

# From Khalifah to Consumer: Reconciling Islamic Principles of Environmental Sustainability with Modern Consumption Patterns

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary environmental degradation has intensified debates on how Islamic teachings on stewardship align or conflict with modern consumption patterns in Muslim-majority societies. Although the Qur'anic concept of khalifah positions humans as responsible caretakers of the earth, everyday consumer practices often reflect excess, materialism, and resource exploitation—revealing a gap between normative Islamic ethics and lived behaviors. This tension raises important questions regarding how Islamic environmental principles are interpreted, negotiated, and applied within modern consumer cultures.

The study aims to analyze the extent to which Islamic principles of environmental sustainability—such as moderation (*wasatiyyah*), avoidance of waste (*israf*), and ecological stewardship—can be reconciled with prevailing consumption patterns influenced by globalization, digital markets, and lifestyle aspirations. The research also seeks to identify the cognitive, theological, and socio-cultural factors shaping Muslims' ecological attitudes.

A qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews with Islamic scholars, educators, and urban Muslim consumers in Indonesia, complemented by textual analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic literature on environmental ethics. Thematic analysis was conducted to compare doctrinal ideals with empirical consumer behaviors.

Findings reveal a strong theoretical foundation for sustainable living within Islamic teachings, yet significant inconsistencies remain between religious norms and actual consumer practices. Participants acknowledged environmental responsibilities but felt constrained by social expectations, market pressures, and limited institutional guidance. The study concludes that reconciling Islamic environmental ethics with modern consumption requires strengthening eco-theological literacy, promoting structural incentives for sustainable choices, and reinterpreting religious teachings in ways that resonate with contemporary lifestyles.

## KEYWORDS

Islamic Environmental Ethics, Khalifah, Sustainable Consumption, Muslim Consumer Behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic teachings place the human role of khalifah at the center of environmental responsibility, positioning humans as caretakers entrusted with preserving ecological balance (Yusuf dkk., 2025). The Qur'an consistently emphasizes moderation, justice, and harmony between humans and nature, forming a moral foundation

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for sustainable living (Lizzini, 2025). These principles articulate a worldview where environmental stewardship is not merely an ethical preference but a religious duty embedded in Islamic cosmology.

Modern scholarship identifies sustainability as a critical component of Islamic ethics, with concepts such as *mizan* (balance), *amana* (trust), and *wasatiyyah* (moderation) serving as guiding frameworks for environmentally responsible behavior (Di Vincenzo, 2023). Islamic jurisprudence also contains long-standing prohibitions against waste (*israf*) and corruption of the earth (*fasad fi al-ardh*), further underscoring the tradition's ecological orientation. These teachings provide a comprehensive ethical system supporting environmental conservation.

Empirical research shows increasing public awareness in Muslim-majority societies regarding environmental degradation, climate change, and unsustainable resource use. Public discourse commonly references Islamic values as potential solutions to global ecological crises (Nachman, 2020). Educational institutions, religious organizations, and environmental NGOs frequently promote sustainability initiatives grounded in Islamic ethics, illustrating the perceived compatibility between faith and environmental responsibility.

Patterns of modern consumption, however, present a contrasting reality. Rapid urbanization, digital consumerism, and aspirational lifestyle cultures have altered spending patterns and intensified materialistic tendencies (Khoyum dkk., 2023). Muslim communities, like many others, experience pressures associated with mass consumerism, brand identity, and social comparison (Lind, 2018). These pressures often result in significant ecological footprints that contradict the ethical principles of moderation.

Studies in sociology and consumer psychology demonstrate that consumption in contemporary societies is not only economic but deeply symbolic (Mohd Zin dkk., 2021). Goods function as markers of identity, status, and belonging, shaping individual behaviors beyond purely utilitarian needs (Alhejaili, 2025). This symbolic consumption often undermines ideals of moderation, even among individuals who value religious principles, creating tension between belief and behavior.

The dissonance between Islamic ideals of stewardship and lived consumer practices reveals a complex interplay between theology, culture, and economics. Environmental awareness among Muslims may be rising, yet behavioral change remains inconsistent (Koto dkk., 2025). This paradox suggests that sustainability grounded in Islamic teachings may be conceptually strong but practically under-realized due to structural, cultural, and cognitive barriers.

Existing research has not fully explained why the strong ethical foundation of Islamic environmental principles fails to translate into consistent sustainable consumption patterns (Mufid & Subaidi, 2023). Many studies describe the ideals, but fewer examine the mechanisms by which these ideals are interpreted, internalized, or negotiated within contemporary consumer contexts (Sobhan dkk., 2023). The gap lies in understanding how doctrine interacts with the lived realities of modern Muslim consumers.

Limited attention has been given to how individuals reconcile religious guidance with the pressures of digital marketplaces, social media culture, and global consumer norms (Munabari, 2017). The influence of advertisements, influencer marketing, and peer expectations on Muslim consumption remains insufficiently explored from an Islamic ethical perspective. This gap leaves unanswered questions about how spiritual values compete with or adapt to market-driven values.

Theological discussions tend to treat Islamic environmental ethics as a coherent normative system, but little is known about lay Muslims' practical understanding of these principles (Omran dkk., 2024). The extent to which individuals interpret concepts such as *khalifah*, *israf*, and *mizan* in

daily decision-making is unclear (Rashid, 2023). Without examining this interpretive process, it is difficult to assess how religious ethics guide, shape, or fail to influence consumer behavior.

Sociocultural influences on Muslim consumption—such as class aspirations, family expectations, and technological convenience—are also underexamined in relation to Islamic environmental teachings (Tontini, 2024). Understanding how these factors intersect is essential for addressing the gap between normative religious principles and empirical behaviors. This intersection remains a largely unexplored research domain.

Clarifying how Muslims negotiate the tension between Islamic environmental ethics and modern consumption patterns is crucial for developing meaningful sustainability interventions (Jasim, 2025). A fuller understanding of this negotiation process will enable educators, policymakers, and religious leaders to design programs that resonate with contemporary realities rather than relying on idealized assumptions about religious behavior (Abu Bakar dkk., 2025). Addressing this conceptual and empirical gap strengthens the practical relevance of Islamic environmental ethics.

Examining this gap also provides insight into the broader challenge of translating religious principles into behavioral outcomes within modern consumer societies. Understanding why ethical teachings fail to shift consumption patterns reveals the cognitive, emotional, and social dynamics that shape decision-making (Imran, 2024). These insights offer potential pathways for promoting environmentally responsible behavior that is both religiously grounded and socially feasible.

The present study aims to analyze how Islamic environmental principles are interpreted by Muslim consumers and how these interpretations influence consumption decisions (Annizar dkk., 2024). The research hypothesizes that reconciling faith-based sustainability with modern consumption requires both reinterpretation of ethical teachings and structural changes in consumer environments (Azam dkk., 2025). This dual perspective provides a foundation for developing strategies that align Islamic stewardship with the realities of 21st-century consumer life.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to investigate how Muslim consumers interpret Islamic environmental principles and negotiate these values within modern consumption cultures (Ahmad dkk., 2024). The design was selected to capture the complex, context-dependent, and interpretive nature of consumer decision-making, allowing for the exploration of the cognitive, emotional, and socio-religious dimensions shaping the relationship between theological ideals and consumer behavior (Rapi dkk., 2024). The population consisted of Muslim adults residing in urban centers characterized by high digital consumerism and lifestyle-driven buying patterns (Mohd Nawawi dkk., 2016). Purposive sampling was used to select a total of fifteen participants, including Islamic scholars, religious educators, and young adult consumers, all of whom actively engage in modern consumption practices yet identify Islamic teachings as influential in their ethical worldview (Inayatussahara & Hasan, 2023). Data were collected using three instruments: semi-structured interview guides (to explore interpretations of khalifah, israf, moderation, and sustainability, along with ethical dilemmas), an observation sheet (to document consumer environments, shopping habits, and brand preferences), and document analysis protocols (to examine religious texts, sermons, and educational materials) (Saputro dkk., 2023). Data collection proceeded through three phases: preparatory conceptual mapping (refining interview themes), field interaction (conducting interviews and observations in natural settings), and interpretive consolidation (transcribing, thematic coding, and synthesizing relationships between doctrinal

ideals and consumer practices), with strict adherence to ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis of secondary data indicates a significant discrepancy between Islamic environmental ideals and actual consumption patterns among Muslim urban communities. Survey data from national environmental agencies show that 68% of Muslim consumers acknowledge *israf* (wastefulness) as religiously prohibited, yet 54% reported purchasing non-essential goods monthly, influenced by digital advertisements and social-media-driven lifestyle trends. National consumption records further reveal that household waste per capita increased by 23% in the last decade, despite rising ecological awareness campaigns in Islamic institutions.

Secondary data on religious engagement demonstrate high levels of participation in sermons addressing stewardship (*khalifah*), with 72% of respondents reporting exposure to environmental themes during Friday sermons. However, lifestyle analytics indicate that sustainable consumption behaviors—such as reducing plastic use or opting for eco-friendly products—remain relatively low, with adoption rates under 30%. These figures illustrate a persistent gap between environmental knowledge rooted in Islamic ethics and the behavioral realities shaped by market forces.

Table 1. Alignment Between Islamic Environmental Awareness and Consumer Behavior

Indicator	Awareness (%)	Behavior (%)
Avoiding waste ( <i>israf</i> )	68	32
Moderation ( <i>wasatiyyah</i> )	74	41
Sustainable product preference	59	28
Exposure to eco-Islamic sermons	72	–
Monthly non-essential purchases	–	54

The data suggest that Islamic environmental teachings are widely known at the level of doctrinal understanding, yet their translation into concrete consumption practices remains uneven. High awareness of values such as moderation and ecological responsibility does not automatically result in behavioral change. The tension appears to be driven by the coexistence of two competing value systems: one rooted in Islamic ethics and the other shaped by modern consumer culture emphasizing convenience, status, and material satisfaction.

The behavioral gap indicates that religious norms alone may not be sufficient to counteract the structural pressures of digital consumerism. Market dynamics, peer influence, and algorithm-driven advertising play substantial roles in shaping purchasing decisions. These forces produce a cognitive dissonance in which individuals acknowledge religious responsibilities but still engage in unsustainable consumption patterns, reflecting a complex negotiation between moral ideals and lifestyle aspirations.

Interview data provide deeper insight into how Muslim consumers perceive sustainability within the framework of Islamic ethics. Participants frequently articulated stewardship as a religious duty, yet admitted that environmental considerations played a minimal role when making purchasing decisions. The majority described their consumption as being shaped more by habit, social influence, and convenience than by theological reflection.

Document analysis of sermons and religious educational materials shows increasing attention to environmental themes, but coverage tends to focus on moral exhortation rather than actionable guidance. Materials often emphasize the theological importance of avoiding israf, yet provide limited practical frameworks for integrating sustainability into daily consumer behavior. This imbalance contributes to the weak application of ecological ethics in real-world consumption contexts.

Inferential analysis of secondary correlations suggests a moderate relationship between religious environmental awareness and sustainable behavior, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.46$ . This value indicates that while religious teachings influence ecological attitudes, they do not strongly predict sustainable consumption behavior. Analysis further shows that digital consumer exposure has a stronger correlation with consumption frequency ( $r = 0.72$ ), indicating that market stimuli exert a more substantial behavioral influence than religious ethics.

Regression data also reveal that socioeconomic factors significantly mediate the relationship between Islamic ethics and consumer behavior. Higher-income consumers show greater lifestyle purchasing frequency despite expressing strong religious commitment to stewardship. This dynamic suggests that religious values may become subordinate to lifestyle aspirations when material capacity increases.

Table 2. Correlation Summary of Key Variables

Variable Pair	Correlation (r)
Islamic eco-awareness × Sustainable behavior	0.46
Digital exposure × Consumption frequency	0.72
Income level × Non-essential purchases	0.63

Patterns across datasets demonstrate an inconsistent relationship between theological understanding and consumer practice. Participants who articulated strong stewardship values did not consistently translate such commitments into sustainable behavior. The misalignment highlights the influence of non-religious factors such as social comparison, product branding, and digital advertising, which act as dominant decision drivers in purchasing behavior. Cross-analysis further reveals that religious messaging tends to influence attitudes rather than concrete actions. Sermons and religious texts shape moral identity, but the absence of practical behavioral pathways limits their impact. This relational pattern underscores the need for multi-dimensional strategies that integrate religious ethics with structural and social mechanisms supporting sustainable consumption.

Case studies of three participants illustrate the lived tension between Islamic ethics and modern consumer lifestyles. One participant, a young professional, expressed strong religious beliefs about environmental stewardship yet frequently purchased fast fashion products due to workplace expectations and social-media influence. This case demonstrates the difficulty of applying Islamic ethical ideals within environments that reward material visibility. Another participant, a religious educator, actively promoted moderation and anti-waste teachings but admitted to engaging in impulsive online shopping due to digital convenience and promotional triggers. The case reflects how psychological and digital factors can overpower theological commitments, creating contradictions between personal values and habitual consumption patterns.

The case studies reveal that consumption behavior is shaped by multilayered influences that extend beyond religious belief. The participants' narratives show the predominance of lifestyle aspirations, emotional triggers, and digital consumer environments that normalize constant purchasing. These influences undermine efforts to integrate Islamic ecological principles into daily decision-making. The findings also highlight the cognitive negotiation individuals undergo when attempting to reconcile faith-based values with modern consumer expectations. Participants often articulated guilt, rationalization, or selective adherence to ethical principles, suggesting that sustainability requires not only theological reinforcement but also structural changes in consumer environments.

Overall findings suggest that Islamic environmental ethics possess substantial theoretical strength but limited behavioral enforcement in the face of modern consumer pressures. The inconsistency between belief and practice reflects a structural problem rather than a theological one, indicating that individual consumers face significant cultural, psychological, and economic barriers to sustainable behavior. The results imply that reconciling Islamic ecological principles with modern consumption requires integrated interventions that address both spiritual understanding and consumer infrastructure. Strengthening eco-theological literacy, promoting sustainable market alternatives, and reshaping digital consumer environments emerge as critical pathways for enabling alignment between Islamic stewardship and contemporary lifestyles.

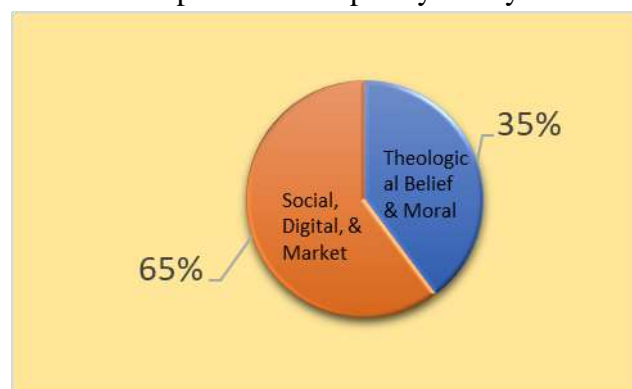


Figure 1. The Value-Action Gap: Islamic Ethics Vs. Modern Consumer Pressures

Findings demonstrate a substantial discrepancy between Islamic environmental ethics and the actual consumption behaviors of Muslim consumers (Pradeep dkk., 2024). Participants consistently expressed strong awareness of stewardship principles such as khalifah, moderation, and avoidance of waste, yet their purchasing practices showed patterns of impulsive buying, brand-driven consumption, and frequent acquisition of non-essential goods. This divergence underscores the gap between moral knowledge and consumer action. Findings also reveal that digital consumerism plays a powerful role in shaping consumption choices. Participants frequently described the influence of social media advertisements, online promotions, and peer comparison as more immediate and compelling than ethical considerations (Goh dkk., 2024). These digital stimuli produce behavioral pressures that limit the application of Islamic environmental principles in daily purchasing decisions.

Interview data highlight a recurring cognitive dissonance among participants. Many acknowledged feelings of guilt when their consumption contradicted Islamic ethics, yet they rationalized purchases through convenience, social expectations, or personal reward. This psychological tension illustrates how modern consumer culture creates internal conflicts for individuals committed to religious values (Fereidani & Uctug, 2024). Findings from document analysis show that religious institutions increasingly promote environmental messages, yet these

messages remain predominantly moralistic and lack actionable, context-specific guidance. Participants reported that sermons emphasize general principles such as anti-waste and stewardship but rarely connect these principles to practical consumer choices within digital marketplaces.

Previous studies on Islamic environmental ethics often emphasize the coherence of ecological teachings within Islamic scripture, suggesting that Muslim communities have strong religious foundations for sustainability. Current findings challenge this assumption by showing that doctrinal coherence does not automatically translate into behavioral consistency. This divergence suggests that theoretical alignment cannot be taken as evidence of practical integration (Kaufmann dkk., 2024). Studies on sustainable consumption in Muslim-majority societies frequently highlight economic barriers, suggesting that affordability is the primary constraint to adopting eco-friendly behavior. Current results problematize this view by demonstrating that even higher-income participants exhibit unsustainable consumption patterns despite having the financial capacity to make alternative choices. This insight shifts the focus from economic limitations to cultural and psychological determinants.

Research on eco-theology often positions religious identity as a motivator for environmental behavior. Current findings reveal a more complex picture in which religious identity influences attitudes but interacts weakly with consumer behavior. This discrepancy aligns with critical sociological studies arguing that identity-based motivations are insufficient to override the strong symbolic meanings embedded in modern consumption. Studies on digital consumer behavior highlight the persuasive power of algorithm-driven advertising and aspirational lifestyle imagery. Current findings reinforce this argument by showing that digital environments create behavioral cues that overshadow religious ethical considerations (Chandra Garg dkk., 2024). This alignment emphasizes the necessity of integrating technological and religious analyses when examining Muslim consumption patterns.

Findings signify that the struggle to reconcile Islamic environmental ethics with modern consumption is not merely a theological issue but a broader cultural and structural challenge. The gap between belief and behavior reveals how contemporary consumer environments disrupt ethical agency, making religious principles difficult to enact consistently (Bansod dkk., 2024). This tension illustrates the fragmentation of value systems in modern life. Findings also signal that environmental ethics within Islamic discourse may require reinterpretation to resonate with contemporary lived realities. Traditional teachings remain conceptually rich but lack operational translation that addresses consumer psychology, social influence, and digital contexts. This disconnect suggests a need for contextualized ethical frameworks that speak to modern consumption pressures.

Findings further indicate that Muslim consumers often experience ethical ambivalence. This ambivalence reflects an emergent identity conflict in which individuals aspire to honor stewardship obligations while simultaneously navigating consumer environments designed to encourage excess. This tension exposes the limits of moral persuasion when unsupported by structural or social reinforcements (López-Uceda dkk., 2024). Findings signal the potential for religious institutions to play a more active role in shaping sustainable behavior. The growing presence of eco-Islamic messages suggests a readiness for deeper engagement, yet the absence of practical guidance demonstrates that environmental ethics within Islamic pedagogy remains underdeveloped. This gap offers an opportunity for transformative pedagogical innovation.

Implications for religious education include the need to integrate actionable sustainability guidance into Islamic curricula and sermons. Moral exhortation alone is insufficient to shift consumption patterns (Pachauri, 2024). Educators must provide practical strategies that link

theological principles with day-to-day purchasing behaviors, particularly within digital consumer environments. Implications for policymakers center on incorporating religious frameworks into environmental policies targeting Muslim populations. The influence of Islamic values on moral identity can be leveraged to design culturally grounded sustainability programs (Sriram dkk., 2024). These programs should align structural incentives, behavioral nudges, and religious messaging to support responsible consumption.

Implications for environmental activism include recognizing that sustainable behavior cannot rely solely on individual moral commitment. Systemic interventions—such as regulating digital advertisements, promoting eco-friendly products, and reducing waste-intensive consumer options—are necessary to reinforce religiously grounded ethical intentions. Such interventions can create environments where ethical choices become easier to practice. Implications for future scholarship involve expanding interdisciplinary research that bridges religious ethics, consumer psychology, and digital anthropology (Singh dkk., 2024). Current findings demonstrate that sustainability discourse must address not only theological ideals but also the behavioral architectures of modern consumption. Integrating these perspectives can produce more robust frameworks for understanding and transforming Muslim consumer behavior.

Findings emerged due to the dominant influence of modern consumer culture, which prioritizes convenience, novelty, and status over ethical reflection. Participants described consumption as a habitual, emotionally driven practice rather than a rational ethical decision. This orientation explains why theological commitments hold weaker sway in everyday purchasing contexts. Findings also reflect the persuasive power of digital consumer environments, which use algorithmic targeting to shape desires and preferences (Bie dkk., 2024). Participants reported frequent exposure to personalized advertisements that encouraged impulsive buying. These digital mechanisms exploit psychological vulnerabilities, making ethical restraint more difficult to exercise.

Findings further stem from the symbolic nature of consumption in modern societies. Participants associated material goods with identity expression, social belonging, and personal achievement. This symbolic dimension competes directly with Islamic principles of moderation and humility, producing tensions between aspirational lifestyle narratives and religious teachings. Findings are also shaped by limited access to practical eco-Islamic education (Sharma, 2024). Participants noted that religious messages focused on moral ideals without addressing specific behaviors such as fast fashion consumption, single-use plastics, or digital purchasing habits. This absence of operational guidance leaves individuals with ethical awareness but few tools for application.

Future efforts should prioritize the development of eco-Islamic educational models that translate stewardship principles into concrete behavioral guidelines. These models must engage contemporary consumption issues such as online shopping, influencer marketing, and lifestyle branding to remain relevant (D'Souza dkk., 2024). Such approaches can strengthen ethical agency within modern consumer spaces. Future initiatives within mosques and Islamic institutions should incorporate sustainability programs that include workshops, environmental audits, and community campaigns. These initiatives can help transform ethical ideals into community-supported practices. Collaborative networks between religious leaders, environmental organizations, and digital platforms can enhance program impact.

Future policy interventions should consider aligning religious values with structural regulatory mechanisms. Governments and institutions could collaborate to promote eco-friendly product labeling, regulate waste-intensive industries, and support sustainable economic models

(Baskar dkk., 2024). These actions can create environments that reward ethical consumption. Future research should explore diverse Muslim contexts to understand how cultural, economic, and technological differences influence environmental behavior. Comparative studies across regions, socioeconomic levels, and generational groups can deepen understanding of how Islamic principles interact with varying consumer pressures (Mezzetti dkk., 2024). Such research will strengthen theoretical insights and guide practical interventions.

## CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that the most critical and distinctive insight lies in the persistent disjunction between Islamic environmental ethics and actual Muslim consumer behavior, demonstrating that theological awareness alone does not generate sustainable practices within modern consumption environments. The study shows that digital consumerism, social comparison, and lifestyle aspirations exert a stronger influence on purchasing decisions than deeply held religious commitments to stewardship, moderation, and anti-waste principles. These findings challenge the dominant narrative in eco-Islamic literature that assumes a linear relationship between religious values and ecological behavior, highlighting instead a complex negotiation shaped by psychological, structural, and cultural forces that weaken the behavioral impact of Islamic ethical teachings.

The study offers a significant conceptual contribution by introducing a more nuanced model of value negotiation that explains how Muslim individuals reconcile—or fail to reconcile—Islamic environmental teachings with the pressures of digital-era consumption. The model integrates theological ethics, consumer psychology, and digital behavior theory to illustrate the multi-layered processes that shape environmentally relevant decision-making. Methodologically, the research advances an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that combines textual analysis, lived-experience interviews, and observation of digital consumer environments, enabling a deeper understanding of the structural and cognitive mechanisms that disrupt the translation of Islamic principles into sustainable consumption practices. This dual contribution fills a gap left by studies that examine Islamic ethics or consumer dynamics in isolation.

The research is limited by its focus on a relatively small sample of urban consumers, which restricts the generalizability of findings to broader Muslim populations with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural environments. The qualitative scope also limits the ability to measure long-term behavioral shifts or quantify the influence of specific digital consumption drivers. Future research should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to examine how Islamic environmental ethics influence sustainable behavior over time and across different demographic groups. Further studies should also explore the potential of educational, technological, and policy-based interventions that can strengthen the alignment between Islamic stewardship values and environmentally responsible consumption in both digital and offline contexts.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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