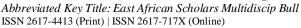
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Original Research Article

Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Alcohol Consumption Among Older People in Kounahiri (Côte d'Ivoire)

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Abstract: This paper examines the socio-cultural determinants influencing alcohol consumption among older people in Kounahiri. Based on accidental sampling, the study collected data via a questionnaire, analysed using Sphinx Lexica 4.5 and IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software. The results show a correlation between level of education and the types of alcohol consumed: people with low levels of education prefer strong local alcohols (koutoukou, palm wine), while those with higher levels of education prefer wine and beer, revealing economic and cultural disparities. Alcohol consumption is essentially part of a social and ritual framework, structuring collective interactions during initiation ceremonies, funerals and festivities. This phenomenon illustrates a dynamic of cultural transmission in which alcohol, beyond its individual use, remains an essential vector of social cohesion and community identity.

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Factors-Alcohol-Older People.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is a toxic psychoactive substance that can lead to dependence. Moreover, in many societies, the consumption of alcoholic beverages is a common practice and deeply rooted in the social landscape. However, it is important to distinguish between harmful use of alcohol, defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022) as consumption with harmful social and health consequences for the drinker, those around him or her and society in general.

From a health point of view, the harmful use of alcohol represents a real public health problem. It was responsible for 5.1% of all surviving deaths in Africa in 2018. This situation is all the more worrying given that drug use and substance-related disorders are constantly on the rise on the continent (UNODC, 2023).

On a global scale, the impact of alcohol on mortality is equally alarming. According to the WHO (2019), 2.6 million deaths were attributable to alcohol that year. More specifically, 1.6 million of these deaths resulted from non-communicable diseases, 700,000 from injuries and 300,000 from communicable diseases. What's more, alcohol-attributable mortality affects men more than women, with 2 million deaths compared with 600,000 for women.

In addition to its lethal effects, alcohol also affects a considerable number of people around the world. It is estimated that in 2019, 400 million people, or 7% of the world's population aged 15 and over, will suffer from alcohol-related disorders. Of these, 209 million people (3.7% of the adult population) were alcohol-dependent. Finally, it is important to stress that alcohol is a major contributor to premature death. In fact, it was responsible for 7.2% of deaths before the age of 69 (WHO, 2016). This figure illustrates the scale of the problem and the urgent need to raise collective awareness in order to limit the health and social impact of alcohol.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), in its 'Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030', alcohol consumption is responsible for around 3 million deaths, or 5.3% of all deaths worldwide. It has also caused the loss of 132.6 million disability adjusted life years (DALYs), representing 5.1% of all DALYs. Beyond its impact on physical health, harmful use of alcohol also causes considerable economic and social losses, both for individuals and for society as a whole (WHO, 2016). Data from the Swiss Health Survey show that 6.2% of people aged 65 to 74 have a drinking problem, often chronic (ESS, 2017). This situation is all the more worrying given that the prevalence of alcohol dependence among people aged 65 and over varies

depending on the author and the study. Indeed, due to the physiological changes associated with ageing, the same amount of alcohol consumed at the age of 30 does not have the same effects as if it were drunk at the age of 70 (Graziani, 2010).

In Africa, the burden of disease and injury attributable to alcohol consumption is particularly high, with a rate of 70.6 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. This is due in particular to the high prevalence of certain diseases, such as tuberculosis, cardiovascular disease, digestive disorders and trauma. Alcohol consumption also affects women of childbearing age. It is estimated that 10% of women aged between 15 and 49 drink alcohol, while 3% drink occasionally. The result is a worrying prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome, estimated at 14.8 per 10,000 population (Popova *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, according to data provided by the WHO (2017), some African countries have particularly high levels of alcohol consumption. Uganda and Namibia top the list, with an average of 11.8 litres of alcohol per capita per year. They are followed by Equatorial Guinea (11.6 litres), Rwanda (11.5 litres), South Africa (11.2 litres), Gabon (10.8 litres) and the Seychelles (10.8 litres), (Jeune Afrique, 2017).

In Côte d'Ivoire, and more specifically in the commune of Marcory, alcohol consumption among women is closely linked to temporal events. In fact, 78.6% of them drink alcohol simultaneously during festive periods, weekends, meals and between professional activities. Furthermore, 50.5% drink exclusively at weekends, while 19.4% drink only at mealtimes. A further 25.2% drink exclusively before or after work. It should be emphasised that festive occasions, moments of joy and relaxation, are particularly prone to this type of consumption (Akpassou Isabelle Aboutou and Kambe Yves Kambe, 2020). It is well established that alcohol has harmful effects on human health, which justifies the need for health awareness. In this respect, Dedy Séri (2016) defines health awareness as 'the self-esteem and concern that are manifested in a human being's relationship with his or her health, in the knowledge that for any normally constituted and socialised subject, health is a nonnegotiable and precious value'.

With this in mind, and in order to gain a better understanding of alcohol consumption patterns among the elderly, an exploratory survey was carried out in the sub-prefecture of Kounahiri from 10 to 20 September 2023 among ten (10) senior citizens. The study revealed several major findings. Firstly, it appears that older people consume all types of alcohol. Secondly, alcohol consumption is particularly high at festive occasions and funerals, including among people suffering from chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Paradoxically, although these senior citizens are aware

of the risks associated with alcohol consumption as they age, they nevertheless choose to maintain this habit, even if it means putting their health and their lives at risk.

Given these findings, a key question arises: why do older people persist in their drinking despite being aware of the dangers of alcohol?

The aim of this article is to identify the factors that encourage alcohol consumption among the elderly. Specifically, it will:

- describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents;
- identify the types of alcohol consumed by the elderly;
- analyse the factors that encourage alcohol consumption among the elderly;

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical and methodological basis of this study is broken down into five (05) points, namely: the site and population, the theoretical basis, sampling, data collection tools and data analysis techniques.

This study was carried out in the sub-prefecture of Kounahiri, which is located in the Béré region, 105 km south of the town of Mankono and 440 km north of Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire. The sub-prefecture of Kounahiri is one of the sub-prefectures in the Béré region. According to the Institut National de la Statistique (RGPH, 2021), the population of this sub-prefecture is estimated at 42,037, including 21,615 men and 20,422 women. It is mainly made up of two ethnic groups, the Wans and the Mounas. This locality was chosen because of the high level of alcohol consumption among the elderly. The population of this study is made up of people aged 50 and over, living in the locality of Kounahiri.

This study is theoretically rooted in the consumption theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1979) and Jean Baudrillard (1970). The analysis of the socio-cultural factors influencing alcohol consumption among the elderly in Kounahiri falls within the framework of consumption theory. This approach makes it possible to analyse drinking behaviour by taking into account the social, economic and cultural dimensions. According to this theory, consumption of a good or service is not limited to satisfying physiological needs. It is also determined by social, cultural and symbolic factors (Bourdieu, 1979; Baudrillard, 1970). Alcohol, as a consumer product, is not just about pleasure or escapism, but also plays an essential role in the construction of social and cultural identities.

Pierre Bourdieu (1979), through his theory of habitus and practices of distinction, emphasises that drinking behaviour is influenced by the cultural, social and economic capital of individuals. Alcohol

consumption among the elderly can therefore be seen as a socially constructed practice, shaped by habits acquired over time within a given environment. In the Kounahiri region, alcohol plays a key role in various cultural and ritual practices. It is frequently consumed during festive ceremonies, rites of passage, funerals and community gatherings, reinforcing its role in local social and cultural life.

Accidental sampling was used for this study. non-probability method involves selecting This participants on the basis of their accessibility and presence at the time of the survey. It is particularly suitable when it is difficult to obtain an exhaustive list of the target population. In the sub-prefecture of Kounahiri, several factors justify its use to study the determinants of alcohol consumption among the elderly. Firstly, the accessibility and availability of participants: Data were collected from older people encountered in public places such as markets, socialising spaces and traditional gathering places. Secondly, logistical and financial constraints: This method made it possible to reduce the cost and time of data collection by interviewing people directly on the spot. Finally, adaptability to the cultural context: In Kounahiri, social interactions take place mainly in community spaces, making it easier to gather testimonies. However, there are a number of limitations to this approach, including a bias in the selection of participants and a lack of representativeness, preventing the results from being generalised to all elderly people in Kounahiri. A total of 130 people aged 50 and over were interviewed for this study.

The interviews were preceded by obtaining the verbal consent of the elderly people interviewed. These discussions provided an opportunity to explain the context and objectives of the study. The average length of each interview was fifteen (15) minutes. The data collection tool used was a structured questionnaire based on several themes: the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; identification of the types of alcohol consumed; and the factors determining alcohol consumption. The data were entered using Sphinx Lexica 4.5 and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

3. RESULTS

The results of this study of socio-cultural factors influencing alcohol consumption among older

people in Kounahiri reveal dynamic complexes where social, cultural and economic elements interact to shape behaviours and perceptions towards alcohol consumption in this community.

3.1 Caractéristiques sociodémographiques des répondants.

Genre	Nb. Cit.	Fréq.
Woman	43	33,08%
Men	87	66,92%
Total	130	100%

This table shows the distribution of elderly men and women in Kounahiri. In terms of frequencies by gender, men accounted for 66.92% of the quotes, i.e. a large majority, while women accounted for 33.08%, i.e. about a third.

Marital status	Nb. Cit.	Fréq.
Single	8	33,08%
Married / Cohabiting	82	63,08%
Widow/widower	40	30,77%
Total	130	100%

This table shows the breakdown of respondents by marital status. Married people represent the majority with 63.08%. Widows (30.77%) and bachelors (6.15%) are not very well represented.

Level of study	Nb. Cit.	Fréq.
None	65	50%
Primary	54	41,54%
Secondary	9	6,92%
University	2	1,54%
Total	130	100

This table shows the breakdown of respondents by level of education. The results show that: People with no level of education account for 50% of quotes, i.e. half the respondents. Individuals with primary education made up 41.54%, which is also a high proportion. People with secondary education accounted for 6.92%, a clear drop compared to the first two categories. University graduates were very few in number, accounting for just 1.54%.

3.2. Types of Alcohol Consumed by the Elderly

Type of alcohol consumed/ Level of education	No	Primary	Secondary	University	Total
	2.050/ (5)	2.050/ (5)			7.600/ (10)
No reply	3,85% (5)	3,85% (5)	_	_	7,69% (10)
The wines	1,54% (2)	3,08% (4)	3,08% (4)	1,54% (2)	9,23% (12)
The beers	_	3,08% (4)	1,54% (2)	_	4,62% (6)
Liqueurs	14,62% (19)	7,69% (10)	0,77% (1)	_	23,08% (30)
Koutoukou (local liqueur)	23,85% (31)	18,46% (24)	0,77% (1)	_	43,08% (56)
Palm wine	6,15% (8)	5,39% (7)	0,77% (1)	_	12,31% (16)
Total	50,00% (65)	41,54% (54)	6,92% (9)	1,54% (2)	100% (130)

Chi-square = 50.06, ddl = 15, 1-p = >99.99%.

This result relates the types of alcohol consumed to the level of education of older people in Kounahiri. It shows the breakdown in percentages and numbers for each category of alcohol. Koutoukou (strong local alcohol) is the most widely consumed, accounting for 43.08% of citations. It is most popular with the uneducated (23.85%) and those with primary education (18.46%), while its consumption is virtually non-existent among those with secondary or university education. People with a low level of education (no education or primary education) mainly consume strong local spirits such as koutoukou and palm wine. Liqueurs are also widely consumed (23.08%), with a strong presence among the uneducated (14.62%) and those with primary education (7.69%).

Palm wine (or bandji) accounts for 12.31% of citations, being consumed mainly by the uneducated (6.15%) and those with primary education (5.39%). Wine and beer have lower consumption rates, but are more evenly distributed between education levels. It should be noted that people with secondary education consume more wine (3.08%) and beer (1.54%) than those with no education. Non-respondents accounted for 7.69%. The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 50.06$, ddl = 15, p > 99.99%) indicates a highly significant association between level of education and the type of alcohol consumed. In other words, level of education has a strong influence on drinking preferences.

Pierre Bourdieu (1979), in La Distinction, explains that consumer tastes and practices are socially determined and linked to an individual's cultural capital. Individuals with a low level of education (none or primary) consume more strong local alcohols (koutoukou, palm wine). These drinks are strongly associated with local cultural traditions and are affordable. This consumption is therefore part of a popular habitus, where alcohol has a festive, social and identity-related function. People with a higher level of education (secondary and university) consume more wine and beer, drinks often associated with the middle and upper classes.

According to Bourdieu, wine and beer are part of a culture that is more legitimised by dominant social norms. Koutoukou and palm wine are local drinks consumed in informal and traditional contexts. They are associated with the working classes, often perceived as less sophisticated by the more educated. Wine and beer are industrial products integrated into a more globalised culture and are often consumed in more formal contexts. Their consumption can be seen as a strategy of social distinction, where people with a higher level of education

seek to adopt practices valued by dominant groups. The absence of hard liquor consumption among the most highly educated individuals can also be interpreted as a desire to adopt a lifestyle perceived as more 'refined' and less associated with popular practices deemed excessive. Thus, according to Bourdieu, alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is a socially constructed practice, reflecting class relations and forms of cultural distinction.

Jean Baudrillard (1970), in La Société de Consommation (The Consumer Society), considers that consumption is not limited to a utilitarian function, but is a system of signs in which each product consumed refers to an identity and social status. According to this author, individuals consume goods not only for their usefulness, but also for what they represent socially. Koutoukou and palm wine are symbols of local cultural authenticity and belonging to a traditional community. Their consumption reflects a recognition of ancient practices and integration into a social group. Wine and beer, on the other hand, are perceived as modern, urban and international. Their consumption is therefore a sign of belonging to a more westernised and globalised culture.

People with a low level of education consume strong, local spirits not only for economic reasons, but also because they are part of a collective ritual and identity. These drinks are often associated with deeprooted cultural practices (weddings, funerals, traditional ceremonies). Conversely, the choice of drinks such as wine or beer by educated people can be seen as a display of a distinct social belonging. It's not just a question of taste, but a choice that reflects an image valued by society (modernity, refinement, distinction). Drinking alcohol is therefore a significant act, a language in which each type of drink represents a social position and a cultural identity.

In conclusion, Bourdieu suggests that tastes in alcohol are shaped by cultural capital and social structures. Local drinks are associated with the working classes, while industrial drinks are associated with the educated and urban classes. With Baudrillard, we see that alcohol is a distinctive sign: the consumption of koutoukou reflects a traditional identity, while the consumption of wine and beer expresses integration into a more globalised culture. Alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is not simply an individual choice, but a social and cultural phenomenon, where each type of drink reflects a status, an identity and a relationship with modernity or tradition.

3.3. Factors Promoting Alcohol Consumption among the Elderly

Factors that promote alcohol consumption	Yes	No	TOTAL
Celebrations (wedding, baptism)	11,54% (15)	4,62% (6)	16,15% (21)
Initiation ceremonies	16,15% (21)	0,77% (1)	16,92% (22)
Sacrifices and deaths	64,62% (84)	2,31% (3)	66,92% (87)
Total	92,31% (120)	7,69% (10)	100% (130)

Chi-square = 15.41, df = 2, 1-p = 99.96%

This table highlights the social and cultural contexts in which alcohol consumption is favored among the elderly in Kounahiri. The majority of respondents (92.31%) report that alcohol is consumed during social events such as sacrifices and deaths (66.92%), initiation ceremonies (16.92%), and celebrations (16.15%). Only 7.69% of respondents say they do not consume alcohol in these contexts. Pierre Bourdieu (1979) shows that consumption preferences and habits are determined by the social position and cultural structures of individuals. Alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is not a free individual choice, but a socially codified practice linked to the habitus of social groups.

The results of the table show that alcohol consumption is strongly integrated into traditional collective events and rituals. This is explained by the habitus of the working and rural classes, where alcohol plays a central role in social cohesion and cultural traditions. Bourdieu explains that cultural practices are transmitted and reproduced within social groups. Initiation ceremonies (16.92%) and sacrifices/deaths (66.92%) show that alcohol is ritualized and transmitted from generation to generation as a fundamental cultural element. These practices are more present in the working and rural classes, where the transmission of traditions is stronger than in more Westernized urban environments. Alcohol thus becomes a marker of cultural continuity, where its consumption goes beyond the festive aspect to become a social and symbolic obligation. For Bourdieu, there is a distinction between legitimate and popular cultural practices. In Kounahiri, alcohol consumption at weddings, initiations and funerals is socially accepted and even encouraged. It is perceived as a legitimate practice, because it is part of a collective and traditional framework. On the other hand, drinking outside of these ritual contexts can be perceived as a deviance. This explains why only 7.69% of respondents say they do not consume alcohol: alcohol is not seen as a simple individual pleasure, but as a collective practice imposed by the local culture.

Jean Baudrillard (1970), in La Société de Consommation explains that consumption is not limited to the satisfaction of needs, but that it is a system of signs where each product consumed conveys a social meaning. Alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is not motivated solely by pleasure or habit, but by what alcohol represents in these contexts: During initiation ceremonies (16.92%), alcohol can be perceived as a rite of passage, marking the entry into a new social status. During sacrifices and deaths (66.92%), it has a spiritual and symbolic function, representing the homage to ancestors and the accompaniment of the deceased in the afterlife. During celebrations (16.15%), it becomes a symbol of sharing and conviviality. Thus, alcohol consumption is a meaningful act that goes beyond simple ingestion: it is a way of participating in a given social and cultural order. Baudrillard claims that consumption is also a way for individuals to integrate and conform to the norms of their social group. Not drinking at these events could be seen as a rejection of traditions and social marginalization. Conversely, drinking in these contexts shows adherence to the values of the group and reinforces one's social belonging. Alcohol, in these contexts, is not a simple product, but an object loaded with cultural and social values. It is not the search for intoxication that takes precedence, but integration into a collective staging where alcohol becomes a medium of social bonding. Thus, in Kounahiri, alcohol is not only a drink, but a powerful cultural sign that structures social interactions.

The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 15.41$, ddl = 2, p = 99.96%) indicates that the relationship between the types of ceremonies and alcohol consumption is highly significant (p > 99.96%). This confirms that alcohol is a central and structuring element in these social rituals and that its consumption is strongly influenced by the cultural context. The analysis of the results through the theories of Bourdieu and Baudrillard shows that alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is much more than a simple individual act: With Bourdieu, we understand that alcohol is a socially inherited and structured practice, linked to habitus and cultural traditions. With Baudrillard, we see that alcohol is a sign of identity and a code of social recognition, which allows individuals to mark their belonging to the values of the group. Thus, the consumption of alcohol during ceremonies in Kounahiri is a total social fact, where traditions, class structures and symbolic meanings intersect.

4. DISCUSSION

Concerning the types of alcohol consumed, the results highlight a link between alcohol consumption and the level of education of the elderly in Kounahiri. They reveal that koutoukou (strong local alcohol) is the most consumed, particularly by individuals with no education and those with a primary education, while its consumption is almost non-existent among people with a secondary or university education. In general, people with little education prefer strong local alcohols, particularly koutoukou and palm wine. Liqueurs are also widely consumed, particularly by the uneducated and those with a primary education. Palm wine represents a significant share of consumption, mainly among these same categories. On the other hand, wines and beers are less common, but their consumption is more evenly distributed between the different levels of education, with a slight preference for wine and beer among people with a secondary education. Speaking about the factors that promote alcohol consumption among the elderly, the results show that alcohol consumption among the elderly in Kounahiri is mainly influenced by social and cultural factors. It is mainly associated with collective events such as sacrifices and deaths, initiation ceremonies and celebrations.

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1925) defines the total social fact as a phenomenon that

simultaneously involves several dimensions of social life: economic, religious, political and symbolic. In the context of Kounahiri, alcohol is much more than a simple drink: it constitutes a central element of collective rituals, marking key moments in social life. Funerals, initiation ceremonies and ritual sacrifices are all occasions when alcohol is consumed in an almost obligatory manner. These practices are not insignificant: they ensure the continuity of social ties and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the community.

From this perspective, Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1964) analysis of food as a communication system fully applies to alcohol consumption. Far from being a simple physiological act, drinking alcohol in Kounahiri is part of a symbolic exchange in which social hierarchy is expressed and power relations are negotiated. The consumption of local alcohols such as koutoukou or palm wine is thus a strong identity marker, anchored in traditions and transmitted from generation to generation.

Far from being uniform, alcohol consumption is structured by social logics that reflect relationships of class, status and distinction. Pierre Bourdieu (1979), in La Distinction, emphasizes that tastes and cultural practices are shaped by habitus, that is to say a set of dispositions internalized over time, according to the social position of individuals. In the case of Kounahiri, alcohol consumption varies significantly according to the level of education. People with no education or a primary education prefer local alcohols (koutoukou, palm wine), while the rare individuals with a secondary or university education have more access to industrial drinks (beers. wines). This differentiation can be explained by economic factors, but also by a cultural reproduction mechanism where belonging to a social category conditions consumption choices.

From a complementary perspective, Jean Baudrillard (1970) analyses consumption as a system of signs where each product refers to a symbolic value and not only to a functional use. Alcohol is therefore not reduced to its physiological effects: it is also a vector of social distinction. Drinking koutoukou is claiming a popular and traditional identity, while consuming wine or beer is perceived as a marker of acculturation to urban and modern norms.

From an economic perspective, alcohol consumption among the elderly in Kounahiri is largely conditioned by production and distribution structures. Karl Marx (1867), in Capital, demonstrates that cultural practices are inseparable from the material conditions of existence. Industrial alcohols, often imported or produced on a large scale, remain financially inaccessible to a majority of the rural population, while artisanal alcohols are less expensive and more easily available. In this perspective, the work of Sydney Mintz (1985) on the economics of foodstuffs shows how consumer products are influenced by global dynamics.

While industrial drinks are struggling to establish themselves in rural areas, progressive socio-economic transformations, particularly through urbanization and the modernization of commercial infrastructures, could change consumption habits in the long term. While alcohol consumption in Kounahiri is part of a specific social and economic framework, it nonetheless remains a public health issue. The World Health Organization (2018) highlights that older people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of alcohol, due to a decrease in their ability to metabolize ethanol and an accumulated risk of drug interactions.

David Courtwright's (2001) analysis highlights a fundamental contradiction: while alcohol can be a factor of social cohesion, its excessive consumption leads to deleterious effects such as the marginalization of individuals in a situation of dependency, the worsening of economic precariousness and the increase in chronic diseases.

In conclusion, the interdisciplinary analysis of alcohol consumption among older people in Kounahiri highlights a plural phenomenon, at the crossroads of cultural, social, economic and health dynamics. Far from being limited to simple recreational use, this practice is part of a system of collective representations, where alcohol plays a structuring symbolic role.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to analyze the sociocultural factors influencing alcohol consumption among the elderly in Kounahiri, highlighting a dynamic complex where traditions, level of education and social practices intersect. The results reveal a marked correlation between the level of education and the types of alcohol consumed: the least educated individuals prefer strong local alcohols such as koutoukou and palm wine, while people with a higher level of education consume more wine and beer. This differentiation illustrates not only an economic factor, but also a cultural anchoring, where traditional alcohols remain deeply rooted in the habits of populations with little education. Furthermore, alcohol consumption is not only an individual process, but above all a social and ritual framework. Consumption moments are strongly associated with collective practices, including initiation ceremonies, funerals and other community festivities. These events, essential to social cohesion, lead to the anchoring of alcohol in social interactions and reinforce its role in the dynamics of cultural transmission. Thus, alcohol consumption among the elderly in Kounahiri appears to be a phenomenon structured by educational, economic and cultural logics. These results lead to the need for a holistic approach for any awareness-raising or regulatory action, taking into account both the social dimensions of consumption and the structural factors that underlie it.

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