

# The mall as a sanctuary: Study finds holiday shopping outlets aren't just shrines to spending

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An international study of holiday shopping and religion finds that dominant religious groups are more likely to experience "consumption mass hysteria" while shoppers in minority religions may view malls and stores much differently: as central meeting places that "can play an active role in the creation of a sacred event."

The study, co-authored by Temple University Fox School of Business marketing professor Ayalla Ruvio, found that holiday consumption in dominant religious settings – such as Christians in the U.S. or Jews in Israel – can lead to greater frenzy and a "social tidal wave" that pushes people to excess during the holidays.

The researchers also found that consumers in minority or immigrant religions tend to seek the company of those who share their beliefs during holidays. For some, shopping outlets aren't shrines to spending. Instead, they can offer a gathering place for a "critical mass" in a [religion](#) to interact and temporarily overcome their minority religious status – creating a type of "marketplace sacralization."

"In effect, the marketplace, though normally viewed as profane and commercial, can, through the collective actions of religious devotees, be transformed into ... a place of worship and fellowship," the authors wrote.

The researchers conducted 41 in-depth, in-home interviews with Muslims, Jews and Christians in the United States, Israel and Tunisia to examine consumers' behavior when their given religion represents either a majority, minority or immigrant faith. For example, Christians are a religious majority in the U.S., a minority in Israel, and an immigrant religion in Tunisia.

Some minority-religion consumers said they found comfort in marketplaces, or products, shared by those with similar beliefs. In one interview, a member of the Tunisian Jewish community used the animated Prince of Egypt movie to assist in his family's Passover observance. "Rather than the sacred being invaded by the secular, the sacred comes to inhabit the secular," the authors found.

In countries where a religious group was in the majority, the researchers found that the dominant religion experienced "[consumption](#) mass hysteria," which led to consequences of debt, drunkenness and overeating. Dominant religions also tend to view religious holidays as a time of national or ethnic glory and "perfection," while minority and immigrant religions report a stronger desire to preserve their traditions and customs, meaning these groups may be more orthodox in their observances.

Despite the many differences, the study found that, in every context and across the religious groups, participants emphasized charity and expressed the spiritual importance of helping others during the central holy days of Christmas, Ramadan and Passover.

**More information:** The study, "Breaking bread with Abraham's children: Christians, Jews and Muslims' holiday consumption in dominant, minority and diasporic communities," was published this year in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science.

Provided by Temple University

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