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HOW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS SHAPE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: AN EXPLORATORY AND PURELY QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CHRISTIAN, MUSLIM, AND TRADITIONAL CONSUMERS IN BURKINA FASO.

Dr. Théophile Bindeouè Nassè^{1,2,3}

¹University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Wa (Ghana)

²Saint Thomas d' Aquin University, (Burkina Faso)

³Polytechnic College of Youth, (Burkina Faso)

Corresponding Author: Dr. Théophile Bindeouè Nassè¹

Corresponding Author Email: nassetheophile2009@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that religion affects consumer behavior in the African context as well as in other geographies. While a lot of research has been done in other contexts, very little research has been conducted in the West African Geography. The purpose of this research is to explore the concepts of religious beliefs and consumer behavior in Burkina Faso to consider the role of culture in management and particularly in the marketing of products. Burkina Faso is a country where religion plays an important role. While the consumption of industrial non-alcoholic beverages is increasing, religious beliefs constitute a stumbling block that moderates the consumption of industrial non-alcoholic beverages. The approach is an exploratory qualitative one assorted with a sound documentary analysis. The qualitative data collection is performed with a digital voice recorder by the means of some semi-structured interviews. The number of semi-structured interviews recorded is 16. Then, the qualitative data is transcribed by hand. Results show that religious beliefs affect and moderate consumer behavior.

Keywords: Religious beliefs, Consumer behavior, Beverages, Consumption, Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The research topics on religious beliefs and consumer behavior in the West African geography have been increasing in the marketing areas. Most of the research topics show that culture in general and religion in particular influence consumer behavior (Diop, 2004; Nassè, Ouédraogo & Diop, 2019; Nassè et al. 2020). However, little is known on the subject and this is what has brought some authors to emphasize that the knowledge on the topic is still at its early phases (Diop, 2004; Nassè, 2018). Burkina Faso is an extraordinary country where several religious believers are cohabitating together (Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims) by sharing food and beverages. It is common to see the same family members with different religious affiliations eating together in harmony. Thus, religion is a significant element in individuals' daily lives whether they are Traditionalists, Christians, or Muslims. Beverage consumption is also a noticed common phenomenon within the different religious groups. However, religion is both an instigator and a moderating obstacle of some ordinary consumption products such as non-alcoholic beverages and alcoholic beverages. This situation raises the subsequent main question: What are the perceptions of religious consumers on the daily beverages' consumption??

The general objective of this research is to show the effect of religious beliefs on consumer behavior in the context of Burkina Faso.

The specific objectives of this research are:

Specific objective 1: The first specific objective is to identify religious beliefs in the socio-cultural context of Burkina Faso.

Specific Objective 2: The third specific objective is to analyze the relationships between religious beliefs and consumer behavior towards industrial soft drinks in three religious groups.

This research begins with the literature review, followed by the research design and research hypotheses, methodology, results, contributions, and finally the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this reflection, it is an overwhelmingly clear question of defining the concept of religiosity and that of consumer behavior, also present the various previous research carried out and finally show that the research problem falls mainly in the field of culture and consumption and marketing. A more in-depth review of the literature allows us to perceive what has been approached by many authors who have made prevail their eminent ideas. This research subject, therefore, brings together different concepts, namely religious beliefs and consumer behavior. Therefore, it simultaneously categorizes terms from marketing and culture and makes it possible to mobilize several theories: the individualistic theory of consumer behavior and the collectivist theory of consumer behavior.

Therefore, the issue here is to define the different concepts first, and second to remember the different theories of the study.

A review of the previous writings in this research can contribute to the understanding of the study theme which relates to culture and consumption in the context of Burkina Faso.

Religious beliefs: The concept of religious beliefs is understood as the combination of intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity (Nassè, Ouédraogo & Diop, 2019). Delener (1990), and Patel (2010) distinguish two degrees of religious beliefs namely a low degree of beliefs and a high

degree of beliefs. For Bonewell (2008) Religious beliefs are bi-dimensional, a materialistic dimension, and a spiritual dimension. In the point of view of some authors like Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh (2018) characterized religious beliefs with a low religious level and a high religious level that could have some effects on consumer's decisions.

For Nassè (2020) religious beliefs have a syncretic dimension and a non-syncretic dimension that both affect consumption.

After defining religious beliefs, the following section puts a light on the concept of consumer behavior.

Consumer behavior: The concept of consumer behavior has been continuously approached by several researchers and scholars. Authors like Bergadaa and Faure (1995), and Yaakop, Hafeez, Faisal, Munir and Ali (2021) define consumer behavior as the how and the why individuals consume particular goods or services. For Diop (2004), consumer behavior corresponds to a given consumer's attitude adopted by individuals who consume a given product; and this consumer attitude is specific to each sociocultural context. However, Diop (2012) is much more relevant in that the author shows that consumer behavior includes these values that significantly influence the shopping and consumption choices of individuals, and these values are knowledge, beliefs, manners, and customs. In the context of Burkina Faso, the concept of consumer behavior can be approached as to how individuals decide, examine, evaluate products and services and make purchases in terms of choice, consumption, quality, taste, advertising, or price.

The different theories mentioned are:

➤ **The individualistic Theory:** Luna and Gupta (2001), De Mooij and Hofstede (2011), Amankwaa, Reed, and Owens (2012), Benabdallah and Jolibert (2013), defend the individualistic approach, by showing that consumers are sometimes affected by their own personality traits, and a character or an attitude. They show that consumer behavior is driven by behavior that is generally a link to the individual consumer experience in particular. Individualism in consumer behavior is due to the fact that in a given society an individual may also develop certain idiosyncratic values unique to the individual, and powered by the rise of egoism, selfishness, and self-centered interest in consumption. Nonetheless, Luna and Gupta did not make it clear that religiosity could influence consumer behavior of consumption. Thus, individualistic consumers are not interested in collective consumption standards.

➤ **Collectivist Theory:** De Mooij (2003), Chudry and Pallister (2002), Mustafar and Borhan (2013), and Nassè (2018), support the approach collectivist. The culturalist view of consumer behavior suggests that consumers may be affected by the company or the group to which the individual shares a number of values or the attitude of a community. Thus, consumption is collective in nature as the individual is sometimes influenced by family friends or relatives. In this, collectivism shapes the consumption behavior of individuals through their purchasing decisions. Thus, for collectivist consumers place their emphasis on other factors, among which social-cultural factors are important in the process of purchasing products.

Research assumptions

P1: Religious beliefs affect consumer behavior in relation to industrial non-alcoholic drinks.

P₂: High religious beliefs moderate consumer behavior in relation to industrial non-alcoholic drinks.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is an exploratory study because there was not marketing research earlier in the context of Burkina Faso, on the topic of culture and consumption. Therefore, this research is to explore the context of Burkina Faso and to corroborate the results obtained in the Western and Asian contexts. The epistemological posture adopted is constructivist. The approach is qualitative.

Research instruments: The instrument is a semi-structured maintenance guide addressed to consumers of industrial non-alcoholic beverages. The number of themes is twenty (20). These themes are constructed using the different variables identified by the literature review.

Research procedure: The research is conducted by using random sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017), it is to say a qualitative purposive sampling namely judgment sampling strategy to locate the participants that have the characteristics to properly provide the useful information in line with the topic. Interviews are conducted at participant's convenient time. The snowballing technique is also used to increase the number of participants. The semi-structured interview guide is addressed to sixteen respondents who consume beverages for some years. The recorded data is transcribed using the audio software. Saturation and homogenization criteria are used to stop data collection (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 2011). Saturation is reached at 10 respondents.

Research framework: The country where the research is conducted, is Burkina Faso where participants are invited to bring their contributions in terms of ideas. The research field includes the capital city of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, in the province of Kadiogo for a period of 6 months and above.

Participants: Participants considered the following criteria, which include age, sex, religion, educational level, marital and occupation, and social class status. First, the participants are 10 to 55 years old and above.

Second, the gender of the participants includes women and men who are Traditionalists, Christians, or Muslims. Third, the level of education of the participants is from elementary school to university. Finally, the participants are also from different socio-professional categories and from different social classes.

Analysis of data: First, the qualitative data is transcribed are handmade using the audio software "SONY Sound Organizer". Then a content analysis is done by considering the art themes and relevant transcripts. Second, the qualitative data is completed by direct and indirect observations.

-Validation of the research: the chosen instruments must make it possible to grasp as well as possible the phenomenon to be measured and to properly measure what one wants to measure (Carricano, 2010). The interview guide is previously validated before collecting the data. Post validation of data is also done and the observation is that respondents have reiterated the same points of view.

Reliability of research: The data is collected on a regular basis with the same instruments to see if the same results are obtained. Thus, the observation is that the results have not varied.

Ethical concerns: The collected data is used for the purpose of this research, and the names of respondents are not recorded to consider anonymity and confidentiality criteria (Nassè, 2020).

RESULTS OF RESEARCH

For the qualitative approach, an interview guide is used and the overall or total sample is 16 interviewees, including Traditionalists (2), Christians (4), and Muslims (10) of both sexes and from all social class with a level of education ranging from primary to higher education, in the city of Ouagadougou (see Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendices).

Religious Beliefs and Consumer Behavior

First, the results clearly show that religious beliefs affect consumer behavior in relation to industrial non-alcoholic beverages in the context.

First, the results at the Traditionalist level show that religiosity influences the consumption behavior of customers towards industrial soft drinks.

*“I am a Traditionalist and I firmly believe in the religion of my ancestors... As a Traditionalist it is not forbidden to drink industrial non-alcoholic drinks”
(Traditionalist respondent)*

Second, so are Christians, who prefer industrial non-alcoholic beverages to industrial alcoholic beverages.

I think I stand strongly. I am strongly committed to my Christian religion. I was very engaged but lately less because of my activities. But personally, in my everyday life, I remain attached to reading my Bible and my prayer to God. Um, the passage that I can uh that comes to my mind is the passage where the apostle Paul says that whoever destroys the body, his body, God will destroy him because his body does not belong to him. So I consider that excessive consumption of sugary drinks can contribute to destroying the body by bringing diseases. My religion excludes the excessive consumption of sugary drinks. (...) If I had a third I would choose it if it was natural but as I only have a choice between the two I would choose the sweet drink; just because I can't stand alcohol. (Christian respondent)

Third, Muslims prefer non-alcoholic drinks to alcoholic drinks:

“My religion, which is the Muslim religion, strictly forbids a Muslim from consuming alcohol, even carrying alcohol or sitting on a table where there is alcohol. ... Me personally good considering my religion I will choose the soft drink; Because of religion. Yes, my religion influenced this choice.” (Muslim respondent).

High Religious Beliefs, and Consumer Behavior

High religious beliefs moderate the consumption behavior in three main religious affiliations. The different answers from, Christian consumers, Muslim consumers, and Traditional consumers, reveal that:

*“Animism recommends moderate consumption. Drinking too much alcohol and doing things that are not right is not good; so you have to have that dose”
(Traditionalist respondent)*

I believe in God very strongly and my degree of commitment to my religion is strong. I get involved in a moderate way in the activities of my religion anyway as soon as I have the time. My religion does not prohibit the consumption of sugary drinks, but in terms of all consumption, it recommends moderation. Likewise, my religion does not categorically prohibit the consumption of alcoholic beverages, but in all consumption it recommends moderation. In this sense the Bible recommends us not to get drunk on wine: “Do not get drunk on wine” (...) I will choose the sweet industrial drink rather than the industrial alcoholic drink; because of my religious faith except the wine which I can accept also allow myself to drink. Yes, my Christianity influenced this choice in part. (Christian respondent).

*Yes, I have a religion. My religion is Islam I practice it if I say that I am a Muslim it is because I was born in a Muslim family, therefore, I am practicing Islam. My religion authorizes the consumption of industrial soft drinks.
Concerning, alcoholic beverage consumption my religion firmly condemns that without any reservation. (Muslim respondent).*

DISCUSSION

Religious Beliefs and Consumer Behavior

Some previous researchers have shown that religious beliefs have an effect on consumption (Bailey, & Sood, 1993; Lord & Putrevu, 2005; Mustafar, & Borhan, 2013; Nassè, 2020; Khan, Iqbal, & Asfandyar, 2020; Sudaryanto, Imam, Anifatul, Jaloni, & Taskiya, 2021). Some authors such as Yaakop, Hafeez, Faisal, Munir, and Ali (2021) demonstrate that religious beliefs have an impact on consumer purchasing intentions in relation to counterfeit products. Mansouri (2012) reveals that religious affiliation and religious beliefs have some effects on consumer creativeness. The present qualitative research demonstrates the same influence of religious beliefs on consumption through a purely qualitative approach that concerns Traditionalists, Christians, and Muslims in the West African context. However, the present qualitative research emphasizes that the religious beliefs of Traditionalists, Christians, and Muslims have an effect on their consumption behavior, with some interreligious syncretic consumption experiences. The results have brought a number of significant elements, and therefore they confirm the propositions.

Thus, the first proposition is confirmed

P₁: Religious beliefs affect consumer behavior in relation to industrial non-alcoholic drinks.

High Religious Beliefs, and Consumer Behavior

Some previous studies show that personality traits moderates consumer behavior in a religious context (Nassè, Ouédraogo, & Diop, 2016; Nassè, 2018). For Momtaz, Hamid, Ibrahim, Yahaya, and Chai (2011) religious beliefs moderates the relationship between social isolation and psychological well-being. However, this research also shows that religious belief also moderates consumer behavior. Highly religious' consumers do limit their intake of non-alcoholic beverages, by reducing the quantity of consumed beverages. This is a common view of Traditional consumers, Christian consumers, and Muslim consumers that moderation is a good religious doctrinal tool as greediness is often perceived as immorality or a cause of disease. Therefore, the second proposition is confirmed.

P₂: High religious beliefs moderate consumer behavior in relation to industrial non-alcoholic drinks.

CONCLUSION

This research is a shred of evidence that religious beliefs have an effect on consumer behavior in the West African geography. Religious beliefs also moderate consumer behavior in the context by being a stumbling block that restrains the excessive intake of industrial beverages. In the light of the individualistic theory and the collectivist theory, some observations have shown that both individualistic religious beliefs and collective religious beliefs affect consumer's purchasing choices as well as their consumption choices.

• **Implications for companies:** For the beverage sector, it is good for marketers to observe a rigorous segmentation with some strategies that fit with a multi-ethnic environment (Cui, 1997; Chudry, & Pallister, 2002), and a multi-religious environment. As Hofstede (1987) points out that management should be adapted to cultural differences, it is suggested that segmentation should meet the three different religious groups' consumers' needs and expectations to fit with consumption differences. Successful marketing management practices also requires both ethical and religious considerations (Hafsi, Siagh & Diallo, 2007). Thus, marketing and management departments should also observe strong ethical practices to meet customers' core needs and expectations. For instance, companies should avoid selling insane beverages, low quality beverages, counterfeit beverages or out-of-date beverages to customers.

• **Future research:** It would be useful to expand this research into other research areas other than the industrial beverage sector or other countries to appreciate the results.

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Conflicts of Interest

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Appendices

Table 1
Number of Respondents

Religious affiliation	Number
Traditionalists	2
Christians	4
Muslims	10
Total	16

Source: Fieldwork, 2015-2018

Table 2
Frequency related to the Number of Respondents

Religious affiliation	Frequency
Traditionalists	12.5%
Christians	25%
Muslims	62.5%
Total	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2015-2018