

# The Impact of Spiritual Beliefs on Entrepreneurs hip : The Case of Women Entrepreneurs in the Informal Sector in Congo-Brazzaville

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of spiritual beliefs on entrepreneurship, focusing on the case of women entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector in Congo-Brazzaville. The analysis explores how spiritual beliefs, whether rooted in religious, traditional, or cultural practices, influence entrepreneurial motivations, management practices, ethical decisions, and resilience in the face of challenges. The article adopts both a theoretical and empirical approach, defining the key concepts of belief and spirituality while reviewing existing studies on the topic. The empirical study identifies the predominant spiritual beliefs among these women entrepreneurs and develops a specific typology to understand how these beliefs influence their entrepreneurial practices. The analysis also reveals a cultural shift, where traditional beliefs such as witchcraft are gradually being replaced by institutionalized religious beliefs. This phenomenon highlights the central role of spiritual beliefs in how these women navigate uncertainty and manage their businesses in a precarious economic environment.

**KEYWORDS :** beliefs, spiritual, entrepreneurship

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the complex and dynamic world of entrepreneurship, the motivations of entrepreneurs extend far beyond purely economic and strategic aspects. Traditionally, research on entrepreneurship has adopted an endogenous approach, focusing on the intrinsic characteristics of the entrepreneur. This perspective, which is predominant in Western contexts, emphasizes the individual profile of the entrepreneur, their skills, and personal traits as determining factors in the decision to undertake entrepreneurial ventures, while neglecting other potentially influential dimensions (Gartner, 1988)<sup>1</sup>.

However, the exogenous approach (D.C. McClelland)<sup>2</sup> which has regained interest among researchers, expands the perspective by examining the cultural, social, and economic conditions that shape entrepreneurial behavior. While relevant, these approaches often fail to incorporate an essential dimension: spiritual belief. Spiritual belief, often viewed as a personal and intimate dimension, is rarely considered in traditional models of entrepreneurial analysis. Yet, spiritual convictions play a crucial role in how entrepreneurs create and manage their businesses, influencing their motivation, management practices, ethical decisions, and resilience in the face of challenges. In this sense, spiritual beliefs straddle both endogenous and exogenous approaches to entrepreneurship, as they are rooted in the individual and shaped by broader cultural and social dynamics.

In this article, we analyze how spiritual beliefs influence entrepreneurship, using the case of female entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector in Congo-Brazzaville (3). Through a quantitative approach, we aim to measure the significance and impact of spirituality on their activities and identify the spiritual beliefs that guide them.

This article is structured into two parts. In the first part, we lay the theoretical foundation of our study by defining the key concepts of belief and spirituality, particularly in the context of entrepreneurship.

This section will also include a review of the existing literature, highlighting the few studies that have explored this relationship, especially those focused on women entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector.

The second part will focus on the empirical analysis of the impact of spiritual beliefs on entrepreneurship. We will identify the predominant spiritual beliefs among women entrepreneurs in the informal sector in Congo-Brazzaville. Finally, we will establish a typology of the spiritual beliefs specific to this population and analyze how these beliefs influence their entrepreneurial practices.

## **I. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Human beings, whether entrepreneurs or not, are not solely defined by their economic or rational dimensions. Before being an "homo economicus," (4) the individual is first a spiritual being, endowed with beliefs and values.

### **1. Belief in the Context of Entrepreneurship**

Belief is a fundamental element of human existence. It is an inherently complex concept that holds various meanings depending on the disciplines and contexts in which it is studied.

#### **1.1 The Polysemic Nature of the Definition of Belief**

According to the CNRTL (National Center for Textual and Lexical Resources) (5), belief is defined as "a greater or lesser degree of certainty by which the mind (the immaterial substance responsible for thought and consciousness, Descartes, 1961) accepts the truth or reality of something." This definition emphasizes that belief can vary in intensity, ranging from a mere personal opinion to deeply rooted and engaging faith. Hentsch (2003) (6) expands this understanding by noting that belief is not limited to the religious domain. It permeates almost all aspects of human life, including love, work, science, politics, and the economy (7). Thus, belief plays a fundamental role as a "social glue," creating bonds of trust and cohesion at both the individual and collective levels. In this context, beliefs become essential drivers that facilitate social interactions, economic exchanges, and the maintenance of order. This dynamic is particularly visible in the entrepreneurial context, where the interaction between belief and trust is crucial for establishing a collaborative and supportive work environment.

However, belief also has a paradoxical dimension. While it serves as the foundation for trust and cohesion, it can also become a source of conflict and violence when challenged. When belief systems are perceived as incompatible or come into competition, tensions may arise, particularly when these beliefs are deeply ingrained in individual or collective identities. This phenomenon often occurs in contexts where religious, cultural, or ideological beliefs diverge, creating divisions that affect both interpersonal relationships and organizational dynamics.

In summary, the polysemy of belief is illustrated by its potential to be both constructive and destructive: it can be a factor of cohesion or a source of discord, depending on the circumstances and contexts in which it is expressed.

#### **1.2 Dimensions of Belief**

Understanding the role of belief requires distinguishing the different dimensions of "believing." Indeed, belief can manifest in various forms, each with distinct implications for entrepreneurial action:

##### **- Belief as a Necessary but Insufficient Factor**

Belief is often seen as a necessary factor for initiating action, especially in environments characterized by high uncertainty, such as entrepreneurship. According to Gartner (1988), the decision to start a business is deeply influenced by beliefs in the feasibility of an idea or vision. Entrepreneurs frequently face risks, unpredictable challenges, and uncertainties, and it is their belief in their project or abilities that triggers action. However, belief alone is not sufficient to ensure success. As Schumpeter (1934) (8) emphasized in his theory of entrepreneurial innovation, while belief in innovation is crucial for breaking away from established practices and creating novelty, it must be supported by a solid strategy, risk assessment, and resource mobilization. In summary, although belief can serve as an essential starting point, it must be combined with skills, knowledge, and concrete actions to translate into tangible entrepreneurial success.

##### **- Belief as a Useful but Not Necessary Factor**

In some cases, belief may be useful but not necessary. Some entrepreneurs primarily rely on empirical data, market analysis, or rational projections to make decisions (Peter Drucker 1985) (9). These individuals do not necessarily base their actions on spiritual or personal beliefs. However, even in such cases, belief in one's abilities or the validity of an economic model remains an underlying factor that can influence decision-making. Friedrich Hayek (1945) (10) points out that in uncertain contexts, decisions are often based on a combination of rational information and personal or intuitive beliefs. Therefore, although belief is not always explicitly necessary in the

decision-making process, it can serve as a facilitating factor, providing inner conviction during moments of uncertainty or doubt.

#### **- Belief as an Alternative Factor Among Others**

Belief can also be considered one of several alternative factors motivating entrepreneurship. Some entrepreneurs may be driven by economic, social, or personal goals without necessarily relying on spiritual or intangible beliefs. However, in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber (1905) (11) demonstrated that religious beliefs, particularly Protestant ethics, played a central role in shaping the entrepreneurial spirit and the pursuit of material success. He shows that religious belief can provide a powerful source of motivation by systematically guiding economic actions. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that other factors, such as economic pragmatism or personal ambitions, can also motivate entrepreneurs. In other words, belief is just one of many elements that can shape entrepreneurial motivation, but it is not always the dominant factor.

#### **- Belief as a Fictitious or Unnecessary Concept**

Finally, belief may be viewed as a non-essential or even fictitious concept in certain contexts. This idea could be supported by theoretical approaches that prioritize a strictly rational view of entrepreneurship, where only measurable data and planned strategies are relevant. However, even in such approaches, it is difficult to deny the underlying role belief plays in concepts such as potential success or future market trends. Joseph Schumpeter (1934) emphasized that the entrepreneur is an agent of change, and innovation often relies on faith in future outcomes, without immediate tangible evidence. Similarly, in entrepreneurial psychology, Bandura (1997) (12) introduced the concept of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's capacity to achieve their goals. This belief, although intangible, is fundamental to the motivation and perseverance of entrepreneurs. Without this personal conviction, it would be difficult for an entrepreneur to persist in the face of obstacles and risks inherent to entrepreneurial activity.

### **1.3 The Distinction Between "Believing That" and "Believing In"**

Based on these reflections, belief can be analyzed along two main dimensions:

- "Believing that": This refers to propositional belief, where an individual adheres to a statement they consider true. This form of belief is often associated with opinions or hypotheses and may be subject to revision based on new information or perspectives. For example, an entrepreneur may believe that their product will meet a specific market demand but could revise this belief based on customer feedback or market analysis results.
- "Believing in": This dimension implies deep faith and personal commitment to a person, an idea, or a transcendent entity. It is characterized by strong emotional and moral involvement, profoundly influencing the individual's values, motivations, and behaviors. In the entrepreneurial context, "believing in" can manifest as unwavering faith in the company's mission, the value of a product, or the ethical principles guiding business operations.

In this article, we focus on the dimension of "believing in," which involves deep faith and personal commitment to an idea, vision, or transcendent entity and plays a decisive role in the resilience and perseverance of entrepreneurs. "Believing in" thus becomes a key driver, not only of motivation but also of moral guidance in decision-making and managing entrepreneurial challenges.

## **2. SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

### **2.1 Definition of Spirituality**

Spirituality is a complex concept that lends itself to different interpretations, particularly in the entrepreneurial context, where analyses are generally focused on rational explanations of organizational and relational performance. Marques (2006) (13) defines spirituality as "the awareness that interdependence, respect, and recognition are not limited to ourselves and our private environment, but also apply to all those with whom we work regularly or occasionally." This definition highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and mutual respect in the professional setting, emphasizing that spirituality can directly influence business management.

Neal (Jean-Yves Duyck, Ikram Mhenaoui, 2013) considers spirituality as a potential innovation capable of guiding businesses toward a new generation of organizations, questioning the efficiency of technology due to its sometimes dehumanizing nature. He suggests that reintroducing human values into business management is necessary to counter the negative effects of a strictly technological approach. While spirituality and personal

beliefs can motivate entrepreneurs and provide the energy needed to persevere through obstacles, they do not replace the importance of technical skills and market knowledge, which remain essential to ensuring entrepreneurial success.

Semantically, the term "spiritual" relates to the spirit and the quest for meaning beyond the material and rational. In entrepreneurship, spirituality can either drive or hinder the decision to undertake entrepreneurial ventures, depending on the entrepreneur's beliefs. It involves four main dimensions:

- **Religion:** Religious beliefs profoundly influence individuals' professional, personal, and social attitudes. Greenwald and Harder (2003) (Jean-Yves Duyck, Ikram Mhenaoui, 2013) note that religion can have a positive impact in the workplace, particularly through spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and introspection. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) (14) emphasize that these practices can be essential for employee performance and the entrepreneurial process.
- **Meaning of Work:** The meaning an individual attributes to their work is often linked to their spiritual values. Singhal and Chatterjee (2006), (Jean-Yves Duyck, Ikram Mhenaoui, 2013) explain that the intensity of investment in work depends on the individual's degree of spirituality, which influences their ability to transcend challenges to achieve professional goals.
- **Community:** Spirituality in entrepreneurship often promotes a collective interest orientation. Bell and Taylor (1991) (15) observed that work constitutes an essential community, replacing other institutions such as the church. In the entrepreneurial context, success is often seen as a collective effort, where the decision to undertake business ventures may be strongly influenced by community support.
- **Authenticity:** Spirituality can encourage authenticity in work, allowing the entrepreneur to fully engage in their activities. Mitroff and Denton (1999) (Jean-Yves Duyck, Ikram Mhenaoui 2013) note that spirituality drives entrepreneurs to devote their knowledge and energy to the organization, leading to more creative work aligned with their core values.

It is essential to distinguish spirituality from religion. Spirituality encompasses a broader quest for meaning and connection with what some call God, as in Christianity, or with multiple deities, as is often the case in Hinduism (Malamoud, 2010) (16). Moreover, certain spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, direct this quest toward consciousness, considered a central element of the spiritual experience. Buddhism emphasizes awakening and the transformation of consciousness, transcending ordinary experience to achieve a state of liberation or fulfillment (Philippe Lestage, 2022) (17).

Religion, on the other hand, offers codified answers to existential questions and provides a moral and ethical framework for its followers. Although spirituality and religion are often associated, they are not synonymous. Spirituality can exist outside the confines of religion and offer a personal, experiential dimension to entrepreneurship.

## II. Analysis of the Impact of Spiritual Beliefs on Entrepreneurship

**2.1 Gender and the informal economy: The predominant role of women in Congo-Brazzaville**  
Congo is characterized by a structural imbalance between the formal and informal sectors. The latter, consisting of unregulated activities such as small-scale trading and subsistence agriculture, plays a central role in economic integration, particularly for women. Due to insufficient opportunities in the formal sector, most women turn to the informal sector, which employs approximately 75% of the workforce (World Bank, 2023) (18). Here, they typically work for themselves or occupy low-productivity jobs.

This significant participation of women highlights gender disparities in access to formal employment and decision-making positions, underscoring the need to implement inclusive policies aimed at reducing these inequalities.

In 2017, women represented only 11.3% of seats in the National Assembly and 18.8% in the Senate, placing Congo 157th in the world for women's representation in parliamentary institutions (19).

This situation had not significantly improved by 2023, with only 15 parliamentary seats held by women, while their presence in senior management positions remains nearly non-existent (gender data world bank).

This lack of representation in key economic and political positions perpetuates inequalities and hinders the country's overall development. It also reflects their broader exclusion from the formal sector, where structural barriers such as limited access to education and professional training continue to marginalize them.

In terms of education, significant progress has been made in reducing gender inequalities in basic education in Congo-Brazzaville. In 2023, the gross enrollment rate for girls at the primary level reached 89%, up from 71% in 2007, reflecting substantial advancement. Furthermore, the girl-to-boy enrollment ratio for primary and lower secondary education was 0.95 in 2018, indicating near parity in initial access to education (World Bank data , 2023).

However, this progress conceals more pronounced disparities in secondary education completion rates and access to higher education. In 2018, 64.6% of girls in Congo completed the first cycle of secondary education, compared to 62.8% of boys. Yet, this progression declines sharply at the higher education level. Across sub-Saharan Africa, only 9% of girls enroll in university, compared to 12% of boys (UNESCO, 2021), a trend similarly observed in Congo.

These educational gaps become even more apparent when examining non-enrollment rates. In 2020, approximately 34% of young women of upper secondary school age in Congo were not enrolled, compared to 15% of young men, representing a significant 19-point gap (UNESCO, 2022) (20). This alarming situation highlights the disproportionate exclusion of girls from higher levels of education.

The observed disparities are driven by a combination of factors. Early marriages often disrupt girls' education, while domestic responsibilities are more frequently assigned to them. Additionally, in many families, educational priorities are directed toward boys, who are perceived as having greater long-term economic potential. Financial constraints further lead parents to favor boys' education when resources are limited. Lastly, social norms and gender stereotypes restrict educational opportunities for girls, particularly in academic or professional fields traditionally dominated by men.

## 2.2 Typology of Spiritual Beliefs

The spiritual landscape of Congo-Brazzaville is marked by a diversity of beliefs that influence not only society but also how individuals conceive and practice entrepreneurship. In this section, we explore the typology of these spiritual beliefs and their impact on entrepreneurship.

Among these beliefs are traditional ones such as animism, fetishism, and witchcraft, which play a key role. Deeply rooted in Congolese culture, these beliefs influence how entrepreneurs manage their businesses, perceive risk, and view success.

Animism, the belief that spirits inhabit not only humans but also animals, objects, and natural elements, remains prevalent in Congolese cultural practices. Spirits are seen as entities capable of intervening in human affairs, particularly by aiding or hindering business success. Entrepreneurs may therefore seek the blessings of local spirits or perform rituals intended to ensure the prosperity of their business activities.

Fetishism involves seeking out a fetishist, who, through their own entrepreneurial status, provides a fetish often referred to as a "Nkisi." This fetish is "an object or collection of objects attributed with supernatural force, capable of countering or attacking aggressive action" (21). The use of these sacred or symbolic objects, often represented as statuettes, pottery, or talismans, is believed to attract good fortune or protect against misfortune. For example, it is common to observe a chili pepper placed on women's market stalls as a means of protecting their finances. However, a fetish can also be harmful to the entrepreneur due to its bewitching power. It is sometimes blamed for causing failures, illnesses, accidents, or even deaths, as its destructive power can turn against its user. To activate or neutralize the power of the Nkisi, specific sacrifices and rituals are often necessary. These rituals are crucial in ensuring that the fetish fulfills its owner's wishes and counters its negative effects. In this context, a female entrepreneur in possession of a Nkisi may be suspected of witchcraft if her successes or misfortunes are believed to be linked to occult forces. The potentially devastating nature of the Nkisi necessitates specific rituals to stop its harmful effects.

In the realm of fetishism, rational approaches are often relegated to secondary importance in the entrepreneurial process, as spiritual beliefs and rituals take precedence in decision-making.

Witchcraft is another traditional belief that influences entrepreneurial behavior in Congo. According to Buakasa (1982), witchcraft is defined as "a form of intelligence and power beyond ordinary human capability, allowing one to dominate and harm others' lives and property, or to protect or achieve certain desires, such as acquiring wealth or asserting one's personality" (22). Along similar lines, Warnier equates witchcraft with "the fight against scarcity, capable of bringing abundance."(23)

The general population's understanding of witchcraft often equates it to the notion of "devouring people"—in other words, acts of malevolence. Resorting to occult forces, or even the spirits of the dead through incantations, such as pouring palm wine on the ground, allows individuals to request protection or success for their businesses. This category of individuals believes in the immortality of the dead, who possess the ability to intervene in the realities of the living.

It is important to note that, historically, in primitive cultures, witchcraft played a political role in community organization. The witch acted as a sage, oracle, and healer (24), with the additional ability to cast spells. Over time, this concept has evolved significantly, and it is now often used pejoratively, far removed from its former grandeur. The motivations of the invoked entities have shifted, focusing on individual interest.

The dynamics of female entrepreneurship are closely governed by this phenomenon of witchcraft, which can be countered either through religion—where only the Almighty God can defeat witchcraft—or through the intervention of a marabout or fetishist who provides a fetish object (Nkisi) that has the power to protect the business and the entrepreneur from malevolent attacks. This phenomenon is so widespread that a witchcraft tribunal (25) has existed in Congo, recognized by the state, since 1982.

In addition to traditional beliefs, Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, also have a major impact on entrepreneurs. With the introduction of Christianity by colonial powers in Congo, traditional religions became marginalized. Catholicism remains the most practiced religion (Benoît Libali) (26) to this day. Catholic entrepreneurs are often guided by values such as integrity, hard work, and social justice. They may request special masses to pray for the success of their businesses or receive a priest's blessing at their workplace, highlighting the importance of religious rituals in spiritually supporting entrepreneurial projects.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church provides concrete support through various social programs and microfinance projects, encouraging ethical entrepreneurship.

Table: Religious Affiliation of Women and Men

Religions	Femmes				Hommes			
	EDSC-2005		EDSC-2011		EDSC-2005		EDSC-2011	
	Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%
Catholique	2159	30,6	2710	25,0	985	31,3	1717	33,4
Protestant	1881	26,7	2514	23,2	581	18,5	718	14,0
Musulman	88	1,2	102	0,9	62	2,0	179	3,5
Autres églises chrétiennes	677	9,6	1167	10,8	274	8,7	357	6,9
Animiste	13	0,2	52	0,5	15	0,5	11	0,2
Eglises de réveil	1771	25,1	3686	34,1	764	24,3	1411	27,4
Autre	0,0	0,0	87	0,8	0	0,0	65	1,3
Sans religion	461	6,5	497	4,6	464	14,8	682	13,3
Non Déclaré	0	0,0	4	0,0	0	0,0	5	0,1
Total	7051	100,0	10819	100,0	3146	100,0	5145	100,0

Source: EDSC-2005 & EDSC- 2011.

Protestantism is also very influential, particularly in its evangelical and Pentecostal forms. Entrepreneurs of this faith believe in the Holy Spirit, a member of the Trinity, who acts in their professional activities for the glory of God. This sense of spiritual support encourages a bolder approach to entrepreneurial decision-making.

Protestant churches, especially Pentecostal ones, often offer seminars and specific training for entrepreneurs, reinforcing motivation through faith and prayer. Entrepreneurial success is perceived as a result of applying biblical principles, encouraging believers to view their success as a reflection of their relationship with God, thereby influencing how they manage their businesses.

In parallel with these institutionalized forms of Christianity, certain modern spiritual practices such as occultism and spiritism continue to influence how some entrepreneurs make decisions and manage risks.

Occultism, derived from the Latin *occultus*, meaning "hidden and secret," refers to the belief in occult forces, often accessed through magic or astrology. Some entrepreneurs turn to incantations, astrological interpretations, or even cards to guide their decisions and predict the future of their projects. The use of these invisible forces can thus influence strategic choices in entrepreneurship, providing believers with a sense of spiritual security.

Spiritism is another spiritual practice based on the belief that the spirits of the dead can interact with the living. Entrepreneurs, particularly those who practice spiritism, use tools such as pendulums to predict the success or failure of their activities. This reveals the importance placed on invisible forces in the entrepreneurial approach.

In summary, entrepreneurship in Congo-Brazzaville is deeply influenced by the diversity of spiritual beliefs. Traditional beliefs such as animism, fetishism, and witchcraft provide spiritual frameworks through which entrepreneurs evaluate risks and seek protection. Additionally, Catholicism and Protestantism shape entrepreneurial practices by encouraging ethical behavior and offering formal spiritual support.

It is clear that Congolese entrepreneurs, particularly women, are often conditioned by these various beliefs, which influence both their behavior in the entrepreneurial process and their reliance on spiritual practices to ensure the success of their ventures. These beliefs—whether traditional, religious, or spiritual—serve as essential factors in shaping risk perception, decision-making, and the pursuit of prosperity in the entrepreneurial domain.

### **2.3 Impact of Belief on the Motivation to Undertake and on Resilience**

Spiritual beliefs play a fundamental role in the lives of female entrepreneurs in Congo-Brazzaville, particularly in the informal sector. For many of these women, although entrepreneurship is often seen as an economic necessity, they are driven by deep faith in higher powers that guide their decisions and strengthen their motivation. This faith acts as a psychological engine, providing them with the assurance that their projects will succeed. In cases of failure, they attribute it to divine will.

Thus, faith in divine or spiritual intervention allows these entrepreneurs to draw courage and inspiration in the face of uncertainty and economic challenges. In Catholicism, for instance, they seek blessings for their businesses, reinforcing their belief that their activities are protected by higher powers (Airault, 2004) (27). This demonstrates that success does not solely rely on skills but also on spiritual alignment. Beyond Christian beliefs, many entrepreneurs, especially Kongo women working in the informal sector, also integrate spiritual and ritual practices into the management of their businesses to attract prosperity and ward off harmful influences. For example, the use of *minkisi*, protective fetish objects, is common among these entrepreneurs. These objects are used to shield the business from spiritual attacks and ensure the success of their activities. These practices are not perceived as opposing rationality but rather as essential complements in an environment dominated by economic uncertainty and insecurity (Mulinda Habi Buganza).

Moreover, the study on the dynamics of female entrepreneurship in the informal sector highlights a coexistence between belief in witchcraft and Christian faith, predominantly Catholicism, among women entrepreneurs in the informal sector. According to the findings, 53.5% of them believe that witchcraft plays a role in their success, with 60% viewing this influence as positive, 15% as negative, and 25% taking a neutral stance (A.KOULOUNDA, 2020)

In parallel, another question regarding the fear of witchcraft revealed that 64.5% of women stated they were not afraid of it, attributing this confidence to their Christian faith and trust in God. This duality underscores the simultaneous influence of traditional and religious beliefs on their entrepreneurial resilience, although perceptions of witchcraft and its role vary depending on the context of the questions. (A.KOULOUNDA, 2020)

Among the stated reasons, 73% of women believe that their religious faith protects them from misfortune and failure. This conviction, particularly strong among entrepreneurs aged 45 to 65, provides them with essential resilience to overcome crises and recover from setbacks. Relying on their faith, they draw the strength and courage needed to persevere in an uncertain economic environment. (A.KOULOUNDA, 2020).

These results highlight a tension between traditional and religious beliefs, illustrating a gradual shift from witchcraft, perceived as a malevolent force, toward a more institutionalized faith, such as Catholicism. While belief in witchcraft remains prevalent among some generations, particularly older ones (44.5% among those aged 45–65 versus 27% among those aged 15–25), a decline in this belief is observed among younger generations, who

tend to gravitate more toward Christianity. This phenomenon reflects a cultural transformation in which faith in formal religious institutions gradually replaces negative traditional beliefs in response to the challenges of the business world.

However, this evolution is not uniform across all economic sectors. For instance, sector-specific characteristics reveal notable differences: in the hairdressing sector, 56% of women acknowledge a positive role of witchcraft in the success of their businesses, compared to only 26.5% in other sectors such as clothing. This disparity could be explained by the social and economic characteristics unique to each sector, as well as the influence of local beliefs on entrepreneurial practices. In summary, belief in witchcraft and religion seems to act as both a source of motivation and resilience, as well as a form of cultural risk assurance in the face of entrepreneurial uncertainties.

## 2. CONCLUSION

This article highlights the profound influence of spiritual beliefs on the entrepreneurial decisions of women operating in the informal sector in Congo-Brazzaville. Whether through the use of witchcraft, fetishes, or Christian faith, these beliefs play a central role in motivating entrepreneurship, managing daily business activities, and fostering resilience in the face of challenges. They do not replace economic imperatives but integrate with them, providing entrepreneurs with a psychological and spiritual framework to confront uncertainty and crises.

However, the analysis reveals a progressive cultural transformation : traditional beliefs, such as witchcraft often perceived negatively, are increasingly being replaced by institutionalized religious beliefs like Catholicism. This shift illustrates an evolution of spiritual practices within the entrepreneurial context, responding to the economic and social realities of the modern world. Nonetheless, this transition underscores the enduring importance of spiritual beliefs as a central pillar of female entrepreneurship in Congo-Brazzaville, shaping decisions, behaviors, and strategies in an environment marked by significant economic uncertainty.

To address the persistent challenges these women face, it is crucial to promote inclusive educational policies aimed at increasing girls' access to higher education. By improving education, reducing early marriages, and combating gender stereotypes, such measures would strengthen the economic and social position of women. They would also facilitate the transition of female entrepreneurs toward more ethical and sustainable practices, allowing spiritual beliefs to align with the contemporary demands of entrepreneurship.

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