

Exploring Regulatory Focus through the Lens of Religion and Morality

Dr. Diksha Kapur^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the intricate relationship between regulatory focus, religious commitment, and moral foundations. This study aims to elucidate how individual differences in regulatory focus may influence religious commitment and moral values. The participants comprised organizational managers aged between 32 and 38 years, selected from the Delhi/NCR region. The research utilizes the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins, 2001), Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-30, Graham et al., 2011), which assesses moral foundations across five dimensions: care, fairness, reciprocity, loyalty, and authority, Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10, Worthington et al., 2003). It was theorized that both promotion and prevention regulatory focus play a significant role in religious commitment and moral values. Individuals with promotion orientation would be high in authority and interpersonal religious commitment. Conversely, those with a prevention orientation were expected to demonstrate heightened levels of care, fairness, loyalty, and intrapersonal religious commitment. Regression analysis was employed in this study for a better understanding us.

Keywords: *Regulatory focus, Religious commitment, Moral values, Moral foundations*

Gaining insight into human behavior and decision-making processes requires an understanding of the complex relationships that exist between regulatory emphasis, religious devotion, and moral foundations. People's motivational orientations, whether they are focused on prevention (seeking safety and security) or promotion (seeking growth and advancement), are referred to as regulatory emphasis. The extent of a person's religious convictions, rituals, and participation in religious groups are all included in their religious commitment. The guiding ideals and concepts that influence people's moral decisions and actions are referred to as moral foundations. Researchers can gain a greater understanding of the intricacy of human decision-making by looking at how these aspects interact and impact one another. A person with a promotion-focused regulatory orientation, for example, might place a higher value on personal development and success, which may have an impact on how they approach moral judgment and religious commitment. On the other hand, people who are prevention-focused might place more importance on safety and avoiding danger, which could result in distinct patterns of moral reasoning and religious

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, School of Behavioral & Social Sciences, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies (MRIIRS), Faridabad, Haryana

*Corresponding Author

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devotion. This study aims to investigate how moral foundations and religious commitment are shaped by individual differences in regulatory attention.

What is Regulatory Focus Perspective?

The complex interaction between regulatory emphasis and other characteristics has drawn more and more attention from scholars in recent years. Regulatory focus theory, originating from Higgins (1997) seminal work, proposes that individuals are driven by two distinct motivational systems: promotion focus and prevention focus. Promotion-focused people are motivated to pursue goals and growth, whereas prevention-focused people put safety, security, and risk avoidance first. These motivational orientations have an impact on how people approach activities and goals. The ramifications of regulatory focus theory have been examined in a number of research in a variety of fields, offering insights into how it affects behavior and results. Förster, Liberman, and Higgins (2005) looked into how regulatory focus and subsequent behavior are affected by goal accessibility. They discovered that whereas those primed with prevention-focused goals showed more caution and risk aversion, those primed with promotion-focused goals showed more creativity and risk-taking behavior.

Connecting Regulatory Focus and Morals

An increasing amount of literature has surfaced as scholars explore the relationship between morality and regulatory focus, illuminating the ways in which people's motivational orientations impact their moral judgments, ethical reasoning, and behavioral proclivities. Investigating this link can have important ramifications for encouraging moral behavior, creating successful interventions, and developing a better comprehension of human morality in a number of fields, such as social psychology, leadership, corporate ethics, and consumer behavior. Numerous research have examined the relationship between morality and regulatory emphasis, providing insight into how these motivational orientations affect moral behavior and thinking. The results of Cornwell et al. (2015) demonstrate the many ways in which people's regulatory emphasis can influence their moral judgment and reasoning.

The study highlights the impact of motivational orientations on moral dilemma resolution by showing that people with a promotion focus are more likely to make utilitarian moral judgments, whereas people with a prevention focus are more likely to make deontological judgments. This implies that people's underlying regulatory focus may have an impact on how they prioritize outcomes over moral observance, providing important insights into the processes that underlie moral decision-making. Expanding on this knowledge, Lee and Aaker's (2004) study explores how regulatory fit affects moral judgment techniques.

According to their findings, moral judgments and actions can be significantly influenced by how people's regulatory attention and the way persuasive messages are presented. Moral communications improve people's processing fluency and persuasion efficacy when they align with their regulatory emphasis. This suggests that people might be more open to moral arguments that support their motivational orientation, providing a possible way to improve therapies and techniques for moral persuasion. Moreover, the consequences of a regulatory focus go beyond personal choices to include organizational ethics and leadership conduct.

Linking Regulatory Focus and Religious Commitment

Psychological research has focused on the impact of regulatory concentration on religious commitment (Preston & Wegner, 2009; Sassenberg & Woltin, 2009). According to research by Lee and Aaker (2004), religious messages gain persuasiveness and may even increase

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religious participation and commitment when they are in line with people's regulatory focus. In a similar vein, Briñol, Petty, and Wheeler (2006) discovered that those who have a promotion emphasis are more likely to see religious rituals as chances for personal development, whereas people who have a preventive focus see them as a way to feel safe and secure. According to Clarkson and Tormala (2010), people who have a promotion emphasis might place greater importance on spiritual development and inquiry, whereas people who have a preventive focus might follow religious laws and customs more strictly.

The impact of regulatory focus on moral decision-making in religious situations was examined by Travaglino and Abrams (2016), who suggested that people's regulatory focus may influence how they respond to moral quandaries with religious ramifications. Furthermore, Worthington and Scherer (2004) examined the function of regulatory focus in religious coping strategies and found that while prevention-focused people may turn to religious rituals and observance of religious laws for solace and security, promotion-focused people may actively solve problems and pursue spirituality. Together, these studies highlight the importance of regulatory emphasis in comprehending people's religious commitment, beliefs, and behaviors. They also provide insightful information about the intricate relationship between religious elements and motivational orientations.

Organizations can use tactics to foster ethical leadership and advance an integrity and accountability culture by comprehending how regulatory focus affects leaders' actions and decision-making processes. Leaders who are conscious of their regulatory focus can use it to encourage moral behavior from their staff, develop a feeling of mission and common values, and establish a setting that supports moral decision-making. Therefore, incorporating regulatory focus theory into organizational policy and leadership development programs can help to uphold high ethical standards inside organizations and encourage ethical behavior.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the relationship religious commitment in both promotion and prevention regulatory focus among a diverse sample of individuals.
- To examine the differential impact of moral values on promotion regulatory focus.

METHOD

Sample

The sample comprised managers from organizations in the Delhi/NCR region, selected using purposive sampling. All participants had a minimum of five years of work experience and were aged between 32 and 38 years. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Tools Used

- **Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins, 2001):** The 11-item questionnaire asks you to rate how frequently various life events have actually occurred. A 5-point likert scale was used. The RFQ produces separate scores for prevention and promotion, each ranging from 1 to 5. The promotion subscale has 3 reverse-scored items (Q1, Q9, and Q11) and the preventive subscale has 4 reverse-scored questions (Q2, Q4, Q6 and Q8). Five questions focus on prevention, while six questions quantify promotion.
- **Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-30, Graham et al., 2011):** The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-30) is a psychological assessment tool developed

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by Jesse Graham and colleagues. It aims to measure individuals' moral intuitions and the extent to which they prioritize various moral foundations in their decision making and judgment processes. The questionnaire is based on the theory of moral foundations, which suggests that moral reasoning is shaped by innate psychological modules that evolved to address recurring challenges in human social life. The MFQ-30 consists of 30 statements that cover five moral foundations- harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Respondents rate each statement on a 5-point scale indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with it. By analyzing individuals' responses, researchers can gain insights into their moral psychology and the relative importance they assign to different moral concerns.

- **Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10, Worthington et al., 2003):** The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) is a psychometric instrument designed to measure an individual's level of religious commitment. It is developed by Everett Worthington and colleagues in 2003. The RCI-10 consists of 10 items that cover different aspects of religious commitment, including beliefs, practices, and emotional investment in religious activities. Respondents rate each item on a 5 point scale, typically ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, indicating the extent to which they endorse each statement. The inventory is structured to capture both internal aspects of religious commitment, such as personal beliefs and spirituality, as well as external manifestations, such as participation in religious rituals and activities.

Transparency and openness

For this study, purposive sampling was used. According to the inclusion requirements, participants had to be managers employed by Delhi/NCR-based companies, have at least five years of experience, and be between the ages of thirty-two and thirty-eight. Those who did not fit these requirements were not allowed to participate in the study. The study adhered to the Journal of Applied Psychology's methodological checklist. All study materials, analytical code, and data are kept private. SPSS version 27.0 was used to analyze the data. Note that the analysis and study design were not preregistered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between people's emphasis orientations on prevention and promotion and their levels of intrapersonal and interpersonal religious commitment, as well as their moral reasoning in the important areas of authority/respect, harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, and in-group/loyalty. We aimed to advance knowledge of the relationship between regulatory attitudes and ethical and religious views by investigating these relationships. Additionally, there are two subsections within this section: regression analysis and descriptive statistics.

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Table 1. Means & Standard Deviations of all the variables used in the study. (N=258)

S.no.	Variable	Promotion Orientation (129)		Prevention Orientation (129)		T	Sig.
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
1	Interpersonal religious commitment	30.12	6.52	25.67	8.94	4.57	0.00
2	Intrapersonal religious commitment	22.51	9.87	32.94	16.76	6.08	0.00
3	Harm/Care	14.62	5.34	20.72	6.27	8.40	0.00
4	Fairness/ Reciprocity	14.48	4.96	19.16	5.73	0.24	0.00
5	Ingroup/ Loyalty	13.58	5.11	19.78	6.05	8.49	0.00
6	Authority/ Respect	24.79	4.39	17.71	6.83	9.90	0.00

Source: Owner

According to the study's findings, there are notable distinctions between managers who have a promotion orientation and those who have a prevention orientation in terms of several aspects of moral and religious commitment. Based on their regulatory focus, these distinctions show how these managers interact with religion and moral principles in different ways.

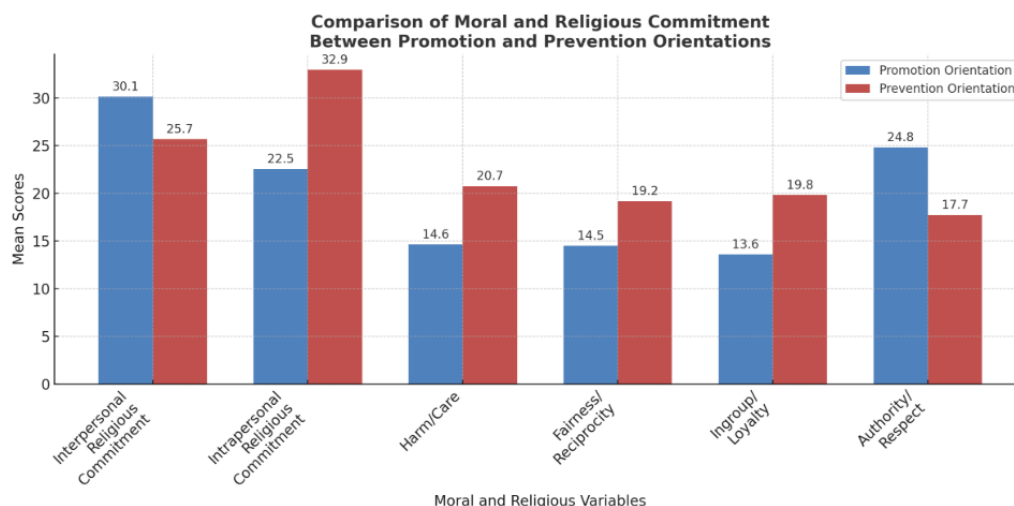
Interpersonal religious commitment was substantially higher among promotion-oriented managers ($M = 30.12$, $SD = 6.52$) than among prevention-oriented managers ($M = 25.67$, $SD = 8.94$; $t = 4.57$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that managers who are motivated by promotion use religion as a social tool, appreciating ritualized religious activities and outside approval. On the other hand, those who prioritized prevention showed greater intrapersonal religious devotion ($M = 32.94$, $SD = 16.76$) than those who prioritized promotion ($M = 22.51$, $SD = 9.87$; $t = 6.08$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that managers who prioritize prevention internalize religion as a very ethical and personal framework that supports their focus on responsibility and duty.

Prevention-oriented managers scored higher on harm/care ($M = 20.72$, $SD = 6.27$) than promotion-oriented managers ($M = 14.62$, $SD = 5.34$; $t = 8.40$, $p < 0.001$) when it came to moral principles. Fairness/reciprocity was also more important to prevention-focused managers ($M = 19.16$, $SD = 5.73$) than to promotion-focused managers ($M = 14.48$, $SD = 4.96$; $t = 10.24$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that managers with a preventative focus place a higher priority on moral duties pertaining to justice and compassion, which is consistent with their inclination toward security-driven ethical considerations in general. Promotion-oriented managers, on the other hand, adhered to authority/respect more strongly ($M = 24.79$, $SD = 4.39$) than prevention-oriented managers ($M = 17.71$, $SD = 6.83$; $t = 9.90$, $p < 0.001$).

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This implies that managers who are promotion-focused appreciate authoritative religious advice and hierarchical institutions, which helps them achieve their objective of organized participation and outside approval in religious contexts.

Furthermore, ingroup/loyalty values were greater for prevention-oriented managers ($M = 19.78$, $SD = 6.05$) than for promotion-oriented managers ($M = 13.58$, $SD = 5.11$; $t = 8.49$, $p < 0.001$). According to this research, those who prioritize prevention place a strong emphasis on belonging and loyalty within their religious group, which strengthens their dedication to safety and morality based on duty.



Source: Owner

Figure 1. Differences in Religious Commitment and Moral Foundations Between Promotion- and Prevention-Oriented Individuals: Based on regulatory focus orientation, mean scores for six important variables reveal unique patterns of moral and religious values engagement.

These results are consistent with Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997), which distinguishes between prevention-oriented managers who prioritize security, duty, and obligation and promotion-oriented managers who prioritize progress, ambitions, and idealistic ideals. The findings show that while prevention-focused managers use religion as an internal guiding principle based on compassion, justice, and loyalty, promotion-focused managers use it as a structured social tool that emphasizes external authority and validation.

These findings also lend credence to the Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007), which holds that although promotion-oriented managers place a higher priority on values like authority and structured commitment, prevention-oriented managers are more likely to stress harm/care, fairness, and loyalty. The greater harm/care and fairness ratings of prevention-focused managers indicate that they view religion values as a moral compass for moral conduct.

These results also align with the distinction made by Batson et al. (1993) between extrinsic (social) and intrinsic (personal) religious motivation. While prevention-focused managers, who score higher on intrapersonal religious commitment, utilize religion as a deeply personal moral framework, promotion-focused managers, who score higher on interpersonal religious commitment, practice religion for social reasons. Furthermore, Pargament (1997)

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emphasizes that moral judgment and coping strategies are significantly influenced by religious devotion.

This concept is furthered by the current study, which shows that whereas prevention-oriented people rely on religious principles for self-discipline and ethical requirements, promotion-oriented people use religious structures for outside guidance and validation. All things considered, these findings shed light on how people with various regulatory orientations interact with moral and religious principles, providing a sophisticated comprehension of the psychological processes underlying morality and religious devotion.

Implications

These results have significant ramifications for comprehending how regulatory attention affects moral and religious commitment. They contend that a person's attitude toward religion and morality depends on whether they follow their duties (prevention) or strive for goals (promotion). To obtain a more thorough grasp of religious commitment and moral ideals, future studies should investigate how these attitudes differ across various cultural, religious, and demographic situations. Further research can also look at how religious beliefs and practices are influenced by the interaction of regulatory focus with other personality factors. Religious organizations, legislators, and academics may be better able to address the various ways that people interact with religion and morality if they have a greater understanding of these dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes how regulatory focus has a major impact on moral and religious commitment. While prevention-oriented people absorb religious ideas as intensely personal ethical principles, promotion-oriented people typically use religion as an external, structured framework that offers social integration and hierarchical guidance. These differences support the notion that people's regulatory orientations influence how they approach moral principles and religious beliefs, which is consistent with both the Regulatory Focus Theory and the Moral Foundations Theory.

The results have significant ramifications for comprehending how moral principles and religious teachings might be modified to fit various psychological types. For example, when creating programs and messaging to improve participation and moral development, religious communities and organizations may find it helpful to take these orientations into account. How these orientations affect religious conduct in various denominational and cultural contexts should be further investigated in future studies. Longitudinal research may also shed further light on the ways in which religious commitment and regulatory focus change over time. This study offers important insights for academics, religious practitioners, and politicians alike by combining concepts from psychology and religious studies. This broadens our understanding of how individual characteristics influence religious participation and moral reasoning.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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