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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 submerge 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 submerge 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

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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 adaptation (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

studies failing to consider religiosity. For example, [Touzani and Hirschman's \(2008\)](#) study of Muslims celebrating Ramadan assumes a religiously homogenous sample. This assumption contradicts previous studies showing higher levels of religious adherence affecting consumer behavior ([Lindridge, 2005](#)).

What about religious minorities and religiosity's influence on engaging with society's dominant religious celebrations? [Alhouti, Butler, and D'Souza \(2015\)](#) argue that religious minorities when compared to religious majorities react differently to marketing strategies, with individuals with higher levels of religiosity being less likely to engage in a consumer culture identifiable with a specific religion. In another study, [Weinberger \(2015\)](#) partially identifies how a few American Muslims choose not to celebrate Christmas. However, Weinberger fails to consider religious reasons for this avoidance, instead arguing such behavior is a rejection of wider social contextual pressures. Yet, [Weinberger's \(2015\)](#) ignoring religious reasons for self-exclusion from Christmas is problematic. First, by focusing on the tensions surrounding public engagement with Christmas, researchers ignore the private domain of the family and home where Christmas ambiguities are likely to manifest. Secondly, [Weinberger's \(2015\)](#) assumption of Muslim homogeneity is challenged by research indicating heterogeneity amongst Muslims between differing countries, social class positions, and religious adherence ([Mokhlis, 2009; Nasr, 1996](#)).

Yet does a minority's religiosity always equate with participation in society's dominant celebrations? Research suggests not. For example, [Belk \(1987\)](#) notes how some Jewish migrants adapt to America's dominant Christian values embodied in celebrating and practicing Christmas gift-giving. Yet such behaviors do not reflect their religious adherence, instead reflects their personality and lifestyle choices ([Mokhlis, 2009](#)). Hence, [Esser's \(2001\)](#) perspective of the context influencing religious minorities to engage with society's celebrations may not reflect religious adherence but merely conformity needs.

We address these criticisms by accepting that religious minorities exist within a wider societal cultural and religious structure and willingly or otherwise are influenced by forces challenging, supporting, or reinterpreting their religiosity. Perhaps one of the most important influencing forces is consumer acculturation.

2.3. Consumer acculturation

Consumer acculturation focuses on two distinct dimensions: attitude and behavior, suggesting these dimensions affect minorities' consumption behavior in different ways ([Gentry, Jun, & Tansuhaj, 1995](#)). Within these dimensions exist acculturation agents, defined as “individuals or institutions who serve as sources of consumer information and/or models of consumption behavior” ([Penaloza, 1989, p. 116](#)), including family, peers, mass media, schools, and companies. Echoing [Esser's \(2001\)](#) understanding of a phenomenon through the conditions leading to a causal mechanism, [Luedicke \(2011\)](#) notes how consumer acculturation neglects outside social influences, shared consumption resources, and the complexities of adaptation to different social systems and sub-cultural groups.

How then do religious minorities use consumer acculturation to negotiate society's religious celebrations? Whilst [Hirschman et al. \(2011\)](#) present Muslims celebrating others religious festivals, [Weinberger \(2015\)](#) demonstrates American Muslims consciously avoiding Christmas celebrations. Whilst religiosity may partially explain these differences, we need to consider the wider context that religious minorities exist within and their related consumer acculturation agents. Here we argue religious minorities' engagement with Christmas celebrations reflects how they view and interpret their own religious beliefs and whom they engage with in these celebrations. It is within this context we propose that individuals evaluate the costs and benefits of turning towards or otherwise from engaging with Christmas celebrations. Yet we posit this behavior is neither consistent nor predictable, instead it is constantly re-evaluated depending upon the cost

benefit arising from each context.

2.4. Islam, its relationship to Christianity and Christmas

‘Islam’ means ‘peaceful submission to the will of God’ and through the Quran and Sunnah, prescribes a comprehensive collection of moral guidelines covering personal, political, religious, and social life. Along with Judaism and Christianity, Islam is an Abrahamic religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Christianity and Islam share similar theological beliefs. They are monotheistic, respect many of the same key figures and worship the same God ([Ruth, 2015](#)). Islam recognizes Jesus Christ and accords him as one of the most important prophets – The Prophet Isa. However, Islam rejects Jesus Christ being the Son of God, and his subsequent crucifixion and resurrection ([Ruth, 2015](#)).

Islam, like many religions, is prone to differing interpretations of its scriptures. Within Islam, at least two schools of interpretation are observable, loosely identifiable as conservative and liberal. Conservative Islamic opinions encourage detachment from Western ideals ([Nasr, 1996](#)). In contrast, liberal perspectives of Islam encourage greater cooperation between Muslims and their wider society ([Taylor, 2009](#)).

As Islam recognizes Christianity, how then does it relate to and understand the Christian celebration of Christmas? This question raises three issues. First, how does Islam view celebrations, second, how does Islam view Christmas, and how does Islam view Muslims engagement with Christmas? Ultimately, the answers to these questions lie within the Quran and Sunnah, and Islamic conservative and liberal perspectives.

What constitutes a celebration within Islam is complex. We define a celebration as the actions associated with celebrating an important day or a social gathering with the aim of engaging in an enjoyable activity to celebrate an event. Whilst, Islam prescribes two celebrations – *Eid ul Fitr* and *Eid ul Adha* – typically accompanied with family gatherings and food, other Islamic celebrations raise differing opinions. For example, whether Muslims should celebrate the Prophet Mohammad's birthday – ‘Mawlid’- offers insights into how Muslims may view celebrating Jesus Christ's birth. Conservative Islamic opinion argues that Muslims should not celebrate Jesus Christ's birthday ([Abdul-Rahman, 2003](#)). In contrast, liberal Islamic perspectives argue celebrating Prophet Mohammad's birthday is acceptable as a means of affirming their Islamic beliefs ([Al-Humayri, 1998](#)).

If Islam recognizes Jesus Christ as the Prophet Isa, how then does it view and understand Christmas? A brief review of Muslim websites reveals conflicting opinions. One group focuses on Muslims not celebrating the birthdays of any Islamic prophet ([Islam Question and Answer, 2012](#)). Alternatively, other websites suggest it is acceptable to remember the Prophet Isa on Christmas Day but not to associate this with his birth ([Ahlubayt Islamic Mission, 2017](#)).

Finally, if Muslims reject Christmas Day as the birth of Jesus Christ/The Prophet Isa, how then they should engage in a society where Christmas is celebrated. Here we need to return to the conservative and liberal perspectives of Islam. From a conservative perspective, Muslims should not engage with any form of Christmas celebration ([Islam Question and Answer, 2012](#)). In contrast, liberal Islamic voices take a different perspective. For example, in 2016 a senior cleric in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, when asked whether Muslims could wish non-Muslims ‘A Merry Christmas’ repeated a 2007 edict by Malaysia's national fatwa committee that it was acceptable if it did not glorify other religions or draw upon religious symbols ([The Strait Times, 2016](#)).

2.5. Christmas: a religious, cultural or market creation?

A determinant of whether a religious minority engages with society's religious celebrations may depend upon its interpretation as a religious, cultural or market driven event.

From a religious perspective, the term ‘Christmas’ represents the

birth of Jesus Christ. Although the Gospels of Luke and Matthew mention Jesus Christ's birth, no birth date is mentioned. Neither does The Bible state Jesus Christ's birthday should be celebrated. All other religiously orientated Christmas celebrations reflect Geertz's (1966) religion as cultural symbolism.

From a cultural perspective, Christmas is inherently associated with Christian cultures (Hirschman & La Barbera, 1989). Yet Christmas's rituals of Christmas cards, Christmas dinner and family gathering emerge from Charles Dickens's book – 'A Christmas Carol' (1843). Accompanying these cultural associations are: the Christmas tree (a German tradition), the hanging and filling of stockings (a Dutch tradition), and Santa Claus (an American tradition) (Belk, 1987). Yet as a cultural phenomenon, Schmitt, Davies, Hung, and Wright (2010) notes Christmas displays dominate Western schools, government buildings, shopping centers and public spaces.

Finally, the market generated Christmas epitomizes commercialism, materialism, hedonism, sensuality, and sociability (Belk, 1989; Hirschman & La Barbera, 1989). Research provides ample examples of Christmas as a commercial celebration. O'Casey and Clarke (2002) notes how children demonstrate heightened brand awareness in requesting Christmas gifts, whilst Laroche, Saad, Cleveland, and Browne (2000) notes female consumers are more likely than men to buy more gifts, start their Christmas shopping earlier and visit more shops.

3. Method

This paper addresses the research 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?' To address this question, this study takes a qualitative approach.

Our participant group consisted of South Asian Muslims living in Manchester, Britain. Four reasons for selecting this sample group. First, Muslims represent 2.7 million or 5% of the British population (ONS, 2015). Second, Islam is the second largest practiced religion in the UK (ONS, 2015). Third, Britain and South Asia share close cultural, historical, and political connections. Finally, one of the authors identifies herself as a British South Asian Muslim facilitating participant access.

Three recruitment approaches created a purposeful sample group. First, the lead author contacted a South Asian community center. This approach led to six participants. Second, a participant recruitment advertisement in a local Asian newspaper - *The Asian Leader*. This led to three participants. Finally, a snowballing technique with participants recommending friends and family. This produced an additional 30 participants creating a sample group of 40 participants (female $N = 18$, male $N = 22$) (Table 1).

Data was collected using in-depth interviews with a prescribed procedure. First, participants drew their family tree. This aimed to identify family relationships and which family members they engaged with over the Christmas period. Second, interviews used a set of grand-tour questions, including: migration experiences, and what constituted Christmas and gift-giving. Religiosity was explored by participants describing their religious attitudes and behaviors. This approach offered a natural understanding and perspective to emerge. Interview length ranged from one and a half to 2 h. Recorded interviews were transcribed generating over 300 pages of transcripts and field notes.

Analyst triangulation was undertaken. This involved all three authors undertaking separate open and axial coding of interview transcripts and field notes to develop their own interpretations. Scholarly themes emerging from the data used an etic coding approach. For example, Christmas tensions, religious vs secular beliefs. The authors then compared their coding and interpretations allowing for identification and exploration of similarities and differences, an approach encouraging multiple ways of understanding the data, whilst avoiding an immediate group consensus. Complimenting this, we also undertook theory/perspective triangulation using the literature and theoretic interpretations to inform each stage of the analysis. Emergent insights

Table 1
Sample group profile.

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Years in UK	Occupation	Ethnicity P = Pakistani B = Bengali
Bushra	F	29	University	29	Teacher	P
Iram	F	33	University	33	Home-maker	P
Zara	F	18	University	18	Student	P
Sara	F	34	University	34	Senior Lecturer	P
Madiha	F	21	College	21	Calls center employee	P
Salma	F	49	High School	49	Home-maker	P
Khadijah	F	22	University	22	Calls center employee	B
Rehana	F	19	University	19	Student	B
Habib	M	23	University	23	Marketing Analyst	P
Tauseef	M	19	College	19	Security guard	P
Tayyab	M	14	High School	14	Student	P
Zainab	F	17	College	17	Store assistant	P
Amir	M	50	High School	43	Store Manager	P
Fozia	F	32	University	32	Customer relations manager	P
Rashid	M	22	University	22	Student	P
Nazia	F	16	College	16	Student	P
Noor	F	44	High School	39	Home-maker	P
Aroosa	F	21	University	22	Postgraduate Student	P
Anam	F	42	College	41	Home-maker	P
Asif	M	59	High School	49	Manager	P
Aneesa	F	26	College	21	Home-maker	B
Aftab	M	23	University	19	Manager	B
Azim	M	22	University	22	Student	B
Bilal	M	17	College	17	Student	B
Faisal	M	24	University	24	Call center employee	P
Farhan	M	23	University	23	Student	P
Farooq	M	25	University	25	Calls center employee	P
Aysha	F	21	University	21	Financial Clerk	B
Farada	F	35	University	35	Social Worker	P
Qaasim	M	29	University	29	Student	B
Nazakat	M	25	College	25	Calls center employee	B
Waqas	M	24	University	24	Lawyer	P
Umair	M	22	University	22	Student	B
Uzair	M	19	University	19	Student	B
Zia	M	17	College	17	Student	B
Iffah	F	24	University	24	Hostess	P
Rauf	M	19	College	19	Student	B
Usman	M	22	College	22	Builder	B
Rizwan	M	23	University	23	Student	B
Waseem	M	16	College	16	Student	B

informed and directed our subsequent data collection as the authors iteratively moved between the literature and the data, and between the parts of each transcript and the whole body of transcripts. Finally, we presented our data findings to participants to seek clarification of our findings.

4. Findings

The findings lend themselves to five themes: *Religiosity, Establishing the wider context, Creating the religious and secular cultural context, Negotiating the public Christmas sphere, and Negotiating the private Christmas sphere.*

4.1. Religiosity

This section explores how participants' religiosity informs our understanding of their engagement with Christmas celebrations. All the participants claim to have a good understanding of Islam. A common narrative shared by most participants focuses on human vulnerabilities and the difficulties of living an Islamic lifestyle. What constitutes an Islamic lifestyle varies, such as consumption choices surrounding clothing (Western clothing or more traditional South Asian inspired clothing both meeting Islamic codes of modesty), wearing of the hijab and alcohol consumption (a few participants admitted experimenting with it). Whilst all participants acknowledge undertaking daily prayers, not all participants necessarily undertook the prescribed five daily prayer times. Hence, we can understand this aspect of participants' religiosity as a combination of limited time and practicalities along with varying levels of religious adherence. Nearly all participants accept their personal inabilities to live a life fully compliant Islamic lifestyle. As Rehana (Bengali female, 2nd generation, 19, student) notes:

Islam is a way of life obviously. We are taught that this is not the end, your hereafter is more important, whatever you do that should be your end goal...you have to see the Islamic thing behind it. Obviously, we all stray, I am not the strongest of people but I try my best to make sure I am with those values and I am not straying away.

During the interviews, none of the participants expressed their Islamic beliefs in proselytization terms. Instead, Islam is presented as an inner-belief system guiding participants' decision-making and daily lives. Consider Anam's (Pakistani female, 1st generation, 42, college educated, home-maker) narrative where her Islamic identity and beliefs reflect a wider respect and modesty towards non-Muslims. A common narrative amongst all the participants:

I think [Islam] it's the best religion...but... there's people from other religions I will get on with them just as well. I will never say to them 'Oh my religion is better than yours.' I don't think I have the knowledge of Islam to be able to tell other people what is right or wrong so whatever they say I will accept but it's my own personal, in what I do... I think it's important to respect other religions as well.

Whilst all participants meet Islamic dress codes of modesty, consumption differences appear amongst various consumer products, for example, amongst conservative religious participants. Here, Anam in keeping with Islam's teaching on creating false religious idols refuses to give books with pictures of people within it. Whilst Aroosa (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 22, post-graduate student) does not allow her young daughter to watch the children's television program 'Pippa the Pig' as Islam forbids the consumption of pigs. In contrast, other participants willingly engage with Western orientated consumption meeting Islamic criteria, such purchasing gifts reflective of religious and cultural sensibilities.

Reminiscent of [Berger's \(1967\)](#) plausibility structure is participants' adherence to celebrations. Whilst a few conservatively religious participants (Anam, Aroosa) hold some form of celebration for the Prophet Mohammad's birthday, most participants do not. This is particularly prevalent amongst religiously liberal participants who as we will note equally refuted Christmas Day as a celebration of the Prophet Isa. However, all participants engage in Eid-ul-Fitr representing the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan. Here participants' narratives reflect [Berger's \(1967\)](#) 'sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning' but also their openness to market forces. For most participants, gifts tend to be solely reserved for Eid-ul-Fitr, a deliberate decision reinforcing the religious and symbolic importance of this celebration over Christmas. Indeed, some participants note how Christmas's increasing commercial prevalence encourages them to compensate for and challenge this through Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations (discussed later). Habib (Pakistani male, 2nd generation, 23, university educated, marketing analyst) captured most participants' perspective of Eid-ul-Fitr. Note

how his description of Eid-ul-Fitr parallels consumption associations surrounding Christmas Day:

Eid is pretty massive...[its] the only time where you can give presents... and have a proper all-out celebration...that's when your diet goes out of the window as well...you want to spend time with your family and your friends. You want to go out. You want to enjoy yourself. You want to show off your new clothes because you wear new clothes on Eid...

4.2. Establishing the wider context

Establishing the wider context captures participants' acculturation narratives. Here, we explore how participants understand British society, and how both themselves and wider society sanction positive or negative behaviors.

All the participants demonstrate varying levels of acculturation, with second and third generation participants showing a greater preference to British culture manifesting through English language media, clothing, food choices and predominately self-identifying themselves as British Muslim or British Pakistani. In terms of friendships, most participants' friends were of South Asian descent reflecting a shared cultural understanding. Participants' perspectives of what constituted British culture are vague and differ between the generations. For first generation participants, clear distinctions along religious lines appear. Asif (Pakistani male, 1st generation, 59, high school educated, manager) captures this distinction where a positive association with British culture is separate from the religious negative association of British culture – drinking alcohol:

You have to acknowledge your own identity and background and take the good aspects from the English culture. We don't have to start boozing every night and getting drunk and going to clubs. Sense of humor, honesty, being on time. These are good habits that we can learn. British culture...is something that you feel comfortable in... you appreciate it and I think is something to be celebrated.

Like the first generation, second and third generation participants note the issue of personal comfort reflecting differences between the two cultures. Typically, this difference reflects a sense of personal freedom within British culture from wider family and community sanctions for inappropriate behavior. As Waqas (Pakistani male, 2nd generation, 24, university educated, lawyer) notes:

...we have been brought up...different to the way...my mum and dad got brought up so I've been a bit more like freedom, I've been allowed to do whatever I want basically whereas they were young they probably didn't have that kind of freedom to do anything really...Britain is kind of like do whatever no one's bothered whereas in Asian culture everything's a lot more regulated...

Participants' narratives are reminiscent of [Berry's \(1997\)](#) integration category, requiring exploration of their socialization. Socialization represents the process by which an individual learns how to behave in a socially appropriate way, reflecting but also differing from acculturation. Where acculturation represents fluidic and vicarious learning, socialization represents an individual's formal learning regarding how to behave and conform whether to the minority or dominant societal culture. Amongst participants' narratives on socialization, we focus on two primary socialization agents – parents and education.

Parents nurture and teach their child to behave in a manner appropriate to their culture and religious beliefs. Those participants' narratives about their parents' socialization behaviors noted their bounded Muslim beliefs. Such as being socialized not to drink alcohol, eat halal food, etc. Yet religious socialization differs from parental socialization into British culture, especially Christmas celebrations. Participants' parents had socialized their children to acculturate into British society whilst retaining their Islamic beliefs. Whilst participants from conservative religious backgrounds note their parents do

not celebrate Christmas (although their parents do recognize the Prophet Isa), those participants with a liberal religious perspective note how their parents acknowledge aspects of Christmas celebrations. For many, this is recognizing Christmas as a Christian event, and for others, as a British cultural event. Actual participation varies but typically focuses around eating a festive dinner. A few participants who celebrate Christmas note how their parents socialized them into celebrating. For example, Satia (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 29, university educated, High School teacher) recalls how her then recently migrated mother engaged in Christmas cultural manifestations:

...because it was fun and exciting...she just thought it was an occasion to get involved. It's exciting because we always talk about it at school that Santa Claus would come to our house on Christmas Eve and leave presents, so my mum used to actually do that for us, so she would be our Santa. We could hear her sometimes down stairs wrapping up the presents with the tape sometimes and she would leave them at the end of our beds. In the morning, we would be opening our presents, it was nice and it was exciting just to tear it apart and see what's inside. And she used to decorate the house...she used to have foil decorations up on the ceiling...

Another primary socialization agent was education where Christmas is an integral part of the school's culture ranging from serving Christmas dinners to religious teaching. Those participants who note their schools' Christian beliefs and Christmas celebrations, do not believe it affects their behaviors towards Christmas. Consider Asif's commentary where his exposure to inherently Christian beliefs and Christmas affirms his own Islamic beliefs and identity:

I remember primary and secondary school we used to have an assembly in the morning and we had prayers. We read stories about Jesus and about some prophets. We were kind of told moral behavior. So, Christian values and Islamic values are kind of similar...so...when I got a copy of the Quran I was surprised to see them...For me, I wasn't becoming a Christian, but there was an aspect of spirituality...we sang the Christmas carols, but it didn't occur to us what we were singing. So, I was grounded and learned of Islam from a non-Muslim view. It was about when I was 16–17 that I...kind of learn about your own faith.

Yet increasing levels of racism and Islamophobia challenge participants' sense of being a Muslim in Britain. Most participants mention differing personal and wider societal hostility. For example, Waqas complains of British society's systematic and deliberate targeting of Pakistani Muslims in Britain, whilst Sara describes a physical assault where a cyclist deliberately rode her bike at her before verbally assaulting her. Consequently, fearing further assaults Sara removed her hijab, effectively removing public recognition of her Muslim identity.

Bourhis et al. (1997) note that a minority group's cultural assimilation into the host society is dependent upon the majority accepting the minority. Perhaps not surprising then, some participants reaction to Islamophobia is to emphasize their Muslim identity and assert a more positive Islamic stance. As Salma (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 49, high school educated, home-maker) notes:

I just feel as though I'm doing something for my religion...because Muslims haven't had a lot of good press...so it's just to show...non-Muslims... that we are human. We are just like you, there's no need to be [scared of us]...We can't just think that other people are going to educate them, other Muslims are going to educate them, we start from ourselves first... and then they do start asking you questions...I've had a lot of White British people asking me lots of questions and...I was more than happy to answer them because its educating them...

Besides educating non-Muslims, some participants attempt to address Islamophobia by challenging societal opinions at a micro level. In particular, reinterpreting cultural aspects of Christmas and then applying them to Eid-ul-Fitr. Consider Farada (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 35, university educated, social worker) who was not alone in describing how she uses Christmas derived cultural consumption

meanings and then applies them to Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations. Here the acculturation trade-off is between the greater benefit of addressing Islamophobia to the perceived cost of rejecting Christmas celebrations. In taking such actions Farada along with other participants publicly challenge wider societal interests and institutions to reflect their personal preferences and meet their needs for acceptance in British society. An action that participants felt would not be rejected or lead to further harm but would signify and educate non-Muslims on the importance of Eid-ul-Fitr:

I used to give [gifts to] my neighbors, my doctors, my gym, everyone, you know, people I associate with, organizations I associate with...and Christmas cards...Because we don't celebrate Christmas...I thought, "What's the point in giving, because we celebrate Eid?" So, what we do now is that the White British associates give us presents on Christmas, and I give them presents and cards on Eid. I wanted basically to highlight to them when it was Eid because a lot of them weren't even aware of Eid...It's a way of making them aware of what it is, and if they wanted to know more about it, they would ask me...

4.3. Creating the religious and secular cultural context

Previously we showed how 'sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning' manifests through an Islamic sense of identity embodied through Eid-ul-Fitr and market forces of consumption. This section explores how this religious identity, along with the previous section, assists our understanding of how participants' religious sacred canopy is mediated with British society's more secular sacred canopy. A canopy consisting of the religious (Christian), secular (British culture) and the market (consumption). Creating the religious and secular context identifies how participants' religious beliefs and values support them negotiating Christmas celebrations within a secular society.

For religiously conservative participants, a dominant narrative was outright rejection of Christmas celebrations, although they did not reject others celebrating Christmas. Consider Aroosa's narrative, commonly heard amongst religious conservative participants:

I don't reject Christmas, nor accept, but it's just something that we don't partake in because it's nothing to do with our religion. And because it's nothing to do with our religion, it's best to not take part in it because, by celebrating Christmas, you don't know that you could be going against something that's a part of your religion. So, for example, Christmas symbolizes the birth of Baby Jesus, but ... as a Muslim ... that is a very big sin to believe that God has a child or God has family ... so, by taking part in Christmas, we're accepting that belief that Jesus is the son of God.

For other religious conservative participants, the extended family offers solace and support in avoiding any engagement with Christmas celebrations, an engagement reaffirming participants' religious knowledge and understanding. Consider Iram's (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 33, university education, home-maker) narrative on how her extended family engaging with Christmas Day:

[Christmas celebrations] doesn't happen in my in-laws'...we have a meeting point at my nan's house, and we have a meeting point at...my husband's aunty. Everyone meets up at her house and she has food but she usually has like a prayer, a khatam. She has it to try and make sure that people are not celebrating [Christmas] and so that's why she makes it into a prayer day.

All participants have some exposure to Christmas, accepting its secular, cultural and commercial symbolism but rejecting its religious symbolism. For example, enjoying the Christmas celebrations atmosphere at work or watching specially commissioned television programs. Here, identification with British society merges with a strong sense of British cultural identity. This is perhaps not surprising considering Esser's (2001) perspective that context influences an individual's choices between religion and wider society. Consider Habib

who asserts his Islamic knowledge whilst creating a separation between the secular and the religious:

I mean we don't celebrate Christmas, but obviously living in a Western society like Britain, I love Britain, so like, you know, you get the Christmassy feeling towards Christmas, don't you? So, you end up like watching Christmas TV, and have a bit of Christmas dinner and stuff. But we don't give presents.

However, for some participants, Christmas celebrations only represented market derived understanding through Boxing Day¹ price promotions. For some participants, regardless of their religious strength, purchasing clothing at significantly reduced prices represents the embodiment of Christmas. As Rehana notes:

Boxing Day sales! I'm scared to go into [Manchester]. It looks too crazy! Maybe a day after that I would go and see if I can find anything in the sales...you just have more deals out something like that might as well take advantage of that.

Although liberal religious participants express religious vulnerabilities around consumption (such as experimenting with alcohol or giving Christmas presents), they tend not to express any remorse in engaging with Christmas celebrations. These participants use their interpretation of Islamic to rationalize their actions. In contrast, religiously conservative participants who are mothers' express narratives focusing around guilt in engaging with Christmas owing to societal pressures of being a good mother. A pressure that leads to an acculturation trade-off between cultural and market generated preferences overcoming religious ones. Consider Razia's (Bangladeshi female, 1st generation, 26, home-maker) narrative where her acculturation trade-off between her Islamic beliefs versus wider societal pressures to be a good mother lead to her engagement with Christmas celebrations:

We don't celebrate Christmas, but my daughter, because she's in school now, so everybody is like giving gifts and things like that. So, she asks for them like, you know advent calendars that come out with chocolates inside them and you have to open one, you know, up until Christmas, so she asks for that, and that is what we get her. She doesn't ask for anything else, so we just leave it at that. We're not supposed to celebrate Christmas and she doesn't understand that yet.

A common theme amongst these mothers was the rational belief that their children's increasing religious awareness would naturally desist them from engaging with Christmas celebrations. However, these mothers' acculturation trade-offs come at an emotional cost. Consider Anam whose acculturation trade-off leads to internalized conflict:

... but when my fourth one [child] was about 5, because I'm sending him to a predominantly White school. I thought 'Oh, I'll get him some presents as well and wrap them up' and I thought 'I'll do all that.' So, I did it that one year but then I didn't do it the next year so I'm thinking, you know, we don't have to celebrate Christmas. We shouldn't be celebrating it. It's okay to be part of it, but I think that's going a step too far. I thought, but then I'd already introduced that idea to him. So, he was upset, when he didn't get them. And then the next day he goes to me 'Oh I know why I didn't get any presents,' and I said 'Why?' and he went 'Oh, it's because I wasn't a good boy and Father Christmas never gave me presents'. And I felt awful then. It was my fault for doing it the year before just with him.

4.4. Negotiating the public Christmas sphere

Negotiating the public Christmas sphere explores beyond participants' reactions to Christmas atmosphere and shopping to focus on to what extent participants publicly engage with Christmas celebrations.

Participants' Christmas celebration negotiations reflect a combination of cultural and social sensitivities, and religious beliefs, often transcending participants' liberal or conservative religious perspectives. This is perhaps not surprising since we note how participants tend not to celebrate the Prophet Mohammad's birthday suggesting Christmas celebrations would also follow suit. Whilst we also note how participants enjoy the Christmas atmosphere, this enjoyment is not identified with engaging with Christmas celebrations. Rather, it is simply identified with taking pleasure in another's happiness. Instead, in this section we are interested to what extent participants willingly engage with public acts of Christmas celebrations.

For most participants, negotiating public Christmas celebrations with personal religious beliefs occurs within the work place. This is perhaps not surprising. The work place embodies and institutionalizes society's cultural norms and rules. Here, non-conformity and rejection of any Christmas celebration could result in sanctions against the individual, such as exclusion from future social events. Consider Faisal (Pakistani male, 2nd generation, 24, university education, call center employee) who recognizes and separates Christmas celebrations into a Christian perspective but reluctantly participates in Christmas celebrations at work. An acculturation trade-off arising from a perceived greater benefit from participating than the religious cost of not participating:

Christmas is a public holiday, from the Christian point of view; it's a birth of Jesus, and yeah, I mean I've got nothing against Christmas or because people celebrate it for their own reasons. But I don't personally celebrate Christmas because it's not what I believe about Christmas...A lot of White people or Christians at work celebrate that Secret Santa thing. Obviously, the Secret Santa we are doing it with them so we have to give presents. We would get involved in it ... we would have it to get in the spirit and stuff.

For others, the office Christmas party involves alcohol. For religiously liberal participants, such as Sara, attendance at the office Christmas party represents a social event where not eating a meat dish (as no halal meat is offered) and refusing to drink alcohol maintains her Islamic beliefs. However, for religiously conservative participants, such as Aroosa, a restaurant kitchen not following Islamic food rules and serving alcohol ensures her non-attendance, a decision that causes no negative reaction from their non-Muslim peers.

Whilst participants' engagement in public displays of Christmas celebrations is limited, there is an increased engagement with Christmas celebrations within the privacy of their homes.

4.5. Negotiating the private Christmas sphere

Whilst the public sphere represents a mediation between British societal norms and Muslim community sensibilities, the private sphere represents a non-prying environment for participants to negotiate their engagement with Christmas.

For conservative religious participants, the home space remains immune to cultural, religious, and commercial interpretations of Christmas. Whilst some participants such as Anam disassociates Christmas Day from the birth of the Prophet Isa, she does spend this time reflecting upon her Islamic beliefs. For other participants, with conservative religious views, there is no religious association with Christmas Day leading to rejecting all cultural, religious, or commercial Christmas symbolism. Consider, Aroosa's narrative where she fears any Christmas engagement may lead them into religiously 'dangerous territories':

... Normal things. My dad works on Christmas Day and we just stay home and chill with family, but it's a normal day and we just watch TV or help my mum around the house. Never decorated, never had a Christmas tree, never had a Christmas meal...never had turkey or whatever they have on Christmas...Christmas is like a normal day in my house...The

¹ Boxing day is the 26th December.

idea of gift giving I think is nice, but do it not for the purpose of celebrating Christmas, as you could be going into dangerous territories in that sense.

For most participants, regardless of religiosity, Christmas celebrations tend to focus solely on a social gathering on Christmas Day. Typically, participants identify Christmas Day as a non-religious event whilst recognizing the wider cultural connotations to themselves and British society. Thus, Christmas Day becomes a time of remembering family and identifying with their own sense of identity and wider British society. Consider Ruska, (Pakistani female, 2nd generation, 19, Dentistry student) where her extended family gathers on Christmas Day:

I mean we always have a good time at Christmas, and even though we don't celebrate Christmas for the same reasons as Christian people do, we use that time to hang out with our family, so it's always a good time regardless. And we don't recognize it as... Oh my god, it's Christmas, we need presents or anything like that; we see it as a nice holiday.

Food has long been associated with family gatherings and special celebrations and for most participants this is evident in their Christmas Day consumption. Here, participants' food consumption reflects wider British cultural narratives surrounding Christmas, whilst rejecting other culturally laden symbolic consumption of Christmas trees, Christmas cards and presents. For example, Ruska's Christmas Day meal choices focus on festive meat consumption, including chicken, lamb, or turkey.

How then do most participants rationalize family social engagements over Christmas Day with their religious and cultural preferences? Central to this understanding, participants evaluate the differing demands and consequences of their actions. Here all participants recognize Christmas Day has no religious significance. However, most participants also self-identify as British and identify with British culture, including symbolic aspects of Christmas. It is within this meeting of cultural and religious preferences that can understand how most participants engage with Christmas Day. As Rehana explains:

Islam states that we should treat our family well and maintain our relation of kinship. One such way of doing that is by getting together with all family members on the event of Christmas and having a meal together. It helps us to build on the bonds of family and gives us the opportunity to share time and experiences with our parents and children.

For a small minority of participants, whilst Christmas Day maintains a clear separation from their Islamic religious beliefs, it also represents a full immersion into a secular cultural and market led understanding of Christmas. A behavior that challenges [Alhouthi et al.'s \(2015\)](#) argument that increased religiosity witnesses' religious minorities being less likely to engage in a consumer culture identifiable with the dominant culture. Whilst these participants may be religiously liberal in their Islamic interpretations, they do not see themselves as being less devout than any other Muslims. Besides consuming a Christmas meal including turkey, these participants willingly engage with gift-giving. This is particularly notable as most participants, even those who have some symbolic engagement with Christmas, refuse to give gifts on Christmas Day.

A small minority of participants willingly accept and engage with the market driven aspects of Christmas Day. Reminiscent of [O'Cass and Clarke's \(2002\)](#) research where children show increased brand awareness regarding Christmas gifts, note how Sara's excitement regarding family gift-giving conflicts with her father's preferences:

My son got lots of presents this Christmas and last. My sisters bought him presents. My father doesn't like us giving gifts over Christmas, because it is not a Muslim religious festival and we shouldn't be practicing the gift-giving aspects ... We also take part in giving gifts to the children; it is really exciting, and the children enjoy opening their presents. Frozen was big this year for my niece, so she was bought lots of Frozen gifts, whereas my son is into Spiderman so he got lots of presents with Spiderman on. The day is really special, as we capture the moments on camera so we

can look back in years to say – this was his first Christmas, second Christmas, etc.

5. Discussion

5.1. Acculturation trade-offs

We identify acculturation trade-offs as an engagement giving rise to the individuals rejecting, compromising, or submersing their selves in the majority's behavior. Central to this engagement is the individuals assessing and evaluating the costs and benefits arising from this engagement. Throughout our findings, we identify a range of acculturation trade-offs. Whether it is Aroosa and her family refusing to engage with any aspect of Christmas through to Faisal's reluctance but ultimate participation in the office secret Santa through to Sara's full cultural immersion into a British cultural Christmas experience. By hearing these participant voices, we challenge and extend [Weinberger's \(2015\)](#) work on self-exclusion from religious festivals. Here we show that self-exclusion takes many forms, often involving some form of editing one's engagement.

How then do we understand these acculturation trade-offs? Religiosity only partially explains the participants' behaviors. Whilst all the participants rejected Christmas Day as being the birthday of Jesus Christ/Prophet Isa, more religiously conservative participants acknowledged and reflected on the Prophet Isa on Christmas Day. Hence, we would be mistaken for using the terms 'conservative' and 'liberal' religiously as clearly demarcating between participants' religiosity. Indeed, those liberally religious participants engaging with some form of Christmas Day celebration associate their behaviors with British culture, justifying their behavior through Islamic beliefs surrounding the importance of the family.

Neither do existing acculturation theories offer a suitable explanation. [Berry's \(1997\)](#) acculturation classifications fail to capture the participants' diverse behaviors. Participants' behaviors are motivated by personal choice, such as celebrating Christmas within the privacy of their homes, and at other times gaining social approval from groups or institutions indicative of wider society, such as work based Christmas celebrations. Such actions can be identified with [Berry's \(1997\)](#) acculturation outcome of integration, and with consumer acculturation behaviors described as 'selective acculturation', 'culture swapping' and 'situational ethnicity'. Yet these terms do not explain why several participants actively engage with some forms of Christmas celebration in their private homes. A space is free from external society or community scrutiny and one requiring some form of religious rational justification. Whilst these terms begin to capture the personal and religious cost of engaging in wider society's Christmas celebrations, they fail to address once again the emotional and religious cost of such engagement. In summary then, our findings indicate that consumption acculturation is occurring but in a variety of differing ways not explained by existing acculturation theories. It is here we find acculturation trade-offs.

5.2. Religiosity and the social explanation model

[Roof \(1979\)](#) calls for further understanding of the paramount dimensions within a group's religiosity. By applying [Esser's \(2001\)](#) social explanation model we address [Roof's \(1979\)](#) call through identifying the interaction between [Berger's \(1967\)](#) 'sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning' based upon religious adherence and a wider secular cultural and market driven sacred canopy of socially constructed meaning. Both these differing canopies represent a complex collection of inter-related beliefs and values based around shared religious understanding (Jesus Christ/Prophet Isa), British cultural values and market driven narratives of mass consumption. Hence, referring to [Glennan's \(1996\)](#) mechanism definition, participants' behaviors emerged from these two contrasting but inter-linked canopies. It is here

that we locate acculturation trade-offs.

Acculturation trade-offs occur between the interactions within Kincaid's (1996) social causality occurring at the macro-level (societal level), meso-level (group interactions) and micro-level (individual). Reminiscent of Schmitt et al.'s (2010) observation of Christmas pervading all aspects of daily life, neither are the participants truly able to deny or avoid any interaction with Christmas celebrations. The key intervening mechanism bringing these Muslim participants into engagement with Christmas celebrations is the market. Here we witness Christmas celebrations as a pervasive and penetrating mechanism covering all aspects of British life, ranging from childhood socialization through to shopping events and office Christmas parties. Considered as a mechanism, Christmas is a force that many participants have neither the resources nor the willingness to resist. Instead participants make rational decisions interpreting Christmas as a cultural event and then, for some, applying an Islamic rationale on the importance of family gatherings.

5.3. Future research and limitations

Our paper lends itself to future research. First, we call for future research to apply the principles within Esser's (2001) SME. Here future research should aim to explore Kincaid's (1996) perspective of social causality, focusing on which actors hold what power and influence over others? Second, we welcome studies focusing on minority family socialization and how they recognize and negotiate challenging religious perspectives whilst maintaining perceived family and religious benefits (Bartikowski, Taieb, & Chandon, 2016). Finally, we encourage research to explore dominant society's engagement with another's religious celebrations (Cruz, Seo, & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017).

This paper is not without its limitations. First, our sample group is limited to South Asians living in a specific geographic area, ensuring an unrepresentative sample. Secondly, participants struggle to discuss their engagement with Christmas celebrations for fear of wrongdoing from an Islamic perspective.

5.4. Conclusion

We explain why religious minorities engage with an other's religious celebrations through Esser's (2001) SME, noting how various cultural and societal mechanisms collude with each other to encourage acculturation and socialization into Christmas celebrations. Esser's (2001) SME when considered within acculturation reminds us how minorities feel the need or pressure to conform to society's cultural values. Central to this conformity is individual's need to benefit from social engagements, an argument echoing Hirschman et al.'s (2011) perspective of sharing religious festivals within a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship. We dispute Esser's (2001) perspective of individuals seeking to maximize their benefit. Instead, we argue that participants selectively seek to gain a benefit without compromising their own religious beliefs.

Competing interests statement

None of the authors have any competing interests to declare.

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