensus on all four hypotheses of the study. This shows that both religious rules and religious sensibilities have a negative effect on hedonic consumption and religious sensibilities may augment the negative effect of religious rules on hedonic consumption.

The Religion Islam prohibits some behavior which can be accepted as hedonic. The results of the focus group interview suggest that anything against the religious sensibilities of the target market may harm the relationship between the consumer and the company.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In this research it is examined the role of religious sensibilities on the relationship of religious rules with hedonic product consumption of Turkish consumers. Even if The Republic of Turkey is a secular country, 99.8 % of its population is Muslim. This presents a huge Muslim market that has religious sensibilities. In Turkey's secular law system, people can consume any product and there are no legitimate restrictions on products against Islamic rules. At the same time people have freewill as consumers to choose not to spend prohibited products by Islam. Since hedonic consumption can be accepted as a sin by Muslim population, religious rules affects their consumption negatively. Religious rules are not the main source of sensibilities but they affect sensibilities positively.

At the same time religious sensibilities also affect negatively the consumption of hedonic products. But this is not the only one effect of religious sensibilities. They play a mediating role on the relationship between rules and consumption.

In this research, a focus group interview study has been conducted with a qualitative research approach. To have justified and reliable study results five group has been constructed with seven participants for each of them. Using a qualitative method may be seen as a limitation of the study but conducting focus group interview with word associations and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is a new approach for this type of qualitative research.

To examine the perceptions of the consumers a survey could be conducted with a larger consumer group and the results could be examined with structural equation modelling but in this subjects asking questions could affect the religious sensibilities of the participants negatively.

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