Why some South Asian Muslims celebrate Christmas: Introducing 'acculturation trade-offs'☆

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ABSTRACT

Research studying religious observance and marketplace interaction in different cultural settings focuses either on the dominant religious group's consumption rituals or religious minorities' own religious consumption rituals. However, research has not explored how religious minority groups celebrate dominant religious holidays. This study explores how Muslims living in Britain apply religiosity to mediate engaging with Christmas celebrations. We argue these interactions must be understood from a religious, cultural and market generated perspective. Our findings indicate that participants encounter tensions surrounding their engagement with Celebrations mediated through their Islamic religious principles. By recognizing this behavior, we introduce the term 'acculturation trade-offs' describing how individuals reject, compromise, or submerse themselves in an others' behavior. This behavior involves a personal evaluation of the costs and benefits of engagement.

1. Introduction

Christmas is not just for Christians any more. Ani Zonneveld, an American Muslim, hosts a Christmas party, cooks red and white desserts, sings Christmas carols, and decorates the Christmas tree (Kaleem, 2011). Hussein Allouch, a Danish Muslim, has an open invitation for others who would be alone to celebrate a Danish Christmas dinner with his family (The Local Denmark, 2014). Nor, are these actions limited to Muslims. Sonia Karia, a British Hindu, never misses decorating the Christmas tree, making a Christmas dinner, and exchanging gifts (BBC Religion, 2005).

These examples illustrate how religious minorities selectively engage with religious, cultural and market derived consumption narratives surrounding celebrations indicative of another dominant religious/societal group. This behavior may partially be explained by consumer acculturation, a sub-category of acculturation, describing 'the acquisition of skills and knowledge relevant to engaging in consumer behavior in one culture by members of another culture' (Penaloza, 1989, p. 110). Indeed, previous consumer acculturation research has shown how minorities cope, negotiate, and adjust to society's wider social and cultural context (Laroche & Jamal, 2015). Yet, this perspective is problematic. First, consumer acculturation studies tend to minimize religion within consumption decisions, instead using religion to differentiate participants rather than focusing on religious perspectives (for example, Lindridge, 2005). Second, the minority group's own religion may oppose celebrating other religious festivals and, thirdly, such engagements may create ambiguity regarding how religious minorities should engage with that celebration. For example, is Christmas a religious festival celebrating Jesus Christ's birth or a celebration of family and consumption?

How then do religious minorities negotiate tensions arising from a religious, cultural and market orientated event celebrated by their society but potentially irrelevant to them? We believe religious minorities negotiate their own religious and cultural beliefs with dominate religious, cultural and market orientated events through 'acculturation trade-offs'. We define acculturation trade-offs as a cultural and/or religious minority deciding on whether to engage with the majority's cultural and/or religious event. We identify acculturation trade-offs as an engagement allowing individuals to reject, compromise, or submerse themselves in an others' behavior. This behavior involves a personal evaluation of the costs and benefits of engagement. In this paper, we assess acculturation trade-offs through a group of South Asian Muslims living in Manchester, Great Britain engagement with Christmas celebrations.

We identify acculturation trade-offs by addressing three themes. First, applying Esser's (2001) Social Explanation Model to identify the

conditions and mechanisms explaining religious minorities' engagement with society's religious celebrations. This involves reviewing religion's influence, the individual's understanding of religion (religiosity) and acculturation. Second, by exploring how religious minorities' acculturation separates the religious aspects of a celebration from its cultural and market derived aspects. Finally, by exploring Islam's relationship to Christianity, celebrations, and Christmas.

Our paper makes several theoretical contributions. First, acculturation studies have viewed acculturation from an outcome perspective (Berry, 1997), assimilation behaviors affected by the majority (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997) or circumstantial behavior adaption (Laroche & Jamal, 2015), often using terms such as 'culture swapping' (Oswald, 1999), 'multiple self-theory' (Markus & Kunda, 1986), and 'situational ethnicity' (Laroche & Jamal, 2015). Yet, these terms and their related studies fail to capture the costs of consumption decisions affecting an individual's religious beliefs. By identifying acculturation trade-offs, we recognize how individuals reconcile their religious beliefs with their acculturation behaviors. Second, we challenge Hirschman, Ruvio, and Touzani's (2011) perspective of minority and dominant religious festivals existing within a symbiotic relationship. Instead, we believe religious minorities engage in a complex and not entirely satisfactory negotiation of religiosity to resolve celebration engagement. Third, we contest previous studies assuming religious homogeneity (Touzani & Hirschman, 2008). Indeed, we argue religious minorities' beliefs and engagement with societal religious celebrations often lead to tensions and partial-resolutions. Finally, by illustrating how individuals self-exclude from religious festivals we challenge Weinberger's (2015) assumption of clear and decisive resolution behaviors.

We address these criticisms through the question: '*How does a religious minority group's acculturation reflect their engagement with religious celebrations that are inherently symbolic of the dominant society's religion?*'

2. Theory building

2.1. The sociological explanation model

We explore a religious minority celebrating society's dominant religious, cultural and market orientated celebrations not from a historical perspective, but from a set of conditions leading to a causal mechanism. A mechanism represents an 'underlying a behavior [in] a complex system which produces that behavior by the interaction of a number of parts according to direct causal laws' (Glennan, 1996, p. 52). In this paper, we refer to the conditions and mechanisms encouraging a minority Muslim group to engage with Christmas celebrations by focusing on Kincaid's (1996) perspective of social causality occurring at the macro-level (societal level), meso-level (group interactions) and micro-level (individual). Here we identify social causation with larger societal structures and forces influencing unrelated individuals. Hence, a religious minority cannot remain immune or separate from wider society's Christmas celebrations. How a religious minority at a group or individual level respond to society's Christmas celebrations depends upon the mechanisms creating the cause and effect. Therefore, Glennan (1996) argues a causally related event requires two separate events, groups, or beliefs to engage with each other through an intervening mechanism. To identify and explore the set of conditions and mechanisms addressing our research question, we draw upon Esser's (2001) Sociological Explanation Model (SME).

Esser's (2001) SME argues researchers should not only explore how social processes and systems operate but also their causes. In this paper, we explore the extent a religious minority demonstrate their acculturation through engagement with the majority's religious celebrations. Unlike other sociological approaches encouraging reductionism to an individual level, Esser's SME argues behaviors should be explored through various actors' social engagement. Hence, applying the SME to religious minorities expands the emphasis from their actions onto

societal actors, such as friends, work colleagues, cultural institutions, the market, and society's beliefs. By including a wider range of actors, we begin to understand how these engagements create a social structure.

Within the SME, an individual is motivated to maximize their benefit from any social engagement within a social structure (Esser, 2001). This need for social engagement arises when others within the social structure have resources differing individuals value. Therefore, a religious minority may engage with the majority because the latter has resources they seek, and vice-versa. Within this engagement both sides expect and evaluate the outcome of their and the others' decisions.

In applying Esser's (2001) SME model to religious minorities, the next sections explore religion at a macro level, religiosity at a *meso* level, and acculturation at an individual micro level.

2.2. Religion and religiosity

We define religion as representing the ultimate meaning uniting differing cultural and social values together in shared meaning, often providing a shared sense of personal identity. This definition draws upon Geertz (1966) and Berger (1967). Geertz (1966) and Berger (1967) view religion from a cultural perspective where religion permeates through all aspects of life, even if individuals do not recognize such permutations as religious symbolism. Yet individuals also recognize these permutations are open to change and challenges from changing cultural and societal events. Whilst, Geertz (1966) focuses on how religion manifests through culturally derived social events, Berger (1967) focuses on religion's engagement with modernity.

Geertz (1966) views religion as a cultural system ordering people's lives, with differing religious groups expressing their religious beliefs through symbolic words and phrases. Through this symbolic meaning, religion offers a persuasive and long-lasting motivation to understand, and explain how and why events occur in a manner that is uniquely realistic to that religion (Geertz, 1966). How then does religion manifest? Berger (1967) argues that religion manifests within the individual and society through a three-stage process of: externalization, objectification, and internalization. Externalization refers to society's understanding of the world leading to objectification, where society understands and believes in its wider understanding of the cosmos. This understanding then leads to objectification, where this understanding becomes ontologically real. Finally, this understanding leads to internalization where meaning systems merge through a shared understanding. This merging leads to a 'plausibility structure' with each meaning system supporting and reinforcing the other to create a 'sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning' (Berger, 1967, p. 4).

We can illustrate Geertz's (1966) view of religion as a cultural system and its manifestation within Berger's (1967) 'plausibility structure' creating a 'sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning' through religious celebrations. For instance, Touzani and Hirschman (2008) note how Muslims incorporate Western and Oriental cultural derived consumption values over the Islamic month of Ramadan, whilst the dominant Islamic cultural meanings remain intact and dominant. Yet Touzani and Hirschman (2008) in assuming the majority population are emulating the market-generated experience of a Western Christmas fail to consider how individuals negotiate celebrating the religious event from its cultural and market-generated components. Key to understanding how individuals negotiate their engagement is religiosity.

We define religiosity from a sociological perspective as an individual's collection of religious attitudes and beliefs manifesting through related activities, beliefs, and dedications. Reminiscent of Geertz's (1966) perspective of religion as a cultural system, religiosity affects an individual's conduct towards religious celebrations. For example, Hirschman et al. (2011) note Muslims experience guilt and shame when they eat during daylight hours during Ramadan. However, these authors fail to explore how these Muslims dismiss their guilt and shame nor the context of this behavior. This omission continues in other