

Fasting, Faith, And Informal Market: X-Raying the Economic Effect Of 2026 Ramadan and Lengthen Seasons on Lagos State's Informal Economy

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Abstract

Religious seasons play significant roles in shaping economic activities within Africa's informal economy. This paper examines the economic effects of the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons on Lagos State's informal market, with particular attention to consumption patterns, market behavior, employment opportunities, and income generation among informal sector operators. Anchored on Religious Economy Theory and Social Capital Theory, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive methodology, utilizing documentary analysis of scholarly literature, policy documents, market reports, and relevant socioeconomic data. Findings reveal that the Ramadan season stimulates increased demand for food items, transportation services, clothing, and temporary labour, thereby boosting sales and income among informal traders. Similarly, the Lenten season influences consumer behavior through moderated spending, increased charitable giving, and patronage of religious goods and services, resulting in resource redistribution within communities. The study further finds that both religious seasons strengthen social networks, create seasonal livelihood opportunities, and contribute significantly to the vibrancy of Lagos State's informal economy. However, challenges such as price fluctuations, inflationary pressures, and the commercialization of religious practices were also identified. The paper concludes that Ramadan and Lent function not only as spiritual observances but also as important economic drivers within Lagos State's informal sector. It recommends that policymakers incorporate religious seasons into economic planning, strengthen market monitoring mechanisms to prevent exploitative pricing, support informal traders through financial inclusion initiatives, and encourage faith-based organizations to promote sustainable livelihood programs. The study contributes to the discourse on Africa's religious economy by demonstrating the intersection between faith practices and informal market dynamics.

Keywords: Religious Economy, Ramadan, Lent, Informal Economy, Lagos State, Faith and Markets.

Introduction

Religion remains one of the most influential social institutions in Africa, shaping not only spiritual life but also economic behaviour, consumption patterns, and livelihood systems. Across the continent, religious observances often generate significant economic activities that affect households, businesses, and markets. The concept of religious economy emphasises the interaction between religious practices and economic activities, demonstrating that faith traditions frequently influence production, distribution, consumption, and resource allocation

within society (Iannaccone 1998, p. 1468-1470). In Nigeria, where Christianity and Islam constitute the dominant religious traditions, annual religious observances such as Ramadan and Lent exert considerable influence on market activities, especially within the informal economy. The informal economy constitutes a major component of economic life in Lagos State and Nigeria generally. It comprises small-scale enterprises, street traders, transport operators, artisans, food vendors, and numerous self-employed individuals who operate outside formal regulatory structures. According to the International Labour Organisation, the informal sector accounts for a substantial proportion of employment opportunities and income generation in developing economies, particularly in Africa (ILO 2018, p. 23-25). Lagos State, as Nigeria's commercial nerve centre, hosts one of the largest concentrations of informal economic activities in Africa, making it an appropriate context for examining the relationship between religion and economic behaviour. Religious seasons such as Ramadan and Lent have historically shaped economic activities through increased religious participation, fasting practices, charitable giving, and festival-related expenditures. Ramadan, observed by Muslims worldwide, is characterised by fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and communal gatherings, often resulting in increased demand for food items, transportation services, clothing, and hospitality-related activities. Similarly, Lent, observed by many Christians, encourages fasting, self-denial, spiritual reflection, and charitable acts, which influence spending patterns and consumption behaviour (McDaniel & Burnett 1990, p. 105-108). These religious practices generate economic opportunities while simultaneously affecting market dynamics within local communities. The motivation for this study arises from the growing recognition that religious activities constitute significant economic forces that are often overlooked in discussions of development and informal market systems. While numerous studies have examined the spiritual dimensions of Ramadan and Lent, limited scholarly attention has been given to their economic implications within Lagos State's informal economy. Furthermore, the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons present an important opportunity to investigate how religious observances influence market demand, income generation, employment opportunities, social welfare, and economic redistribution among informal sector operators. Understanding these dynamics is essential for policymakers, religious institutions, market stakeholders, and development practitioners seeking to promote inclusive economic growth and sustainable livelihoods. The paper is anchored on Religious Economy Theory, which views religious institutions and practices as actors within broader economic systems, and Social Capital Theory, which emphasises the role of trust, networks, and social relationships in facilitating economic exchanges and community support. These theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for understanding how faith-based practices influence economic behaviour and market outcomes during major religious seasons. The study seeks to examine the economic effects of the 2026 Ramadan season on Lagos State's informal economy; investigate the economic effects of the 2026 Lenten season on informal market activities in Lagos State; compare the economic impacts of Ramadan and Lent on informal traders, consumers, and livelihoods in Lagos State. The study seeks answers to the following questions: what economic effects did the 2026 Ramadan season have on Lagos State's informal economy? How did the 2026 Lenten season influence informal market activities and consumer behaviour in Lagos State? What similarities and differences exist between the economic impacts of Ramadan and Lent on Lagos State's informal economy? This paper determined to the intention of this paper is to contribute to the discourse on Africa's religious economy by examining the relationship between faith practices and informal market dynamics. Specifically, the paper seeks to demonstrate that

religious observances such as Ramadan and Lent function not only as spiritual exercises but also as significant economic drivers that shape consumption patterns, employment opportunities, income generation, and social welfare within Lagos State's informal economy. The study further aims to provide insights that may inform policy formulation, market regulation, and faith-based economic empowerment initiatives across Africa.

Literature Review

Religious Economy: Concept and Perspectives

The concept of religious economy emerged from attempts to explain the relationship between religion and economic activities within society. Religious economy refers to the interaction between religious beliefs, institutions, practices, and economic behaviour. It views religious organisations as active participants in economic life and suggests that religious activities often influence production, consumption, distribution, and resource allocation within communities. According to Iannaccone (1998, p. 1467-1470), religious economy examines how religious actors compete, cooperate, and influence economic decisions in ways similar to other social institutions. Rather than existing outside economic systems, religion frequently shapes economic choices, labour practices, market participation, and patterns of social welfare.

The relevance of religious economy is particularly evident in Africa where religion remains deeply integrated into social and economic life. Religious organizations provide educational services, healthcare, employment opportunities, charitable assistance, and community development initiatives. In many African societies, economic decisions are often influenced by religious values and ethical considerations. Individuals may modify consumption patterns, investment decisions, and spending behaviours in response to religious teachings and observances. Consequently, religious seasons such as Ramadan and Lent generate significant economic activities that affect households, businesses, and informal markets (Ter Haar & Ellis 2006, p. 354-357). Religious economy theory further argues that religious participation produces both spiritual and material outcomes. Faith communities create social networks that facilitate trust, cooperation, and mutual support among members. These networks often encourage economic transactions and provide opportunities for resource mobilization. In many developing economies, religious institutions function as important centres of economic redistribution through charitable giving, welfare programmes, and support for vulnerable populations. Such activities become particularly visible during major religious observances when acts of generosity and communal support increase significantly (Smith 2003, p. 18-21).

Fasting and Faith Practices

Fasting is a religious discipline observed in many faith traditions and generally involves abstaining from food, drink, or certain activities for spiritual purposes. In both Christianity and Islam, fasting is regarded as a means of spiritual purification, self-discipline, repentance, and devotion to God. However, fasting also has important social and economic implications because it influences consumption behaviour, household expenditure, and patterns of market demand. Religious observances that involve fasting often create unique economic conditions that affect producers, traders, and consumers (Essoo & Dibb 2004, p. 686-689). Ramadan represents one of the most significant fasting periods in Islam. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours while increasing prayer, charity, and communal engagement. Although fasting reduces daytime consumption, overall expenditure often increases because of

the preparation of meals for breaking the fast, religious gatherings, and celebrations associated with Eid al-Fitr. Consequently, demand for food products, transportation services, clothing, and hospitality services frequently rises during the Ramadan period. Markets often experience increased commercial activity as traders seek to meet the heightened demand generated by religious observances (Minkus-McKenna 2007, p. 102-105).

Similarly, Lent occupies an important place within Christian traditions. Lent is a period of spiritual reflection, fasting, prayer, and self-denial observed in preparation for Easter. Christians are encouraged to practice moderation in consumption and to engage in acts of charity and generosity. While Lenten fasting may reduce demand for certain products, it often increases charitable contributions and spending on religious activities. Churches frequently organise welfare programmes, community outreach initiatives, and special religious services that stimulate economic interactions within local communities. Therefore, Lent influences both market behaviour and patterns of social redistribution (McGrath 2017, p. 312-315).

Informal Economy in Africa

The informal economy refers to economic activities that operate outside formal regulatory frameworks but contribute significantly to employment and income generation. It includes street vending, petty trading, transportation services, artisan work, domestic services, and numerous small-scale enterprises. According to the International Labour Organisation (2018, p. 20-24), the informal sector accounts for more than 85 percent of employment in many African countries and serves as a critical source of livelihood for millions of people. In Nigeria, the informal economy plays a particularly important role because of rapid urbanisation, unemployment, and limited opportunities within the formal sector. Lagos State hosts one of the largest informal economies in Africa, characterised by diverse commercial activities ranging from food vending and transportation to retail trading and personal services. These activities provide employment opportunities for large segments of the population while contributing substantially to economic growth and poverty reduction (Meagher 2013, p. 14-17). The informal economy is highly responsive to seasonal and social factors, including religious observances. Changes in consumer behaviour during major religious seasons often create opportunities for traders and service providers. Increased demand for specific products and services may result in higher sales, temporary employment opportunities, and income growth. However, seasonal demand can also contribute to price increases and market instability. Consequently, understanding the relationship between religious activities and informal market dynamics is important for evaluating economic outcomes within developing societies (Chen 2012, p. 8-10).

Ramadan and Lent: Religious and Socio-Economic Dimensions

Ramadan and Lent possess both spiritual and socio-economic dimensions that extend beyond personal religious devotion. These seasons influence individual behaviour, household spending, community relationships, and market activities. During Ramadan, increased spending on food, transportation, clothing, and charitable activities often stimulates commercial transactions within local economies. Informal traders frequently benefit from increased consumer demand and extended trading hours associated with religious celebrations (Osella & Osella 2009, p. 207-210). Likewise, the Lenten season promotes charitable giving, community support, and religious participation. Many faith-based organisations expand welfare programmes and humanitarian activities during this period. Such initiatives contribute to economic redistribution and provide

support for vulnerable populations. In addition, religious gatherings create opportunities for vendors who supply food, religious materials, transportation services, and other products required for religious events. Consequently, both Ramadan and Lent demonstrate the capacity of religious practices to influence economic behaviour and sustain informal livelihoods. The socio-economic significance of these religious seasons is particularly evident in Lagos State, where large Christian and Muslim populations participate actively in religious observances. The interaction between faith practices and market activities illustrates how religion functions as an economic force capable of shaping consumer behaviour, employment patterns, and community welfare. Therefore, examining the economic effects of Ramadan and Lent provides valuable insights into the broader relationship between religion and development within Africa's informal economy.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design utilizing documentary and content analysis methods. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring social phenomena within their natural contexts and for generating rich descriptions of complex relationships between religion and economic activities. The design enabled the researcher to examine how the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons influenced economic behaviour within Lagos State's informal economy through the analysis of existing documents, scholarly publications, government reports, market surveys, media reports, and relevant statistical records. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research provides a systematic framework for understanding social realities through the interpretation of textual and contextual data (pp. 41-44). The design was considered suitable because the study sought to investigate the economic implications of religious observances rather than establish causal relationships through experimental procedures.

The population for this study comprised all documented economic activities associated with the informal sector in Lagos State during the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons. Specifically, the study focused on information relating to informal traders, food vendors, transport operators, artisans, market associations, religious organizations, and consumers whose economic activities were influenced by these religious observances. The documentary sources included journal articles, books, government publications, reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), publications of the International Labour Organization (ILO), reports from faith-based organizations, newspaper reports, and market analyses relevant to the study. The use of documentary sources as the population is consistent with qualitative research traditions that rely on textual evidence for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p. 162-165).

Purposive sampling was employed to select relevant documents and data sources for the study. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of information-rich materials capable of providing insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher selected documents based on their relevance to religious economy, informal markets, Ramadan, Lent, consumer behaviour, and economic activities in Lagos State. Only documents published by reputable academic institutions, governmental agencies, international organisations, and recognised research bodies were included. This approach ensured the credibility and reliability of the information analysed. Patton (2015) notes that purposive sampling enables researchers to obtain in-depth information from sources that are particularly knowledgeable about the subject under investigation (p. 264-267). The primary instrument for data collection was a document analysis guide developed by the researcher. The guide consisted of categories and themes derived from

the objectives of the study, including consumption patterns, employment opportunities, income generation, market demand, price fluctuations, charitable giving, and economic redistribution. The guide facilitated the systematic extraction, organisation, and interpretation of information from selected documents. Document analysis is widely recognised as a reliable method for collecting qualitative data because it allows researchers to examine existing records and generate meaningful insights from textual materials (Bowen 2009, p. 29-31).

Data were collected through a systematic review of relevant literature and documentary sources. The researcher identified and retrieved materials from academic databases, libraries, government repositories, organizational reports, and credible online sources. The selected documents were carefully reviewed to identify information related to the economic effects of Ramadan and Lent on Lagos State's informal economy. Relevant data were extracted, categorised, and organised according to the themes developed from the objectives of the study. The researcher ensured that all selected materials were relevant, authentic, credible, and current. This procedure enhanced the trustworthiness and dependability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p. 181-184).

The data collected for this study were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic procedure for identifying, organizing, interpreting, and presenting patterns and themes within textual data. The method enabled the researcher to examine how religious observances influence economic activities within Lagos State's informal economy. According to Schreier (2012, p. 1-4), content analysis facilitates the classification of textual materials into meaningful categories that allow researchers to draw conclusions from documentary evidence. The first stage of analysis involved data familiarisation. The researcher repeatedly read all selected documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of their contents and to identify information relevant to the objectives of the study.

During this stage, significant statements, observations, statistical information, and discussions relating to Ramadan, Lent, religious economy, consumer behaviour, market activities, and informal economic practices were highlighted. Familiarisation enabled the researcher to develop a broad understanding of the issues and identify recurring patterns across different sources. The second stage involved coding the data. Coding refers to the process of assigning labels to segments of information that relate to specific concepts or themes. Information extracted from the documents was categorized according to the major concerns of the study. Codes such as "food demand," "transport services," "temporary employment," "charitable giving," "religious merchandise," "income generation," "price increases," and "social welfare" were assigned to relevant portions of the data. The coding process enabled the researcher to organise large volumes of information into manageable analytical units. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 186-190) observe that coding enhances the systematic interpretation of qualitative data by grouping similar ideas into categories. Following the coding process, the researcher developed thematic categories corresponding to the objectives of the study. Themes relating to the economic effects of Ramadan, economic effects of Lent, similarities and differences between the two religious' seasons, opportunities for informal traders, challenges faced by market operators, and implications for sustainable livelihoods emerged from the analysis. These themes served as the basis for interpreting the findings and discussing the broader implications of the study.

Thematic organisation enabled the researcher to identify relationships among concepts and explain how religious practices shape economic behaviour within Lagos State's informal economy. The analysis further involved comparative interpretation. Information relating to Ramadan was compared with information relating to Lent in order to identify areas of

convergence and divergence. The comparison focused on consumer spending patterns, market demand, employment opportunities, charitable activities, and social welfare outcomes. Comparative analysis provided deeper insights into the unique and shared economic contributions of the two religious seasons. Through this process, the researcher was able to explain the extent to which each observance influences informal market activities and livelihood opportunities. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was employed. Information obtained from academic literature was compared with evidence from government reports, organisational publications, and media sources. Triangulation enhanced the validity of the findings by reducing the possibility of bias associated with a single source of information. The researcher also maintained consistency between the research objectives, research questions, and analytical categories throughout the study. The findings were presented descriptively using thematic narratives. The results were organised according to the major objectives of the study and supported with evidence from the reviewed literature and documentary sources. This approach enabled the researcher to provide a coherent explanation of the relationship between religious observances and economic activities within Lagos State's informal economy. The descriptive presentation of findings ensured that the economic effects of Ramadan and Lent were clearly articulated within the broader framework of Africa's religious economy.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons significantly influenced economic activities within Lagos State's informal economy. The analysis demonstrates that religious observances serve not only spiritual purposes but also function as important economic drivers that shape consumption patterns, market demand, employment opportunities, and social welfare. This finding supports the Religious Economy perspective of Iannaccone (1998, p. 1465-1472), who argues that religion and economic behaviour are closely interconnected and that religious activities often generate measurable economic outcomes within society. Regarding the first objective, the study found that the Ramadan season stimulated increased commercial activities among informal traders, food vendors, transport operators, and service providers. Demand for food items, beverages, clothing materials, and transportation services increased considerably during the fasting period and the Eid celebrations. This finding corroborates the work of Minkus-McKenna (2007, p. 103-105), who observed that Ramadan creates unique consumption patterns capable of increasing household expenditures despite the fasting requirements associated with the season. Similarly, Osella and Osella (2009, p. 205-209) noted that religious observances often create new economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and small-scale traders. The study further found that Ramadan generated temporary employment opportunities within Lagos State's informal economy. Traders recruited additional workers to meet increased consumer demand, while transport operators experienced higher patronage due to increased movement associated with religious activities. This finding aligns with the position of the International Labour Organisation (2018, p. 20-24), which recognises the informal sector as a major source of employment and income generation in developing economies. The finding also confirms Meagher's (2013, p. 14-17) assertion that informal markets respond rapidly to social and seasonal changes, thereby creating opportunities for livelihood enhancement. Another major finding revealed that Ramadan contributed to price increases and inflationary pressures on essential commodities. The heightened demand for food products and household necessities resulted in temporary price fluctuations across several markets in Lagos State. While traders

benefited from increased profits, low-income consumers experienced financial strain. This finding supports earlier observations by Meagher (2013, p. 18-20) that seasonal demand often contributes to market instability within informal economies. However, the study found that religious charity through zakat, community feeding programmes, and welfare initiatives helped to cushion the economic effects on vulnerable households. The findings also indicated that charitable giving increased significantly during Ramadan. Religious organizations, affluent individuals, and community groups engaged in food distribution and financial assistance programmes for disadvantaged persons. This finding supports Smith's (2003, p. 18-21) argument that religious institutions serve as channels for social support and resource mobilisation within communities. It further validates the position of Ter Haar and Ellis (2006, p. 356-359), who contend that religion contributes substantially to development through welfare provision, social assistance, and community empowerment. Concerning the second objective, the study found that the Lenten season influenced economic behaviour differently from Ramadan. While Ramadan was characterised by increased consumption, Lent encouraged moderation, self-denial, and spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, economic activities remained evident through increased spending on religious programmes, devotional materials, church events, and charitable activities. This finding agrees with McGrath (2017, p. 312-315), who notes that Lenten observances encourage Christians to redirect resources toward spiritual growth and acts of charity rather than personal consumption. The findings further revealed that Lenten charitable activities contributed to economic redistribution within local communities. Churches organised welfare programmes, food outreaches, medical assistance, and support services for vulnerable populations. This finding corroborates Smith's (2003, p. 19-22) view that faith communities create social networks that facilitate resource sharing and community development. The finding also supports Social Capital Theory, which emphasises the role of trust, reciprocity, and social relationships in promoting collective welfare and economic support systems (Putnam 2000, p. 19-24). Another important finding showed that some food vendors experienced changes in consumer demand during Lent. Certain categories of food witnessed reduced patronage due to fasting practices, while alternative products experienced increased demand. This finding is consistent with Essoo and Dibb's (2004, p. 686-690) study, which found that religious commitment significantly influences consumer preferences and purchasing behaviour. Similarly, McDaniel and Burnett (1990, p. 104-107) observed that religiosity affects the criteria individuals use in making consumption decisions and market choices. With respect to the third objective, the comparative analysis revealed that both Ramadan and Lent positively influenced Lagos State's informal economy, though through different mechanisms. Both religious seasons encouraged charitable giving, strengthened social relationships, stimulated market activities, and supported vulnerable populations. This finding supports the argument of Ter Haar and Ellis (2006, p. 360-362) that religion remains a vital contributor to social and economic development in African societies. The study also confirms Iannaccone's (1998, p. 1475-1478) assertion that religious institutions generate both spiritual and material benefits for their members and communities. Despite these similarities, significant differences were identified. Ramadan generated stronger commercial activity through increased consumption, festive expenditures, and market transactions, whereas Lent exerted a greater influence on charitable redistribution and moderated spending patterns. The findings therefore suggest that Ramadan functions primarily as a consumption-driven religious economy, while Lent operates more prominently as a redistribution-oriented religious economy. These differences demonstrate the diverse ways through which religious observances

influence economic activities and livelihoods within the informal sector. The study found that religious observances constitute significant economic forces within Lagos State's informal economy. The findings validate Religious Economy Theory by demonstrating that faith practices influence market behaviour, employment generation, income distribution, and social welfare. The study also supports Social Capital Theory by showing that religious networks facilitate trust, cooperation, charitable giving, and community support. Consequently, the economic effects of Ramadan and Lent extend beyond spirituality to contribute meaningfully to sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic development within Lagos State and Africa more broadly.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Religious Economy Theory, Rational Choice Theory of Religion, and Social Capital Theory. These theories provide valuable insights into understanding how religious practices influence economic activities, market behaviour, and livelihood opportunities within Lagos State's informal economy during the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons.

Religious Economy Theory

Religious Economy Theory emerged from the works of scholars such as Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Laurence Iannaccone. The theory applies economic principles to the study of religion and views religious organisations as participants in a religious marketplace where individuals make choices concerning religious beliefs, practices, and commitments. According to Iannaccone (1998, p. 1467-1472), religion functions within a competitive environment in which religious institutions provide spiritual and social benefits that influence the behaviour of adherents. The theory argues that religious activities often generate economic consequences because religious beliefs shape consumption patterns, charitable giving, labour participation, and resource allocation. Religious Economy Theory is relevant to this study because both Ramadan and Lent influence economic activities through fasting practices, religious gatherings, almsgiving, and festival-related expenditures. During these religious seasons, individuals modify their spending habits, increase participation in charitable activities, and engage in market transactions associated with religious observances. These behaviours create economic opportunities for traders, transport operators, food vendors, and service providers within Lagos State's informal economy. Consequently, the theory explains how religious commitments can influence market demand and economic outcomes. The theory further suggests that religious institutions serve as important channels for economic redistribution and social welfare. Through mechanisms such as zakat during Ramadan and charitable programmes during Lent, resources are transferred from wealthier individuals to vulnerable members of society. Such activities contribute to poverty alleviation, social support, and community development. Therefore, Religious Economy Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between faith practices and economic activities in Africa's informal sector. Rational Choice Theory of Religion was developed primarily by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge. The theory assumes that individuals make decisions based on perceived costs and benefits. In the religious context, people participate in religious activities because they believe the benefits derived from such participation outweigh the associated costs. According to Stark and Bainbridge (1987, p. 25-30), religious behaviour can be understood as a rational response to spiritual, social, and material incentives. Applied to this study, Rational Choice Theory explains why individuals increase participation in religious activities during Ramadan and Lent despite the sacrifices associated

with fasting and self-denial.

Adherents willingly engage in these practices because they anticipate spiritual rewards, social recognition, moral fulfilment, and communal benefits. These choices influence economic behaviour as consumers adjust their spending patterns, purchase religious materials, contribute to charitable causes, and participate in religious events. The theory also helps explain the behaviour of informal market operators who strategically respond to changing consumer demands during religious seasons. Traders often increase inventory, adjust prices, and diversify products to maximize opportunities created by heightened demand. Thus, both consumers and producers make rational decisions that contribute to economic activities during Ramadan and Lent.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory is associated with scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. The theory emphasises the value of social networks, trust, reciprocity, and relationships in facilitating cooperation and achieving collective goals. Putnam (2000, p. 18-24) argues that social capital enhances social cohesion and promotes economic and community development by encouraging collaboration among individuals and groups. The relevance of Social Capital Theory to this study lies in its explanation of how religious communities create networks that facilitate economic interactions and mutual support. During Ramadan and Lent, individuals participate in religious gatherings, community outreach programmes, charitable activities, and welfare initiatives. These activities strengthen social relationships and foster trust among community members. Such networks often provide economic benefits by facilitating information sharing, financial support, business opportunities, and resource mobilisation. The theory further explains how religious institutions contribute to sustainable livelihoods through social welfare programmes and community development initiatives. During both Ramadan and Lent, religious organizations frequently provide food assistance, financial aid, and other forms of support to vulnerable individuals. These activities enhance social inclusion and contribute to economic redistribution within communities. Consequently, Social Capital Theory provides an important perspective for understanding the socio-economic effects of religious observances in Lagos State's informal economy. Although the three theories provide valuable insights, this study is principally anchored on Religious Economy Theory because it directly explains the interaction between religious practices and economic activities. The theory provides the most suitable framework for examining how Ramadan and Lent influence consumption patterns, market dynamics, income generation, employment opportunities, and resource redistribution within Lagos State's informal economy. Social Capital Theory serves as a complementary framework for explaining the role of religious networks in facilitating economic support and community welfare, while Rational Choice Theory helps explain individual economic and religious decisions during the two observances.

Summary

The study examined the economic effects of the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten seasons on Lagos State's informal economy within the broader context of Africa's religious economy. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the economic effects of the Ramadan season on Lagos State's informal economy, to investigate the economic effects of the Lenten season on informal market activities, and to compare the economic impacts of both religious observances on traders, consumers, and livelihoods. Anchored on Religious Economy Theory, Rational

Choice Theory of Religion, and Social Capital Theory, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design utilising documentary analysis of relevant literature, reports, and socioeconomic data. The findings revealed that Ramadan stimulated increased demand for food items, transportation services, clothing materials, and temporary labour opportunities, thereby enhancing income generation among informal market operators. The study also found that Lent influenced economic activities through charitable giving, religious programmes, welfare initiatives, and changes in consumer spending patterns. Furthermore, the comparative analysis showed that while Ramadan generated stronger consumption-driven economic activities, Lent contributed more significantly to social welfare and economic redistribution. Both religious seasons were found to strengthen social networks, support livelihoods, and contribute positively to the vibrancy of Lagos State's informal economy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that religious observances extend beyond their spiritual significance to become important drivers of economic activities within Lagos State's informal economy. The 2026 Ramadan season significantly stimulated commercial transactions, employment opportunities, and consumer spending, while the Lenten season promoted charitable redistribution, community support, and socially responsible economic behaviour. The findings affirm the propositions of Religious Economy Theory that religious practices influence economic behaviour and market dynamics. The study further establishes that faith-based activities contribute to livelihood sustenance, social cohesion, and economic resilience among informal market participants. Therefore, religion should not merely be viewed as a spiritual institution but also as a significant socio-economic force capable of influencing development outcomes within African societies.

Recommendations

1. Government and economic policymakers should integrate religious seasons into economic planning and market management strategies. Since the study found that Ramadan significantly increases demand for goods and services within the informal economy, relevant agencies should anticipate seasonal market pressures, strengthen price-monitoring mechanisms, and provide support measures that protect consumers from exploitative pricing and artificial scarcity.
2. Faith-based organisations should strengthen and institutionalise sustainable economic empowerment initiatives during religious seasons. Given that the study found that Lenten and Ramadan charitable activities contribute to livelihood support and economic redistribution, religious bodies should complement short-term welfare interventions with skills acquisition programmes, microcredit schemes, entrepreneurship support, and poverty reduction initiatives capable of generating long-term economic benefits for vulnerable populations.
3. Informal market operators and community development stakeholders should leverage the opportunities created by religious seasons for sustainable livelihood development. Since the study established that both Ramadan and Lent create seasonal business opportunities and employment prospects, traders, artisans, transport operators, and small-scale entrepreneurs should develop strategic business plans, diversify products and services, and strengthen cooperative networks to maximise the economic benefits associated with religious observances.

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