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## Culture, religion, and conspicuous consumption-nexus triad fueling food waste

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This narrative review offers vital contribution to the discourse on sustainability, food security, and sociocultural transformation; it furnishes a compelling interdisciplinary exploration of the complex drivers of food waste in Nigeria. It highlighted how in Nigeria, the phenomenon is a multifarious issue profoundly rooted in the country's cultural norms, religious practices, celebrations, exacerbated by excessive consumerism, conspicuous consumption and lavish spending particularly during festivals and religious ceremonies. Furthermore, the article alluded that the background of the problem transcends logistical inefficiencies or lack of infrastructure; they are complexly tied to societal values and perceptions of status and hospitality. **Methods:** This article uses comparative analytical lenses to synthesize existing literature to provide an intricate and balanced consideration of diverse issues that have relevance to the phenomenon under consideration. Multiple data sources, especially academic databases such as ResearchGate, DOAJ, Scopus, and JSTOR were searched for relevant studies and articles that have bearing on food wastage. The review is hinged on the theory of Planned Behavior and Social Practice Theory. **Findings:** In line with the tenets of theory of Planned Behavior this review especially revealed that food wastage occur among individuals and households in Nigeria because people believe food wastage is innocuous, a sign of abundance and hospitality. Also, corroborating the Social Practice Theory, this review uncovered that food wastage in Nigeria is largely related to everyday routines and skills that shape how people buy, store, cook, and consume food. **Conclusion:** This article concluded that food wastage issue in the country is driven not by the surplus or low cost of food but mostly by the caprices of individuals. As a departure from other articles and research on the phenomenon, this article has put plate food waste and misjudging food quality on a pedestal as also weighty factors that contribute subtly but significantly to the food waste phenomenon in the country. The article recommended amongst others that food waste reduction should tackle issues across the entire supply chain, from preparation to consumer behavior while emphasizing the need to discard outdated and inefficient practices and reevaluate cultural norms around celebrations and religious festivals. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** Majority of contemporary articles on food wastage focused chiefly on factors such as poor storage facilities and supply chain inefficiencies, with little to no attention given to the social causation of the phenomenon which is a primary focus of this review.

**KEYWORDS:** consumer behavior; food security; food systems; invidious consumption; sustainability.

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## 1. Introduction

Food security remains one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century (Jeger et al., 2021; Peketi et al., 2025). Despite sufficient global food production to feed the current population, millions suffer from hunger and malnutrition (Sharma et al., 2016). Ironically, a significant amount of food never reaches those who need them due to inefficiencies in the food supply chain, namely food losses and food waste (De Boni et al., 2022). While often used interchangeably, food losses and food waste refer to different phenomenon with distinct causes and implications. Food losses refers to decrease in the quantity or quality of food resulting from decisions and actions by food suppliers in the chain, excluding retailers, food service providers, and consumers (Delgado et al., 2021). Food losses typically occur at production, post-harvest, storage, processing and distribution phases (Yahia et al., 2019).

Food waste refers to food that is fit for human consumption but is discarded either before or when it spoils, often due to consumer behavior or retailer practices (Tomaszewska et al., 2022). According to Allen & Eze (2025), food waste is “any nutritious or edible foodstuff that is purposefully discarded during the preparation or consumption phases for a number of causes, instead of being meant for human consumption”. In essence, the main difference between food losses and food waste lies in the stage of the supply chain and the intentionality of disposal; food loss is largely unintentional and occurs earlier in the chain, food waste on the other hand often involves deliberate discarding of edible food (Rezaei & Liu, 2017), and usually happens at retail and consumer/consumption levels (Aktas et al., 2018). While food loss are caused by poor infrastructure, technical limitations, climatic factors and market conditions, consumer behavior (over-purchasing, poor meal planning, confusion over expiry dates), retail prices (rejection of imperfect produce, aggressive marketing, large portion sizes), cultural norms (societal attitudes that promote excess or stigmatize leftovers), and lack of awareness; many consumers are unaware of how to store food properly or the implications of waste (Agya, 2025).

According to Lahiri et al. (2023), food waste could be in form of food scraps (uneaten food parts), spoiled food (food that has gone bad due to improper storage, or contamination), expired food (food that are past their expiration date or shelf life), unwanted left overs (leftovers that are not consumed and are discarded), over prepared food (excess food prepared for events or meals that goes uneaten), and plate waste (food left uneaten on plates at eateries, schools, parties, or homes). According to Jeno et al. (2021), the country with the most food waste originating from households, were China (more than 108 million tonnes), India (more than 78 million tonnes) and the United States of America (more than 24 million tonnes); about 30 percent of food in American grocery stores is thrown away (Gunders & Bloom, 2017).

In an attempt to meet the needs of Nigeria's rising population in terms of food, an increase in the production of food is ongoing annually (Okoro, 2024). Due to the increase in food production, there is also a corresponding increase in the amount of food that goes to waste from households, fast food post, and restaurants (Gunjal et al., 2019). Food waste poses significant threat to Nigeria immediate environment, health, and economy (Haruna et al., 2023). Nigeria's food system displays a disastrous paradox: the country ranks among the highest producer of its staple foods globally (Okwuonu et al., 2021), the country is facing rife hunger and malnutrition as 30.6 million of its citizens will face acute food insecurity between June and August 2025 (Kolawole et al., 2024), while at the same time suffering substantial food waste (Uluocha, 2025). Nigeria is the country wasting the most food in Africa (Kolawole et al., 2024). Food waste represents a significant economic loss for the nation; food worth billions of naira is wasted from farm to fork, with estimates suggesting it can be equivalent to 9.1% of its GDP (Businessday, 2025). For perspectives, in 2021, the United Nation Environmental Programme revealed that each year 37.9 million tonnes of food were wasted in Nigeria, which was estimated as 189 kg of food per capita wasted; a figure significantly higher than the global average of 74 kg/capita/year and the average for high-income countries, placing the country among the countries with the highest per capita

food waste generation globally (UNEP, 2021). Furthermore, the carbon footprint of food wastages in Nigeria is equivalent to over 25 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually (Foday, 2023).

Food waste is a pressing global issue (Calvo-Porral et al., 2015; Melikoglu et al., 2013), though the phenomenon is most prevalent in Sub-Saharan African and South East Asia (Phasha et al., 2020). Food waste is a burden on society, particularly in terms of the money wasted at the household level (Sunday et al., 2022). Food waste is a pressing global concern with significant implications for both poverty and environmental sustainability. For example, resources used in food production (land, water, and energy) are wasted, and decomposing food generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas (Sarangi et al., 2024). Furthermore, food waste exacerbates food insecurity (Royer, 2024). Reducing food waste could help redistribute food to those in need, closing the gap between production and accessibility. Reducing food waste at retail, food service and household level can provide multi-faceted benefits for both people and the planet (UNEP, 2021). There are multiple ways in which Nigeria could increase the efficiency of its food system, but a reduction in food waste holds the most potential for an immediate impact on achieving the country's priorities. Specifically, Nigeria can meet its key policy goals of increasing food security and reducing food imports by reducing food waste (The World Bank, 2020).

Urban households discard more edible food than rural households (Harrison et al., 1975; Lanfranchi et al., 2016; Morton et al., 2007). Furthermore, (Martianto et al., 2024) posits that urban areas generate 79.4 kg/cap/year of food waste compared to 45.8 kg/cap/year in rural areas. These disparities have been linked to differences in food systems (Aloysius et al., 2023), with greater emphasis on processed food purchases more food goes to waste. For example, average monthly food waste proportion among urban households has been found to be significantly higher than that of rural households. Among rural households, leftovers of food and lack of proper storage were the main reasons for food waste, while leftovers of food and preparation of food more than needed were the reasons for food waste among urban households (Sunday et al., 2022).

In developed countries, food waste management follows a prioritized approach, with the most preferred methods being reducing food waste generation, donating surplus to those in need, utilizing waste food for animal feed, composting, production of biogas, while the least preferred options are incineration and disposing food waste in landfills (Sufficiency et al., 2022). This method prioritizes environmentally friendly and socially responsible methods, minimizing waste and maximizing resource recovery (Garcia-Garcia et al., 2017). In Nigeria, however, the most prevalent method of disposing food waste in the urban areas is by tossing them into the bin where they are picked up by scavengers, or waste disposal companies and taken to landfills, whereas in the rural areas, food waste is improperly disposed of in the environment, or burnt, causing greenhouse gas emissions and contamination (Kolawole et al., 2024).

Young people generally waste more food than older people (Chereji et al., 2023; Ghinea & Ghiuta, 2019; Przezbórska-Skobiej & Wiza, 2021), particularly in terms of leftovers and daily food management. This behavior is linked to factors like different consumption habits - different eating habits and lifestyle choices among younger generations (Mucha & Oravec, 2025), a lack of food management skills - younger individuals may not have the same level of experience or knowledge in planning shopping, storing food properly, and utilizing leftovers (Karunasena et al., 2021), and the attitude-behavior gap where their intentions to reduce waste aren't always reflected in their actions (Bravi et al., 2020). Elderly populations on the other hand often exhibit more prudent and resourceful behaviors due to their direct familiarity with periods of food insufficiency, heightened awareness of waste's cost consequences, leading to a stronger disposition not to waste food (Karunasena et al., 2021; Machate, 2021). Furthermore, older people may have more entrenched food management practices that inhibit waste compared to younger people (Aloysius et al., 2023). In some cases, dependence on others for food provision by older population can encourage a more mindful approach to food waste (Balan et al., 2022).

Religiosity underpins intention and norms to minimize food waste, often through individual accountability for waste (Elhoushy & Jang, 2021; Filimonau et al., 2022). Explicitly, most religions condemn food waste (Catovic, 2018). For instance, Islam abhors food waste even at buffets (Lamuwala, 2025). The Quran and Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) unambiguously forbid wastefulness and excessive consumption, and wasting food is considered haram (forbidden) and those who do are seen as "brethren of Satan" (Omran, 2025). For example, Moufakkir & Auzun (2024), states that Allah's wrath will come against those who squander food, either directly or indirectly. In Christianity, food waste is discouraged and seen as a sinful act (Grabowski, 2024; Hassan et al., 2022; Yoreh & Scharper, 2020), instead of wasting food, the religion encouraged that such food be shared with others. According to Špička (2023) wasting food in Islam is considered selfish and disrespectful, violating the command to be good stewards of God's gifts and to help those in need. For a fact, the example the story of Jesus commanding his disciples to collect the leftover food (fish and bread) from the feeding of the 5,000 persons near the Sea of Galilee provides a scriptural foundation for the Christian perspective on avoiding food waste, as it demonstrates an emphasis on resourcefulness, stewardship, and gratitude for God's provision underpinning the religion principle to be diligent with material things especially food.

Judaism prohibits food waste, this prohibition resonates with Bal Tashchit which literally means do not waste (Yoreh, 2014). In Hinduism, food is revered as sacred and deeply connected to spirituality and the act of preventing food waste is considered a form of worship, reflecting the faith's emphasis on non-violence, compassion and sustainability (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). This perspective stems from the belief that food embodies divine energy and should be treated with gratitude and respect and not to be wasted. African Traditional Religions (ATRs) emphasize a sacred connection with nature and a philosophy of balance and responsibility, promote resourcefulness, which inherently discourages food waste through the principle of frugality, promoting sustainable resource use, reciprocity, and respect for the ecological system as a dwelling for spiritual beings, this is contrasting modern attitude towards food consumption, which stems from a lack of environmental consciousness and large-scale consumption (Obiora, 2025).

Understanding the behavioral and cultural determinants of food waste is essential for several reasons and the most significant of these is that it allows policymakers, businesses, and communities to address core issues driving food waste rather than its indications. For example, food waste is often a byproduct of daily habits and lifestyles (Janssens et al, 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm, 2019) and understanding these behavioral drivers allows for targeted interventions that encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable and mindful consumption, disposal of food waste, and food management practices. Similarly, recognizing the intersections between cultural practices, individual behaviors, and pertinent external factors allows for holistic approaches to food waste reduction by individuals, households, and institutions (Wang & Manopimoke, 2023). Furthermore, knowing and acknowledging the sensitive, complex cultural and behavioral factors behind food waste helps inform policies and programs that can foster more sustainable food practices and effective solutions that account for the complexities of human behavior and cultural nuances (Morkunas et al., 2024).

Bearing the startling information on food waste so far, this review becomes germane as it examines the occurrence, underlying causes and impacts of food waste on the social system while giving insights into the phenomenon, a major theme of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3, which aims at halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reducing food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses (UNEP, 2021). Developing a sustainable food system can be achieved by reducing the amount of food waste generated, accordingly, this review seeks to heighten conversations around the problem of food waste in the country and others like it because through awareness the phenomenon though a complex one, can be controlled subtly.

These questions would be given consideration and sort to be answered during this review: How do cultural values and norms influence food consumption and waste patterns in Nigeria? What role do religious beliefs and practices play in shaping food waste behaviors in Nigeria? How does conspicuous consumption contribute to food waste in Nigeria, and what are the underlying social and psychological drivers? What are the most effective strategies for reducing food waste in Nigeria, considering its cultural, religious, and social idiosyncrasies? Specifically, the objectives of this review are to: Explore how cultural values, norms, and practices contribute to food waste in Nigeria; Examine the impact of religious beliefs and practices on food consumption and waste patterns in Nigeria; Explore the influence of social status, prestige, and display of wealth on food purchasing and food waste behaviors in Nigeria; Propose mitigation strategies and interventions to reduce the incidence of food waste in Nigeria. These objectives guided this review by providing a solid foundation for exploring the complex relationships between culture, religion, conspicuous consumption, and food waste in Nigeria.

This review is hinged on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Practice Theory. Theory of Planned behavior is a theoretical approach (which has been used by several scholars to investigate food waste related behavior) in the field of psychology, developed by Icek Ajzen, which explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control can influence food wastage. The psychological factors, (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control), crux of this theory, provide an expedient framework for understanding why individuals or households waste food. The Theory of Planned Behavior provides a valuable framework and comprehensive structure for understanding the relationships between social norms and identity (traditions and culture), habits (eating habits, cooking skills, preservation skills among others), and external conditions (economic factors) can be employed to a large extent to explain the reasons behind food wastage in the household, such as in the case of a deliberate action from the consumer (behavior) or otherwise. Conceptually, using the theory of planned behavior as a framework for this review, food waste (behavior) can be linked to attitudes, habits, and the perceived behavioral controls such as location of households.

Social practice theory is a sociological framework that sees society and culture as the result of interrelated social practices, moving beyond individual actions to the routinized, socially embedded practices (Kropfeld, 2023; Aleshaiwi & Harries, 2021). The theory can be applied to understand food waste by examining the social practices surrounding food consumption (Hennchen, 2019). Social Practice Theory shows how practice (food associated practices for instance cooking, eating, and storing food), are composed of three interconnected elements: meaning (the meaning associated with food, such as cultural significance, convenience and taste), materials (the physical environment and infrastructure, such as household kitchen equipment, storage, and packaging), and competence (skills and food handling expertise, meal planning and food storage) (Tezzo et al., 2021). Social Practice Theory understands food waste as a derivative of social practices, that is, food waste occurs often because of the way people live their lives (Ozanne et al., 2022). This framework can reveal the underlying factors contributing to food waste such as lack of meal planning, inadequate food storage skills and appliances, and societal values around food surplus (Nand et al., 2025). Furthermore, the theory can support the design of targeted actions and interventions; by understanding the social practices surrounding food waste, interventions can be designed to target specific practices, meanings, materials, and competences that contribute to food waste (Ozanne et al., 2022).

To avoid a weak evaluation of the phenomenon of food waste, the crux of this article, in the global parlance, food waste is treated as largely occurring and concentrated at household and consumer levels (every stage in the culinary journey of most households is a possible point for food waste) (Quested et al., 2013). This leaning is in sync with the positions of (Godsell & Woolley, 2024; Hassan et al., 2022; Howard, 2025). For perspectives, 17 per cent of the total amount of food produced, equivalent to an estimated 931 million tonnes of food is wasted at the household and retail levels, of which 570 million tonnes

comprise household food waste (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021).

### 1.1 Conceptual framework: Culture as a determinant of food waste

Central concept, cultural factors impact individual and collective attitude, behaviors, and norms having a bearing food—which in due course control the level and pattern of food waste in a society. For textual description of framework structure: cultural perspective (independent variable), culture forms how people see, value, prepare, share, and discard of food, and they exhibit through these four important factors as follows.

Socio-cultural norms (shared beliefs about food size, hospitality, and consumption; Anathemas or limitations influencing which food are suitable to eat. The consequence may be over-preparation, rejection, or discarding of some foods). Food values and benefits, in traditional perspective of food's symbolic, nutritive, or cultural significance; meaning having relevance to freshness, plenty, or quality. The consequence may determine if or not leftover or “ugly” food especially fruits are consumed or discarded. Food practices and habits, day-to-day practices and traditions around meal planning, preparation, and eating; customs associated with portion size, meal timing, or leftovers. The result influences amount prepared, chances of remnants, and recycle behavior. Social influence, family traditions and cultural expectations about status, sharing, and food aesthetics; social media and group dining practices strengthening wasteful or old-fashioned habits. The effect reinforces or discourages waste behaviors contingent on the established tradition. Furthermore, outcome variable is food waste, first demonstration of all preceding factors through household, communal, or event-level food discarding. The extent and nature of food waste hang on the interface between the four cultural factors.



Fig. 1. Ugly produce: fruits rejected due to aesthetic or cosmetic imperfections

### 1.2 Conceptual framework: Religion as a determinant of food waste

Religious beliefs, doctrines, and practices shape how people value, handle, and consume food, which in turn determines the extent of food wastage. Textual description of framework structure, religious perspective (independent variable), religion shapes food ethics and morals—stimulating appreciation, balance, and sharing, or imposing food taboos that may perhaps affect eating and waste. This operates through multiple connected scopes, first religious dietary laws and restrictions, rules on what food are okay and not okay; restrictions can lead to some food being rejected or thrown away. Effect can lessen or increase waste dependent on how stringently they are followed and managed.

Religious festivals and ritual practices, festivals usually come with large-scale food preparation and shared meals; ritual offerings or celebratory meals may produce leftover or discarded food. These rituals influence the bulk and timing of food waste production. Religious teachings and values, doctrines accentuating moderation, thankfulness, and charity; encouraging responsible eating and waste habits. These teachings and values can inculcate viable or non-viable eating routines. Religious community and leadership influence, religious leaders and community groups influence how people think about

sharing and getting rid of unwanted food; faith-based campaigns can push for food donation, redistribution, and conversation around reducing food waste. The effect is bolstering conducts that support religious ethics either way. Outcome variable in food waste; the collective outcome of values, beliefs, and habits around food consumption within a religious milieu. Then, how much food gets wasted shows how well religious teachings around wastefulness are followed by devotees.

## 2. Methods

This article is a narrative review that uses a comparative analytical lens in synthesizing existing literature to provide a nuanced and balanced consideration of diverse issue that have relevance to food wastage. Data triangulation is particularly useful with respect to the phenomenon under consideration as multiple data sources, factors, and perspectives are considered to extract insights from complex data and develop peculiar understanding. This review paper utilized electronic academic databases such as ResearchGate, Scopus, DOAJ, PubMed, and JSTOR amongst others to search for relevant studies, research papers, and articles that have bearing on the theme being explored. Though popular, we have excluded the Google Scholar database because of its propensity to include a high number of grey, unpublished, and non-English language materials in its yield. Categorically, this piece utilizes secondary sources such as books, newspapers, archival materials, government and international organizations documents, and a number of peer-reviewed journals across several disciplines until September 2025 to make available a well-adjusted interdisciplinary review.

The search employed relevant keywords that include food waste in Nigeria, cultural factors influencing food waste, religion and food waste, conspicuous consumption and food waste, food crises in Nigeria, Nigeria food culture of waste, food security and waste management, role of households in food waste management, food waste and sustainability, impact of food waste on the Nigerian economy, Nigeria food system and waste. Inclusion criteria include studies examining the relationship between culture and food waste in Nigeria, the impact of conspicuous consumption on food waste in Nigerian households, the economic implications of food waste in Nigeria's agricultural sector, how religious beliefs contribute to food waste in Nigeria. Exclusion criteria include studies unrelated to food waste. There were no restrictions on the language, date, document type, or publication status for record inclusion.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Culture or cultural practices and food wastage

Cultural practices impact on our perception of food waste (Phasha et al., 2020). Wasteful consumption is recurrent and deeply entrenched in Nigeria (Mbachu, 2013; Olukoju, 2018). Wastage, especially food wastage, is a phenomenon that cuts across all segments and strata of the Nigerian society and raises serious questions from a social-cultural point of view. The Nigerian society, like most modern societies have evolved from a culture where no food was wasted to a society where wasting food is tolerated and seen as a fact of life; highlighting a modern consumer culture where food produce is often wasted (Kelleher & Robins, 2013). Cultural norms of hospitality in Nigeria where guest are welcomed with abundant food (large servings can lead to guests leaving considerable amounts of food uneaten), and meals prepared for anticipated guests who may not show up contribute to cooking food in excess. Similarly, Nigerian households habitually overestimate the necessary quantity of food to be prepared. This over-preparation, while intended to ensure family and guest satisfaction, often results in large quantities of unused food, leading to food waste at the household level. Elimelech et al. (2023) have identified a web of interrelated socio-demographic characteristics, values, and attitudes as drivers of household food wastage.

Excessive food preparation for large cultural events contributes to significant waste (Phasha et al., 2020). In Nigeria, food wastage during social activities that are related to cultural practices remains a serious challenge. This is because during these events, food is prepared in large quantities, which ends up not being wholly consumed and results in an increase in food waste. Weddings are definitive social realities in many societies (Akanle & Olakunle, 2025) and are major culprits for food waste (Farooqi et al., 2016; Lamuwala, 2025). Nigerian weddings, renowned for their extravagance are typically large scale social events which are significant contributor to food waste, owing to cultural expectations and a picture-perfect mentality, there is a strong desire to host extravagant, bountiful feast with multitude in attendance leading to excessive food preparation, as running out of food or having less-than-ideal portions is considered a major embarrassment for the hosts (Akanle et al., 2019; Maigari, 2023).

Funerals serve as important social event, offering support and community connection and food is integral to this, providing strength and comfort to those grieving (Becker et al., 2022); offering food and drinks at a funeral creates an atmosphere where attendees can gather, share stories, and find solace in each other's company. A core cultural practice is to provide generous meals to funeral guests, demonstrating care and respect for the deceased and their family (Graham, 2017). However, families often over-prepare food to ensure there is enough for unexpected guests or a larger-than-expected turnout, which can result in waste if fewer people attend. Furthermore, funerals are also opportunities to put on extravagant shows of wealth (Ndinisa, 2014), and the magnitude of food during funeral in many African culture is reflected and directly proportional to how the deceased was. In many southern Nigeria communities, funerals fueled by culture and traditions are avenue to prove that the deceased family are not poor or to demonstrate the deceased's social status (Bamigbade & Akinwumi, 2025), leading to excessive food preparation, consumption, and disposal.

African naming ceremonies are rich cultural events that vary by region and ethnicity but are generally characterized by a communal feast (Dadey, 2022). The ceremony is a sacred event that reflects spiritual, cultural, and communal milestone carried out on the eighth day after birth of a child in many African societies (Ken-Anaukwu, 2013). Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, at this ceremony newly born Igbo child gets to become defined as an individuated human being through the ritual act of being assigned a name by which to identify him or her in the course of his or her earthly existence, acting as a rite of passage (Chinwe, 2014). The large scale of guests who are expected to be fully satisfied often necessitates the preparation of substantial quantities of food to feed everyone, and the abundance of food provided can naturally lead to a significant amount of leftover food, making waste a common issue (Thejotographerin, 2018).

The Age-Grade is a form of socio-cultural institution made up of people within the same age bracket usually within three to five years from each other (Yakubu, 2022). In sociology, an age grade is a form of social organization based on age within a series of such categories, through which individuals pass over the course of their lives (Uzoh & Ekechukwu, 2024). The institution transverse most communities in the Southeastern part of Nigeria (Ibeh & Ndubuisi, 2022). In the Igbo society for example, it is the most important agent of socialization apart from the family (Anyanwu, 2020). While there is paucity of direct empirical information linking Nigeria's food waste to Age-Grade ceremonies, it is however not contestable that this ostentatious, once-in-a life-time initiation ceremony, can significantly contribute to overall food waste because it creates an environment of large scale feasting and excess food; the excesses often result in a surplus of food that goes unconsumed and wasted (Ossai, 2023).

Ozo, a predominantly socio-political institution, is one of the prestigious titles in Igboland (Ahamefule, 2020). The Ozo title in Igbo culture symbolizes wealth and status, and its accompanying title-taking ceremony features preparation of large quantity of food (Eze & Ebubechukwu, 2020). An Ozo title ceremony involves a "lavish feast" which is central and undoubtedly a part of Ozo initiation ceremonies to feed many people, during the festival food will be constant cooking in every available spot in the compound of the candidate for

everyone to have their fill without cessation. The initiation feast demonstrates the candidate's ability to host kindred and provide elaborate food offerings (Ndubisi & Okere, 2020). Unrestrained food served the clan is a public display of the aspirant's wealth and generosity, a key requirement for the Ozo title (Nwokocha & Nnatanya, 2024). For example, around Udi, in Ezeagu Division, Eastern Nigeria, before the ceremonies proper, aspirants will sponsor a public feast with cows, goats, and rams, and during the festival he will provide food in abundance for the kindred every day continuously for seven weeks. Put in perspective, about 30% money spent for Ozo initiation ceremony goes to food provision (Amene, 2024). To meet the expectations of widespread community participation and to ensure no one goes hungry during the Ozo initiation ceremonies, aspirants often prepare far more food which often exceeds actual consumption, leading to a large surplus, leftovers, and wastage.

Table 1. African countries that waste the most food in 2024

Country	Household Estimate (kg/capita/year)	Household Estimate (tons/year)
Tanzania	152	9,960,496
Uganda	110	5,209,076
Seychelles	183	20,089
Rwanda	141	1,937,761
Nigeria	113	24,791,826
Mozambique	92	3,033,197
Madagascar	92	2,724,081
Niger	92	2,411,286
Burkina Faso	92	2,085,610
Mali	92	2,078,251

Table 1 shows that Nigeria household food waste stands at 113 kg per year, amounting to 24.79 million tons of household food waste in the country—the most in Sub-Saharan Africa. Elsewhere in the region, Tanzania households waste an average of 152kg of food per capita annually, Uganda 110 kg, Seychelles 183 kg, Rwanda 141 kg, and Mozambique 92 kg. Table 2 shows some key types of food wastages associated with culture and how these wastages are generated

Table 2. Food wastage types associated with culture

Factors	Type of Food Wastage	Cultural link
Culture	Plate waste: food served but not eaten	Traditions of hospitality and abundance where serving more food than is needed is seen as generosity or respect. In some cultures, leaving food on the plate shows politeness
	Preparation and cooking waste: edible parts discarded during preparation	Culinary traditions that reject certain plants and animal parts. Some festival cooking practices where large quantities are prepared for communal sharing, leading to leftovers
	Aesthetic or social status waste: food fit for consumption but are rejected due to appearance or perceived quality	Preference for perfect-looking food often as a symbol of affluence or good taste. This is also caused by the social pressure on host to serve premium food at gatherings to maintain status
	Leftover waste: unconsumed food after meals or at events	Eating leftovers is seen as disrespectful or unhealthy in some cultures. Also, event-based norms sometimes at weddings, birthday celebrations, and funerals encourage over-catering to avoid perceived stinginess
	Seasonal and Festival waste: surplus food generated during cultural or festive periods	Feasting traditions, for example harvest festivals where excess food is an integral part of celebration

### 3.2 Religion or religious practices and food wastage

In principle most religions condemn food waste (Catovic, 2018; Teng et al., 2023), however, the phenomenon is a global problem which is sometimes rooted in religion itself (Minton et al., 2020). Nigeria is a multi-religious society, dominated by two of the world's major religions, that is, Christianity and Islam, alongside a smaller but significant adherence to African Traditional Religions that reflect indigenous beliefs and ancestral worship (Ngbea, 2023; Ngbea & Achunike, 2014). The primary Islamic celebrations in Nigeria, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Eid al-Maulud are festivals with significant religious and cultural practices (Idris, 2021), and a central part of these celebrations is feasting (Khaleeli, 2009). Islamic festivals are characterized by an abundance of diverse foods which often leads to excess and food waste among Muslims, even though Islamic principles explicitly forbid extravagance and wastefulness, considering it a spiritual disservice and even a sign of ingratitude to God and a significant problem that contradicts Islamic teachings of moderation, gratitude, and not wasting God's blessings (Hasan, 2023). In a nutshell, even though Islam stresses the significance of mindful food consumption and the avoidance of wastage, the abundance of food at Islamic festivals often lead to excess culminating in substantial increases in food waste during these periods.

Overbuying and overcooking is so rampant globally during religious festive seasons that it almost feels like a custom (Hassan & Low, 2024). Christian festivals, especially Christmas, contribute to food waste due to the cultural expectation of abundance (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021; Harris, 2011). Though the religion's tenets actually promote responsible stewardship of resources and care for the hungry, which encourages reducing waste. Unambiguously, food waste significantly increases during the Christmas celebrations due to factors like over-purchasing for large gatherings (resulting in large amounts of uneaten food), supermarkets offering tempting discounts on bulk buys (offers can encourage consumers to buy more food than they actually need.), and a cultural emphasis on lavish feasts (traditional gesture of hospitality and celebration, leading to lavish food preparations that often exceed actual consumption) (Salonen, 2016). For context, hosts of Christmas parties purchase and prepare large quantities of food as a gesture of good hospitality and to ensure their guests are satisfied; hosts become carried away and overzealous when food shopping for Christmas feast, serving guests more food than they can eat, and making unplanned spontaneous decisions, which ultimately lead to additional food waste (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021). Guest behaviour plays a role in food waste during Christmas; during Christmas, people often drink more at events and forget about food, or they don't turn up at all at when invited, which creates huge amounts of waste when food has already been prepared (Pearson, 2024).

Communal feasting and abundance of food is a significant practice an integral part of most African Traditional Religions and festivals (Zimmermann, 2012). These festivals attract vast crowds (Kugbonu et al., 2018) and they can significantly generate a lot of waste, especially food waste; large portions of foods are often included to demonstrate abundance and connect with traditions. Food waste during Nigerian traditional religious festivals is a significant problem, driven by over-preparation, and cultural norms that encourage abundance, leading to unused food. For example, the Osun festival, a communal gathering and a festival that's a huge part of the indigenous Yoruba religious tradition, attended by tens of thousands of Osun devotees honoring Osun, the Yoruba goddess of fertility and water features communal feasting spanning a period of two weeks.

Although, other towns like Ede, Ido-Osun, Ilesha, Otan-Ayegbaju and Ikorun celebrate Osun festival, none of these towns celebrates it on a large scale like the people of Osogbo (Elizabeth, 2014). Similar to the Osun festival, The New Yam Festival, feast in South-Eastern Nigeria centers on communal feast/community with copious amounts of the new yam harvest prepared for the occasion. While the festival celebrates abundance, and the first yams are offered to the gods and ancestors as a gesture of gratitude for the bounty of the land and to ensure continued fertility and a prosperous new season (Onwutalobi, 2014),

there is an implicit understanding of cyclical consumption or a traditional practice involving consuming or discarding all old yams from the previous year's harvest before the New Yam Festival begins (Jessicaossom, 2022). Table 3 highlights some pathways for food wastage in the three major religions in Nigeria aiming to promote awareness and encourage sustainable practices. These religions, like many others, have teachings that can influence food waste and food waste management.

**Table 3. Religious influence on food waste generation**

Religion	Food wastage Pathways
Islam	<p>Large quantity of food are prepared for breaking of fast during Ramadan and Eid feast which often leads to excess food that are left uneaten and discarded</p> <p>Food distributed as charity meals (Sadaqah) may not always reach intended recipients as at when due, leading to spoilage</p> <p>Avoidance of haram food: if food is accidentally mixed with non-halal ingredients or animals are improperly slaughtered their meat are discarded</p>
Christianity	<p>Feast days and celebrations: overproduction of food during Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving often lead to excess food that are thrown away. Also, leftover bread and wine used for the Eucharist are often discarded.</p> <p>Church banquet and charity meals: large community meals sometimes result in surplus food that go bad when not adequately preserved</p>
African Traditional Religions	<p>Food and assortment of drinks are mostly provided in abundance during ritual activities like ceremonies to honor ancestors and the gods. Also, lavishness and wastage are commonplace at initiation ceremonies like rite of passage and age grade celebrations, and at events to mark birth, puberty, and death.</p>

### *3.3 Conspicuous consumption and food wastage*

Conspicuous consumption, invidious consumption, or showy materialism convey the idea of spending or acquiring goods or services to publicly display one's wealth or status, often in a way that is perceived as excessive or attention seeking (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2025). According to Barauskaitė et al. (2018), conspicuous consumption is the acquisition of higher status and recognition through consumption. The term was coined by sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Fitzmaurice, 2015). Veblen said that conspicuous consumption comprised socio-economic behaviors practiced by rich people as activities usual and exclusive to people with much disposable income (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012), yet a variation of Veblen's theory is presented in the conspicuous consumption behaviors that are very common to the middle class and to the working class, regardless of the person's race and ethnic group.

While it focused on durable luxurious goods in the beginning, conspicuous consumption has progressed to include non-material experiences and online behaviors, inspired by social media and the yearning for social approval, recognition, and higher status (Hao et al., 2024). However, while status can also drive interest in sustainable consumption, the general association of conspicuous consumption with resource-intensive lifestyles often results in increased waste (Folwarczny et al., 2024). Specifically, this behavior contributes to food waste when people buy and order excessive amounts of food to signal social status, wealth, or generosity, rather than for actual need (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2025). A contributor to Nigeria's food waste crisis may be conspicuous consumption with respect to food. Foday (2023) inferred that conspicuous consumption, a contributor to higher overall consumption and waste at the household level, creates a cycle of excessive purchasing and disposal, especially among developing populations in affluent urban settings where consumers derive their utilities from their relative consumption instead of absolute consumption, amplifying the severe problem of post-harvest food loss due to poor infrastructure. While post-harvest issues cause most food waste, conspicuous consumption adds to consumer-level waste, creating a dual challenge for Nigeria's food security and economic stability (Zailani, 2023).

The desire to appear affluent (Xu et al., 2020) or to conform to social norms can lead individuals and households to buy more food than is necessary, creating surplus that eventually gets thrown away (Foday, 2023). In some cases, consumers may discard food because it doesn't meet certain superficial standards, even if it is still perfectly edible, a behavior linked to a desire for perfection often associated with conspicuous consumption (Shapiroe.com, 2024). As some subdivisions of the population experience increased wealth, there can be a shift towards more profligate way of life where food is seen as disposable, further fueling waste (Foday, 2023). In many cultures, preparing more food than is needed (de Bruin et al., 2019; Nnoli et al., 2024), especially at gatherings or to show hospitality, can be understood as a mark of abundance, generosity, and a demonstration of wealth and social standing, which matches a cultural emphasis on sharing and bounteousness.

The culture of ostentatious parties and displays of affluence by wealthy and pseudo wealthy Nigerians often results in excessive food preparation (Apata, 2015), and a staggering amounts of food prepared for these parties (edible food) are frequently left uneaten and discarded (Foday, 2023). Therefore, when households prepare more food than its necessary or food are arranged to be way beyond what guests can consume at a party, it can be seen as an attempt to fulfill the normative behavior of providing ample food, which in turn showcases their ability to afford plenty and a desire to be a generous host. It is fast becoming a norm among the Yorubas of South-Western Nigeria to boast about the sheer quantity of food available, and the amount left uneaten at extravagant funerals and weddings, to these, the needless waste is seen as a display of wealth, generosity, or efficacious hospitality.

High income can influence conspicuous consumption and food waste (Deshpande et al., 2024; Setti et al., 2016; Tonini et al., 2023). In high-income situations, the financial cost of discarding food is less consequential, which can reduce the motivation to be careful with food consumption. For example, there's a strong connection between higher income levels, food affordability, and increased food waste, particularly in the form of plate waste; essentially, when people can afford more food and have more variety, they may waste more by overbuying highly perishable foods like vegetables, ordering larger portions or buying more food than they need, leading to increased leftovers and ultimately, food waste (Mahmoudi et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2020); urban residents typically have higher incomes, leading to increased food purchases and potentially more waste (Porpino et al., 2015). Specifically, Sunday et al. (2022) and Busari et al. (2023) maintain that economic consideration in form of high income is a contributory factor to food waste in Nigeria.



Fig. 2. Plate waste: food that has been prepared and served but not consumed

Outside culture, religious practices, conspicuous consumption, consumption habits affect food waste (Gorgan et al., 2022). For example, plate food waste is a behavior that has been shown to have a substantial link to food waste generation (Ayten & Kabali, 2024). Plate food waste is uneaten portion of edible food that is served but left uneaten on individual plates, a subset of food waste, which is all discarded food (Guimarães et al., 2024; Williams & Walton, 2011). Eating in groups or large buffet settings is a major contributor to plate waste (Xu et al., 2020). Buying habits, for example, consumers may purchase more food than they need sometime due to past scarcity (Foday, 2023). This behavior known in some parlance as over-acquisition is deeply rooted in scarcity principle, which evolve from a

psychological activation of a resource acquisition goal and can lead individuals buying more than their immediate needs leading to increased food waste (Simpson et al., 2024). Also, buffet-style dining and unlimited offerings encourage guests to take more food than they can eat, leading to significant food waste, a problem especially prevalent in tourism and entertainment industry where assortment is a key appeal (Juvan et al., 2021). This overconsumption is motivated by the longing for diversity and the dearth of a direct cost for each portion, causing substantial amounts of edible food being discarded. Furthermore, big food container sizes and a consumerist culture contribute to food waste by stimulating overbuying and leading to consumers being incapable of finishing food while it is fresh, before it goes bad and are discarded (Balan et al., 2022). As a final point, "ugly produce" contributes to food waste as "you eat with your eyes first" (Hwang, 2022). Aesthetic standards (these standards—social construct—are often dictated by marketing and retail requirements rather than safety or quality concerns) especially for fruits and vegetables lead to substantial waste as products are rejected for superficial reasons like size, shape, or blemishes, even though they are perfectly fit for human consumption (Makhal et al., 2021).



Fig. 3. Large volume of food that is not consumed but are discarded at garbage dump

#### 4. Conclusions

Food waste is caused not only by the abundance or cheapness of food but also by our caprices. The triadic contributory approach explored by this review provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between cultural, religious, and consumption-related factors influencing sustainability. In Nigeria, the food waste phenomenon is a multifarious issue profoundly rooted in the country's cultural, religious, and socioeconomic fabric, and the root of the problem transcends logistical ineffectiveness or shortage of infrastructure; they are complexly tied to societal values, traditional practices, and perceptions of status and hospitality. Cultural expectation to serve food in abundance, every so often regardless of actual need, culminate in substantial measures of excess food that commonly go to waste. Perhaps the most powerful contemporary driver of food wastage is conspicuous consumption. In a culture where social standing is closely tied to material wealth, quantity and diversity of food served can become a status symbol, reflecting the host prosperity and prestige. The outcome is a society where wastefulness is normalized and even celebrated as a sign of wealth and status. This dynamic is predominantly evident in Nigeria's urban middle and upper classes, where catering norms and social expectations dictate opulent display of food, concentrating on facade over actual consumption. The repercussions of these habits are widespread and profound. Giving the stark reality of millions of Nigerians struggling below poverty line and contending with daily insecurity, the sheer waste of food raises disconcerting questions about our values and main concern. Furthermore, the environmental cost of food wastage is substantial in a country already struggling with weather-related stresses. Ultimately, tackling food waste in Nigeria involves more than just a shift in habits—it's about reassessing values. By backing a culture of sustainability and social accountability, Nigeria can begin to curb the improvident practices inspired by culture, religion, and status-seeking.

Reducing food waste and food waste management should address problems across the entire supply chain, from preparation to consumer behavior. Through religious and

community leaders, inspire behavioral shifts in conspicuous consumption and by raising awareness about the phenomenon through targeted campaigns that educate people on the implications of food waste. There is also needed to get rid of obsolete and inept practices and reassess cultural norms around celebrations; encourage sustainable practices during celebrations and religious festivals. Avoiding food waste during the festive season requires mindful planning, responsible cooking practices, and conscious consumption. Consumers should be cognizant of their food choices and contribute to more sustainable and responsible festive seasons. What's more, at festivals and celebrations "Festivals, a time for food sharing and not wasting" should be a watchword. Households and individuals buy and cook as much is needed; less food is prepared; less food is wasted. Refrain from preparing meals merely on the supposition that a relative might make a surprising visit. Modifying menus to better match guest preference and tastes. Provide reasonable servings and let guests know they can ask for additional help. Encouraging leftover consumption and food recycling by transforming leftovers into new dishes. Store leftovers or give them to individuals who might need them instead of discarding them. However, for meaningful change, senior family members need to take the lead, showing younger family members the importance of valuing food and minimizing waste. Furthermore, government should set food waste reduction goals, create a system to monitor, evaluate, and adjust the national strategy for optimal effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement, and adjust as needed. Finally, because there is relatively limited research on food waste that brood over the influence of culture and religion, future research along this line is recommended

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### **Author Contribution**

S.J.A. and A.J.A. contributed to the conceptualization and framework of the review. A.J.A. and R.Q.A. performed the literature search and data curation. A.J.A. was responsible for the writing of the original draft. A.S. and L.O.S. provided critical review and significantly edited the manuscript. A.J.A. served as the corresponding author and managed the project administration.

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