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# Experience Dimensions of Religious Festivals: Religion and Spirituality at Paryaya, Udupi, India

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Festivals and events have been found to be an important motivation for travel, and are a significant component in a destination offering. All religious festivals, irrespective of religion and tradition, aim to develop spirituality. Experience is the core of festivals and events, and the experience is multifaceted. This research aims to analyse the impact of various experience dimensions of religious festivals on participants' overall festival experience and behavioural intention at a biennial festival called 'Paryaya' held at Udupi, India, using the concept of the experience economy. The researchers have adopted a quantitative research approach for the study. The result obtained through Structural Equation Modelling reveal that education, *aesthetics*, *escapist*, *communitas*, spirituality, and authenticity dimensions of experiences significantly contribute to tourists' overall festival experience. The overall festival experience of travellers acts as a statistically significant predictor of their behavioural intention at Paryaya. Moreover, the research concludes that visitors to a religious festival can be considered spiritual tourists, and their experience closely reflects the characteristics of spiritual tourism.

**Key Words:** religious festival, experience economy, revisit intention, structural equation model, India

## Introduction

Tourism is a social phenomenon and is a quintessential part of experiencing spirituality and religiosity by questing travellers in their search for the meaning of life (Buzinde, 2020). Spiritual tourism is not a new phenomenon and it has long been a widely known form of tourism (Choe & O'Regan, 2020). Spiritual tourism, a distinct market niche (Skinner & Soomers, 2019), is a global phenomenon that significantly contributes to the socio-economic development of communities countries (Choe & O'Regan, 2020). The United Nations' World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) highlighted that the cultural exchange and dialogue induced by spiritual tourism act as a cornerstone for mutual understanding, respect and tolerance, which are the building blocks of sustainability (UNWTO, 2015). The UNWTO also acknowledges that spiritual tourism helps destinations in creating employment opportunities, income generation, poverty alleviation, product diversification, and nurture a sense of pride among communities.

From a structural perspective, the term spiritual tourism overlaps and includes religious tourism and pilgrimage elements. From a geographical perspective, spiritual and religious tourism take place side by side. From an experiential perspective, religions itself can be an intensely spiritual experience (Olson & Timothy, 2006). In his work to define the term 'spiritual tourism', Norman (2012) indicates that the reason for complexity in defining spiritual tourism is that it is relatively new to scholarly discourse. He claims that literature on 'spiritual tourism' to date is erratic and he highlights various issues and shortcoming in the existing academic literature, including his previous work (Norman, 2012) that struggles to define the term 'spiritual tourism'. Norman (2012) has adopted an experience paradigm to distinguish spiritual tourism from other forms of tourism. He proposes that a spiritual tourist can undergo up to five varieties of experience – quest, experimental, collective, retreat and healing.

The first, experience a spiritual tourist may demonstrate is a quest for knowledge and personal discovery through religious or spiritual practices. In the search for knowledge, a journey itself becomes a medium of spiritual experience. Thus, the quest for knowledge is core for the authentic tourist experience. Second, travellers try out or experiment with an alternative way of life from their everyday problematic life. Third, spiritual tourists are willing to be part of a community or a trend. Fourth, when everyday life is perceived as problematic, spiritual tourists move away from home to get relief or healing by engaging in spiritual or religious practices. Fifth, tourists intend to escape from everyday problems via travel which is a temporary measure to release them from certain bonds and expectations and thus the spiritual travel can be conceived as a sanctuary from a complex world. He argues that a typical spiritual tourist might exhibit two or more characteristics of the experiences stated above. Considering these experiences, which are highlighted in the literature on spiritual tourism, Norman (2012) narrates that

*spiritual tourism can be, and is, part of contemporary religious practice for a range of individuals, as well as part of non-religious meaning and identity projects* (Norman, 2012:37).

Even after redefining the term 'spiritual tourism', Norman (2012), emphasises the need for scholarly attention on spiritual tourists' experiences to gain a socially and culturally useful reflection on spiritual tourism.

Existing literature on religious and non-religious festivals reveals that individuals visiting festival may experience some or all of the five elements of spiritual experience as proposed by Norman (2012): quest (Bleeker, 1967; Howell, 2018), experimental (Howell, 2018), collective (Eddy, 2012; Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010), retreat (Bleeker, 1967) and healing (Bleeker, 1967; Frey, 1998). Bleeker (1967), proposed that festivals have been celebrated by people from time immemorial to escape from their dreary lives, to take a pathway to interrupt the unrelenting burden of never-ending duties that consequently provide happiness and freedom. Howell (2018:22) observes that some festivals are able to 'create a sensation that one has stepped out into different age, society, and even dimension', which reflects that festivals act as an alternative way to experiment and explore life. In summary, events and festivals are experiential products that can contribute to individuals' quests for spiritual

experience (Howell, 2018; Bleeker, 1967). Other than the benefits offered to tourists and individuals, many researchers have documented the role of festivals and events in destination competitiveness, community wellbeing and economic development (Gupta & Basak, 2018; Getz, 2008; Sánchez, Fernández & Lara, 2017).

Packer and Ballantyne (2016) emphasised that measuring visitor experience is a more important way to connect with visitors than satisfaction, as it acts as an antecedent to satisfaction. However, studies on visitor experience, satisfaction and post-consumption behaviour in festivals known for their rich traditions and spirituality are scarce compared to other forms of tourism, although the socio-economic sustainability and impacts of these events is similar to other forms of tourism. Although events at destinations have been approached from the perspective of their contribution to destination development, the experience aspect of visitors that determines their future behaviour is not much explored. Considering the research gap, this research aims to analyse the link between various experience dimensions of religious festivals in relation to visitors' overall festival experience and behavioural intention. This work is undertaken at a biennial festival called 'Paryaya' held at Udupi, India. Udupi, a religious and coastal tourism centre well-known for its Sri Krishna Matha, a monastery for the Vaishnavite sect of Hinduism is located in the western coastal region of India. The Paryaya, a religious festival being organised for over five hundred years, attracts more than half a million visitors. However, despite the longevity and significance, no research has been found on visitor experience or its impact on revisit intention to this festival (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019). As 'spiritual tourism' still a contested term (Lopez, Lois González & Fernández, 2017), we point out here that we consider spiritual tourism as a multi element tourism, which comprises of diverse activities and practices include participating in a festival, meditation, yoga retreat, ceremonies, ritual and travel via ancient pilgrimage trails (Cheer, Belhassen & Kujawa, 2017; Norman, 2012; Haq & Wong, 2010). Thus, we adopt the definition that

[a] *spiritual tourist is someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred, or experiential in nature, but within a divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling* (Haq & Jackson, 2009:145).

## Review of Literature

Experience is at the core of all events, and experiences are multifaceted - the way any individual experiences an event is personal and complex (Richards, 2020). Evaluating tourists' experience of an event is imperative as it is the best predictor of tourists' future behaviour (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Tian-Cole & Illum, 2006). Many researchers have attempted to conceptualise and identify the elements of experience from a marketing perspective – particularly in recent years as the market has moved into the era of experience economy (Chen, Suntikul & King, 2020; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

The concept of experience economy has evolved through three stages. During the first-generation of experience economy, firms attempted to stage experiences as memorable and personal, aimed to connect mainly with the passive consumer. Based on this, through their pioneering work, Pine and Gilmore (1999) explicitly operationalised the concept of experience (within the broad scope of hospitality and tourism marketing) into four realms of experience dimension (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011), namely *Entertainment*, *Educational*, *Esthetic* and *Escapist* experiences, also called 4'E. For an Entertainment experience, the customers participate passively as they themselves are observers of the event. For an Educational experience, the consumer does participate in the experience and absorbs it, while in an *Esthetic* experience, the customers are deeply immersed in the experience but tend to participate quite passively and the Escapist experience involves immersion and participation. The Entertainment experience is related to the senses, while an Educational experience is about acquiring knowledge. The Escapist experience is about actions, while the *Esthetic* is quite simply about being there.

To look a bit closer at these distinctions, the Entertainment experience can happen in a religious event when people view various activities and performances at an event. The tourists are entertained by the multiple activities and performances which occur. The elements of Entertainment include activities, amusement, and performances (Dash & Samantaray, 2018). The Entertainment dimension discussed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) are similar to Norman's (2012) experimental experience where spiritual tourists opt for an alternative to their everyday life, which is highlighted by Bleeker's (1967) work on the objectives of festivals.

The education aspect of the event experience is derived when the tourist believes that their participation will improve their knowledge and skills. For the tourism industry to ensure an educational experience, it must engage the tourists' mind and provide them with the opportunity to learn something new (Hosany & Whitam, 2010). The desire for self-education is also a key factor for festival attendance (Prentice, 2004). Education is a process of absorption as it occupies the attention of an individual to bring an 'experience into the mind' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The educational experience enhances a tourist's satisfaction by enhancing their perceived value of an event (Chen & Chang, 2012) and thus can impact on their behavioural intention (Hung & Petrick, 2011). In Norman's (2012) work, the education aspect of experience reflects a spiritual tourist's 'quest' for knowledge and personal discovery.

The *Esthetic* experience of a participant is derived from the overall physical environment of an event (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A study by Lee *et al.* (2008) explored the impact of what they term the festivalscape, the physical environment, on tourist satisfaction and loyalty towards an event. The festival atmosphere motivates participants (Prentice & Anderson, 2003) along with other elements such as colour, lighting, and signage (Gilmore & Rentschler, 2002). *Esthetic* experience requires active participation by the tourist with the physical environment and thus, is part of the experience. Norman (2012) suggests that spiritual tourists like to move to new physical spaces and engage in religious activities to heal themselves.

Escapism is one of the primary experiences obtained by the visitors at an event as it allows an individual to be away from home and experience something new (Slater, 2007; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). The Escapist experience involves tourists' immersion and participation (Musa *et al.*, 2017). The researchers Kim, Uysal and Chen (2002) found that the primary motivation for festival attendees is to move out of their daily routine (Morgan, 2009). This Escapism dimension of experiences mirrors Norman's (2012) idea of 'retreat' by which a spiritual tourist tries to escape from everyday life and social bonding that is perceived to be problematic (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019).

Considering the link in the literature between four realms of experience and their contribution to a participant's overall festival experience, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

- H1: **Educational** experience has a positive impact on tourists overall festival experience
- H2: **Entertainment** experience has a positive impact on tourists overall festival experience
- H3: **Esthetic** experience has a positive impact on tourists overall festival experience
- H4: **Escapist** experience has a positive impact on tourists overall festival experience

The four dimensions of experience economy have been studied extensively in tourism and other experience-based services with for example it has been applied in religious tourism (Albayrak *et al.*, 2018), pilgrimage tourism (Chang, Li & Vincent, 2020), golf tourism (Hwang & Lyu, 2015), mountain terrain biking (Hagen & Boyes, 2016), local food (Piramanayagam, Sud & Seal, 2020), bed and breakfast (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007), and wine tourism (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2016).

The second generation of the experience economy is focused on individual consumers and their sense of perception rather than on the institutions involved. Experience as per the second generation is co-created by the involvement of consumer, which is personal, emotional and meaningful (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2005).

In the third generation of the experience economy, the experience is created by the virtual or physical communities who share a common interest in the context. This insists that festivals and events, which are mainly experience dominant, leverage more than these four dimensions of experiencescape. Festival and events thus surpass the paradigm of the experience economy and incorporate additional dimensions of experiences (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019).

In order to provide depth to our work, in this current study, we have integrated a further four dimensions of event experience into Pine and Gilmore's (1999) original concept of experience economy: Spirituality, Authenticity, *Communitas* and Overcrowding.

A growing number of tourists seek travelling as a mean for developing self-identity, self-discovery, and self-fulfilment, which are more related to spirituality than hedonic experience (Bandyopadhyay & Nair, 2019). Buzinde *et al.* (2014) found that spiritual ideals and spiritual connectivity are the dominant experiential components that motivate Indian travellers to attend

religion-based events, which they suggest are contrary to the western context. Temporary immersion in cultural traditions adds this spiritual experience. For a traveller, the primary motive is spiritual gain, unlike those who travel for pleasure and curiosity (Gupta & Basak, 2018). Beyond traditional sightseeing, travellers see this experience as a spiritual journey (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). India is known for its festivals, and people from different faith and traditions celebrate various festivals. All Hindu festivals, irrespective of religion and tradition, are aimed to develop spirituality (Sridhar, 2006). Thus, historically, festivals are associated with sacred traditions, which often increase spiritual consciousness by offering the realms of the sacred to festival visitors (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019). These spiritual experiences have a significant impact on tourists' revisit intention (Van Cappellen & Saroglou, 2012). Hence, we propose that

- H5: The *Spirituality* dimension of religious events has a positive impact on tourists' overall festival experience

*Communitas* is an unconventional mode of social relatedness, which is different from the routine (Turner, 1969). *Communitas* is developed when an individual temporarily separates from all identities and constrains of their normative reality (Rowe, 1998; Turner, 1969). It is similar to the Norman's (2012) concept of 'collective' experience-seeking behaviour among spiritual tourists. *Communitas* or the feeling of a community is essential as it refers to the feeling of closeness among the participants during an event (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019). The researchers Russell & Levy (2012), state that for event attendees, *Communitas*, contributes proactively to a desire to repeatedly reabsorb the experience of an event. Hence, we propose a hypothesis that:

- H6: *Communitas* has a positive impact on tourists overall festival experience

In tourism, the quest for authenticity is a significant force that drives tourist behaviour in the choice of destination. A tourist experience, to be authentic, is a fusion of objective, constructive, and existential (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999). Authenticity is (should be) a key element of special events and festivals as it allows an opportunity to satisfy the tourist in their pursuit of originality. It is contended that an authentic tourist experience is the convergence of visited places, individual tourist's behaviour, and belief system. Authenticity therefore, is found to be associated with behavioural intention

(Castéran & Roederer, 2013). Considering this evidence, we hypothesis that:

H7: **Authenticity** has a positive impact on tourist’s overall festival experience

Crowding is a perception that varies between individuals and depends on the type of tourism in a particular area. There is mixed evidence on the impact of Crowding on tourist post-consumption behaviour. A tourist at an event or festivals is expected to be tolerant of crowds compared to tourists at a natural resource destination. Researchers (Wickham & Kerstetter, 2000) found that tourists who want to go shopping, attend concerts and festivals prefer crowds. The presence of other people positively affects the expectations of the individuals, which motivates them consistently to attend and socialise at events such as festivals (Kim, Lee & Sirgy, 2016). On the contrary, researchers have observed that Crowding with an increased tourism density can have a negative impact on tourism and the tourists if it affects the destination’s security and sustainability (Graefe, Vaske & Kuss, 1984; Shelby & Heberlein, 1984). Crowding can act against individuals and keep tourists away from destinations (Jurado, Damian & Fernandezmorales, 2013) – densely populated crowded environments create confusion and frustration among the tourist (Hyun & Kim, 2015). Considering the evidence on the impact of Crowding on tourists experience, we propose that

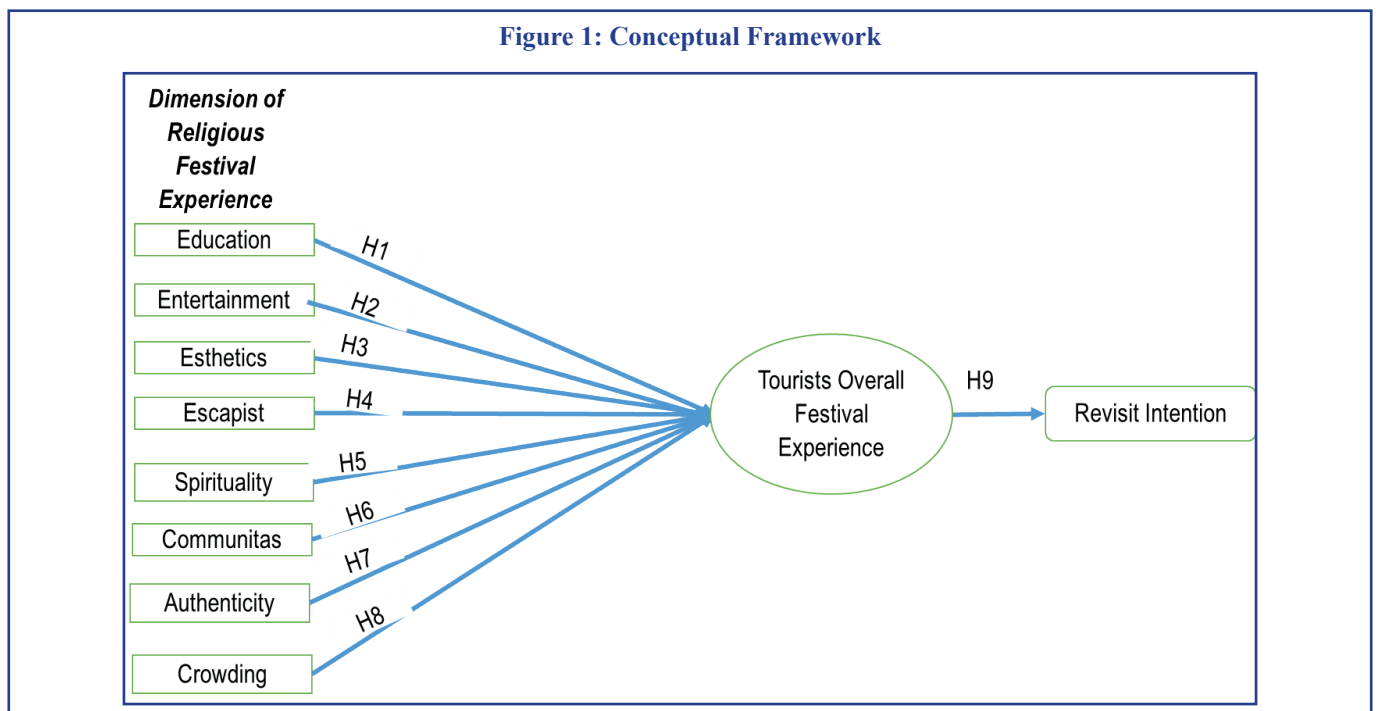
H8: **Crowding** affects tourist’s overall festival experience

In the past, researchers have found that various dimensions of experience have a significant positive impact on tourists revisit intention (Alexiou, 2020; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014b; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011c; Sirirat, 2019). The composite score for an overall festival experience could therefore be calculated from all the variables used to measure the dimensions of festival experience. Repeat visitors stay longer and participate more intensively in various activities; in addition, if they are satisfied they present a more positive word of mouth thereby improving the volume of first-time visitors (Lehto *et al.*, 2004; Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Revisit intention is believed to be an extension of satisfaction and loyalty to a destination (Um, Chon & Ro, 2006), thus, revisit intention reflects a tourist’s intention to recommend an event to others. Considering the evidence regarding the positive effect of experience on tourist revisit intention, we propose that

H9: **Overall Religious Festival Experience** has a positive effect on tourists revisit intention.

### Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review exploration of theoretical links between various dimensions of the experience economy and tourist revisit intention, conceptual framework in Figure 1 is proposed.



### Overview of Festival

Udupi city is the capital of the Udupi district of Karnataka, a principal state of India. The population as per the 2011 census is 1,177,361, with 42.69% of the population speaking Kannada. It is a coastal town with the Western Ghats mountain range to the east, and the Arabian Sea to the west and it became popular after the establishment of Sri Krishna Mutt (monastery) in the 12<sup>th</sup> CE. ‘Paryaya’ is a religious ritual that takes place in Sri Krishna Temple. The word Paryaya means a transition in Sanskrit – this religious and cultural tradition was initiated by the saint, philosopher and founder of the Dwaitha sect of Vaishanism, Sri Madhvacharya (CE 1238 -1317), it is a well-known festival in this region which dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Paryaya denotes the transfer of responsibility and exclusive right to worship Lord Krishna and manage the Sri Krishna Mutt / Temple for two years by a seer (pontiff). The transfer happens from one seer to another amongst the Astha Mutts (Eight Monasteries) once every two years. Paryaya (or succession) is a colourful festival which runs for almost for a week. The current Paryaya (2020-22) is the 250<sup>th</sup> Paryaya in a sequence which began in 1522. The new incoming seer is brought to the Krishna temple with the Paryaya procession, which

reaches the temple early morning on the day of Paryaya. On reaching the temple, the primary function begins in which the outgoing seer hands over the Akshaya Patra and Sattuga (a vessel and ladle dating back to the time of Sri Madhavacharya) along with the keys of the sanctum sanctorum to the incoming Paryaya seer. The festival and the Paryaya is celebrated by all of the eight seers (Charya, 2020; Rao,2002).

### Methodology

In order to explore the festival, the authors opted for a non -probability convenience sampling method. The data were collected from participants by two of the authors and five Masters students of hotel and tourism management who visited the Paryaya on two days in January 2020 and sought respondents who would participate voluntarily in the study. Those who agreed to participate were asked to fill out a hard copy questionnaire in English or Kannada (the local dialect). A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, of which 249 fully completed questionnaires were used for the analysis of data.

### Measurement

The research measured participants’ festival experiences using eight dimensions- Entertainment, Education, Escapism, *Esthetics*, *Communitas*, Spirituality,

Figure 2: Festival Crowds



<http://www.mangaloretoday.com/main/Paryaya-finale-on-Jan-18-Choornotsava-celebrated-Udupi-festivities.html>

Figure 3: Procession of the Seer who is about to take over Management of the Sri Krishna Mutt



<https://www.udayavani.com/english-news/sri-eeshapriya-teertha-swami-of-adamaru-mutt-ascends-paryaya-peeta>

Authenticity, and Crowding and explored the effect of these on their behaviour intention. The scales to measure Entertainment, Education, Escapism, and *Esthetics* dimensions of experience are adopted from Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007). The scale developed by Chandralal & Valenzeula (2017) was adopted to measure the *Communitas* dimension of experience. The scale for Authenticity was adopted from Wong, Ji & Liu (2018). The scale for the Spirituality dimension was adopted from Lee, Hwang & Shim (2019), and the scale for Crowding was adopted from Li, *et al.* (2017). The scale developed to measure the overall festival experience was thus adapted with the necessary changes to make it relevant for the present context. Finally, the revisit intention of the visitor was measured using the scale developed by Kim, Ko & Park (2013).

The survey instrument was comprised of two sections: Section 1 collected respondents' demographic information - age, gender, nationality, education level, occupation, size of travel, group, place of residence and frequency of visit; Section 2 collected the views of respondents in relation to festival experience and revisit intention on five-point Likert scales where '1' denotes strongly disagree and '5' denotes strongly agree (1: strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Moderately agree, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree).

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents who attended the Paryaya event during January 2020 is presented in Table 1.

The total number of participants who took part in the study was 249 - 51.8% of respondents in the survey were males. The age of the respondents ranges from 18 upwards and the majority belong to the age group of 34-44 (44.2%) while the 25 to 54 group constituted 89.6% of the respondents. The above 55 years category represent only 3.6% of the respondents. In terms of occupation, the majority of participants are either employed or work in services. 96% percent of the respondents are graduates and 68.3% of the participants in the study were residents of Karnataka, with 31.7% from neighbouring states of Karnataka such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa. The majority of the participants (68.7%) attended the Paryaya along with their family members, while 12.4% attended the Paryaya with friends and 11.2% attended the event alone. The majority of the participants in the

| Demographic variables           | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                   |           |            |
| Male                            | 129       | 51.8       |
| Female                          | 120       | 48.2       |
| <b>Age</b>                      |           |            |
| 18 -24                          | 17        | 6.8        |
| 25- 34                          | 49        | 19.7       |
| 35-44                           | 110       | 44.2       |
| 45- 54                          | 64        | 25.7       |
| 55 and above                    | 9         | 3.6        |
| <b>Occupation</b>               |           |            |
| Employed                        | 89        | 35.8       |
| Service                         | 79        | 31.7       |
| Entrepreneurs                   | 56        | 22.5       |
| Others                          | 25        | 10.0       |
| <b>Education</b>                |           |            |
| Metric                          | 9         | 3.6        |
| Graduation                      | 128       | 51.4       |
| Post-Graduation                 | 111       | 44.6       |
| Others                          | 1         | 0.4        |
| <b>Place of Residence</b>       |           |            |
| Within the state                | 170       | 68.3       |
| From other states               | 79        | 31.7       |
| <b>Size of the Travel group</b> |           |            |
| Alone                           | 28        | 11.2       |
| With family                     | 171       | 68.7       |
| With Friends                    | 31        | 12.4       |
| Others                          | 19        | 7.6        |
| <b>Frequency of Visit</b>       |           |            |
| First Time                      | 207       | 83.2       |
| Second Time                     | 31        | 12.4       |
| More than twice                 | 11        | 4.4        |

study (83.2%) were participating in the Paryaya for the first time and 16.8% of the participants have attended the Paryaya more than once.

### Results

The descriptive statistics such as Mean, Skewness and Kurtosis for the items in the spiritual event experiencescape scale are presented in Table 2. The reliability of each construct in the study is measured by calculating the Cronbach Alpha. The Alpha for the constructs varied between 0.711 to 0.905. Thus, the Cronbach Alpha score presented in Table 2 indicates that all spiritual event experiencescape constructs have good reliability as they are more than 0.7 (as recommended by Hair *et al.*, 2010). The skewness and the kurtosis values between '0.02 to 1.90' indicate that all the scale items are normally distributed (George & Mallery, 2010).



**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Items in the Scale**

| Code    | Constructs and items in the scale                                      | Mean | Alpha | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---------|--|------|-------|----------|----------|
| ENT1    | Participating in Paryaya is entertaining                               | 3.89 | 0.854 | -0.71    | -0.16    |
| ENT2    | I really enjoyed watching the Paryaya                                  | 3.56 |       | -0.73    | -0.20    |
| ENT3    | Activities in the Paryaya are amusing to watch                         | 3.96 |       | -0.83    | -0.26    |
| ENT4    | The activities in the Paryaya captivating                              | 4.00 |       | -0.86    | -0.13    |
| EDU1    | It is a great learning experience                                      | 3.20 | 0.863 | -0.26    | -0.81    |
| EDU2    | I learned a lot about the traditions of Paryaya                        | 3.49 |       | -0.40    | -0.45    |
| EDU3    | The experience was highly educational to me                            | 3.38 |       | -0.48    | -0.50    |
| EDU4    | The experience really enhanced my knowledge about Paryaya              | 3.43 |       | -0.43    | -0.41    |
| ESTHE1  | Just being here was very pleasant                                      | 4.69 | 0.711 | -0.55    | 0.72     |
| ESTHE2  | The setting was pretty beautiful                                       | 4.92 |       | -0.80    | 0.92     |
| ESTHE3  | The setting was very attractive  | 4.96 |       | -0.75    | 0.74     |
| ESTHE4  | The setting provided pleasure to my senses                             | 4.52 |       | -0.27    | 0.67     |
| ESC1    | I felt like I was living in a different time                           | 4.37 | 0.811 | -0.66    | -0.19    |
| ESC2    | I completely escaped from reality                                      | 4.32 |       | -0.77    | 0.20     |
| ESC3    | I totally forgot about my daily routine                                | 4.30 |       | -0.93    | 0.60     |
| ESC4    | I felt I was in a different world                                      | 4.13 |       | -1.28    | 1.90     |
| SPIRIT1 | I felt a holy atmosphere at Paryaya                                    | 4.56 | 0.886 | 0.39     | -0.82    |
| SPIRIT2 | I experienced a sense of being close to God                            | 4.07 |       | -0.12    | -0.32    |
| SPIRIT3 | The visit produced a spiritual response in me                          | 4.10 |       | -0.06    | -0.43    |
| SPIRIT4 | I felt inner happiness at Paryaya                                      | 3.57 |       | 0.02     | -0.35    |
| COMMU1  | Participating in Paryaya allowed me to turn strangers into friends     | 3.34 | 0.905 | -0.56    | -0.39    |
| COMMU2  | I feel a sense of being connected to other visitors                    | 3.28 |       | -0.32    | -0.66    |
| COMMU3  | Paryaya made me feel part of the local community                       | 3.25 |       | -0.23    | -0.64    |
| COMMU4  | Paryaya allowed me to engage with the local community                  | 3.20 |       | -0.08    | -0.71    |
| COMMU5  | I feel strong ties with other visitors                                 | 3.04 |       | -0.14    | -0.60    |
| AUTHEN1 | I enjoyed the unique religious and spiritual experience.               | 4.40 | 0.797 | -0.12    | 0.67     |
| AUTHEN2 | The rituals at the Paryaya are authentic                               | 4.08 |       | -1.22    | 1.68     |
| AUTHEN3 | Paryaya is an authentic representation of local culture and traditions | 3.44 |       | 0.01     | -0.65    |
| AUTHEN4 | Paryaya event settings look very authentic                             | 3.41 |       | -0.40    | -0.12    |
| CROWD1  | The festival site seemed very crowded to me                            | 2.72 | 0.863 | 0.32     | -1.16    |
| CROWD2  | Overcrowd during Paryaya made me uncomfortable                         | 3.53 |       | -0.02    | -1.40    |
| CROWD3  | Overcrowding spoiled my experience at Paryaya                          | 2.72 |       | 0.33     | -1.19    |
| BINT1   | I would like to revisit to next Paryaya                                | 4.59 | 0.752 | 1.13     | 1.45     |
| BINT2   | I will recommend others to attend Paryaya                              | 4.38 |       | 1.23     | 1.25     |
| BINT3   | I would say positive things about this Paryaya                         | 4.28 |       | 1.09     | 1.01     |
| BINT4   | I would come with my family and friend to the next Paryaya             | 4.11 |       | 0.68     | 0.78     |

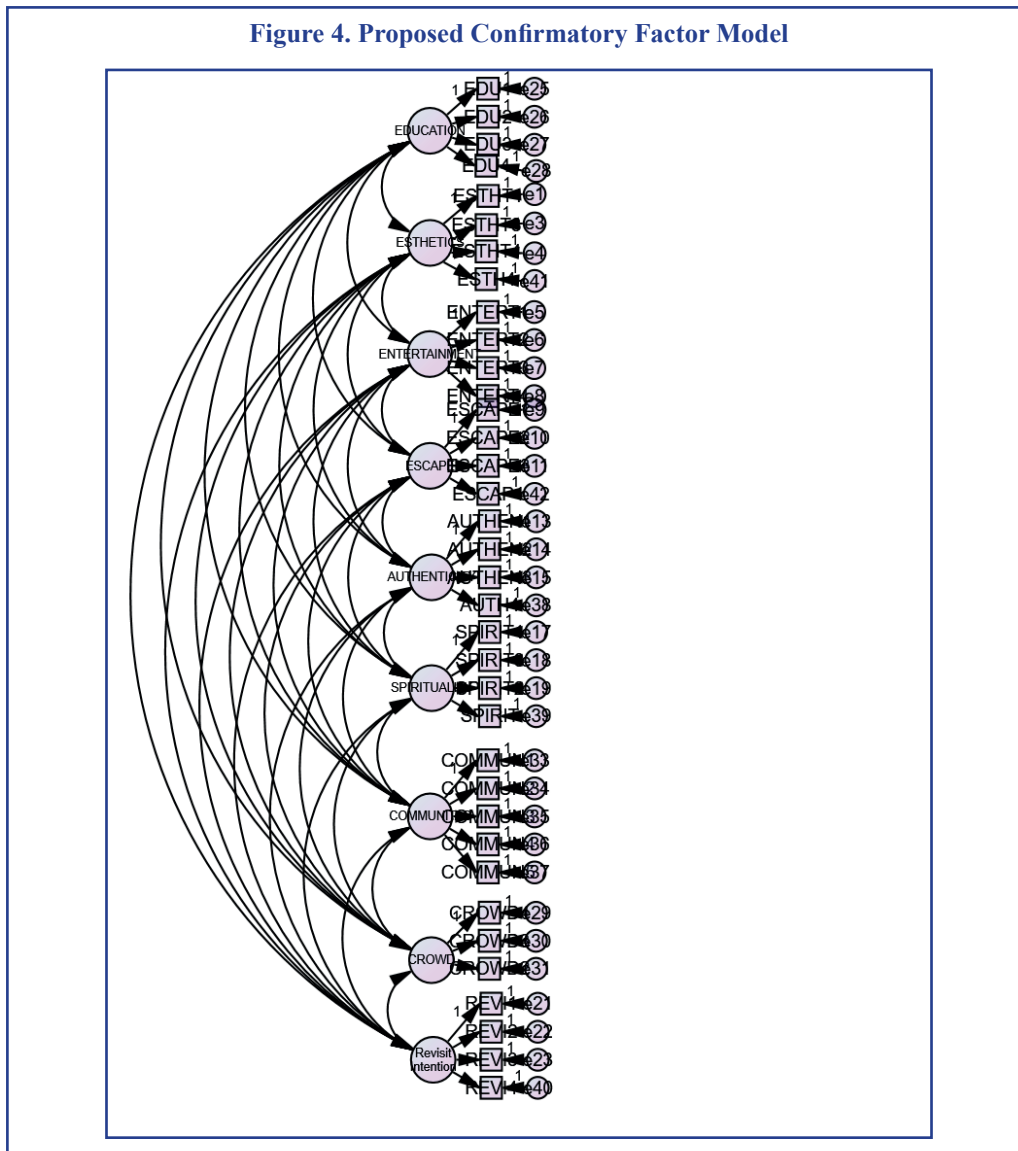
### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA helps the researcher confirm the validity of the factors and indicators which are developed based on pre-existing theory in the literature review. CFA is a statistical technique to analyse the psychometric properties of new and existing measures (Harrington, 2008). A researcher makes *a priori* assumptions that each factor that is specified is associated with a specific set of indicator variables (Kim & Mueller, 1978). In the CFA Model, if a researcher specifies only one level of factors and their indicators, the resultant model is called a first-order factor model. The basic assumption in CFA is that all factors are correlated; however, they are separate constructs. A high correlation of indicators is denoted as convergent validity, and the difference between each construct is denoted as discriminant validity.

As different researchers in different cultural contexts developed the various scales used in this study, it is necessary to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales. Before analysing the relationship between constructs, the model fit needs to be assessed. The proposed CFA model is presented in Figure 3. An ellipse represents the factors or constructs, and their indicators are represented as rectangles.

The result of the CFA was compared against the fit indices suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999). The measure of goodness of fitness indicators, such as the ratio of chi-square to the degree of freedom ( $X^2/df = 1.26$ ), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.901), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.87) Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.978), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

Figure 4. Proposed Confirmatory Factor Model



(RMSEA = 0.034) and Probability of Close Fit (P Close =0.99) all indicate that all of the eight factors of religious festival experiencescape and the behavioural intention have the best fit. During the CFA, some statements such as ‘Paryaya event settings look very authentic’, ‘I felt I was in a different world’ and ‘I would come with my family and friend to next Paryaya’ were removed as the loading (Lambda) was lower than 0.7.

**Convergent and Discriminant Validity of constructs in the scale**

The discriminant and convergent validity of various factors in the scale is estimated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010b), the calculated square root of the AVE should be more than 0.5 to indicate its discriminant validity. Similarly, a CR value of 0.7 or more

is needed for each construct to reflect their convergent validity. The Correlation, CR, and AVE, of the constructs in the study are presented in Table 3.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

The proposed hypotheses in the study have been testing using the structural equation model (SEM), which are also called Path models. The SEM helps the researcher to test the relationship between different constructs (derived from the review of literature and theories proposed in the past). The SEM provides a sign of relationship as positive or negative along with the strength of the relationship between constructs under the study. The standardised regression coefficient and t- statistics help the researcher to interpret the sign and the strength (Habibi & Ariffin, 2018). The standardised regression coefficient and t – statistics of the relationship between the constructs are presented in Table 4.

Table 3: Correlation, CR, and AVE of the constructs

| Dimension          | CR   | AVE  | C1          | C2          | C3          | C4          | C5          | C6          | C7          | C8          | C9          |
|--------------------|------|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Escapist (C1)      | 0.83 | 0.63 | <b>0.79</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Communitas (C2)    | 0.90 | 0.65 | 0.03        | <b>0.80</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Esthetics (C3)     | 0.73 | 0.49 | 0.15        | 0.28        | <b>0.70</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Authenticity (C4)  | 0.84 | 0.58 | 0.05        | 0.10        | 0.13        | <b>0.76</b> |             |             |             |             |             |
| Spirituality (C5)  | 0.83 | 0.55 | 0.14        | 0.12        | 0.21        | 0.16        | <b>0.74</b> |             |             |             |             |
| Entertainment (C6) | 0.91 | 0.72 | 0.13        | -0.03       | 0.19        | -0.04       | -0.07       | <b>0.85</b> |             |             |             |
| Education (C7)     | 0.85 | 0.58 | 0.01        | 0.06        | 0.03        | 0.02        | 0.04        | 0.10        | <b>0.76</b> |             |             |
| Crowd (C8)         | 0.86 | 0.61 | -0.04       | 0.14        | -0.01       | 0.18        | -0.01       | 0.01        | -0.08       | <b>0.78</b> |             |
| Revisit (C9)       | 0.80 | 0.57 | 0.23        | 0.06        | 0.39        | 0.68        | 0.72        | -0.14       | 0.35        | -0.19       | <b>0.75</b> |

Note: The square root of AVE appears diagonally in bold letters.

Table 4: Results of Hypotheses Testing

| Hypothesis | Independent variable        |   | Dependent Variable          | Standardised Estimates | t-value | Result   |
|------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------|----------|
| H1         | Education                   | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.100                  | 1.971   | Accepted |
| H2         | Entertainment               | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.091                  | 1.343   | Rejected |
| H3         | Esthetics                   | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.195                  | 2.447   | Accepted |
| H4         | Escapist                    | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.114                  | 2.093   | Accepted |
| H5         | Spirituality                | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.560                  | 4.820   | Accepted |
| H6         | Communitas                  | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.123                  | 2.192   | Accepted |
| H7         | Authenticity                | → | Overall Festival experience | 0.482                  | 5.707   | Accepted |
| H8         | Crowding                    | → | Overall Festival experience | -0.086                 | -1.303  | Rejected |
| H9         | Overall Festival experience | → | Behavioural Intention       | 0.632                  | 8.844   | Accepted |

The results obtained through SEM reveal that event experiencescape dimensions such as Education ( $\beta = 0.100$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), *Esthetics* ( $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Escapist ( $\beta = 0.114$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), *Communitas* ( $\beta = 0.123$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Spirituality ( $\beta = 0.560$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Authenticity ( $\beta = 0.482$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) have significant positive impact on participants' overall religious festival experience. Subsequently, the overall experience at Paryaya, a religious festival, has a positive impact on the behavioural intentions of participants ( $\beta = 0.632$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results also indicate that one unit of change in festival experience is able to explain about 63.2% of the variation in behavioural intention of the respondents. The influences of Spirituality and Authenticity dimensions of experiencescape are statistically significant at 1% and the effect of Education, Escapist, and *Esthetics* dimensions of experience are statistically significant at 5%. The Crowding aspect of the religious festival negatively influences tourists' overall festival experience; however, the impact is statistically insignificant.

## Discussion

Festivals and events related to religion significantly contribute to tourism development in destinations around the world. Tourism promoted through events supports the economic and socio-cultural development of the communities in a region. Ensuring a memorable experience is vital to sustaining the benefits of events. Experiences obtained by the visitors act as a key for their post-consumption behaviour. The participants may spread a positive story about the event via word of mouth and may have a positive revisit intention regarding the destination. Based on an extensive review of literature on the experience aspects of festivals and tourism events, this research has identified eight dimensions of festival experience, including the four dimensions of experience proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999). All the resulting dimensions of festival experience have been validated using confirmatory factor analysis. Moreover, the results obtained using a structural equation model revealed that Education, *Esthetics*, Escapist, *Communitas*, Spirituality, and Authenticity dimensions of experiences significantly contribute to tourists' overall experience. Further, the overall festival experience of tourists acts as a statistically significant predictor of tourists' behavioural intention at Paryaya.

The study results reveal that only Educational, *Aesthetics* and Escapist experience among four experiences dimensions proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) have a statistically significant influence on the overall tourist experience. This finding is in line with the work of Chen and Chen (2012), and Hung and Petrick (2011). However, the results contradict the findings of Tang, Guo and Xu (2018) and Manthiou *et al.* (2014), as the Entertainment dimension of experience does not significantly impact tourists' overall religious festival experience. Thus, it can be interpreted that for a tourist visiting a religious event, the Entertainment aspect of the experience may not be a significant contributor to their overall experience. The study also implies that spiritual experience is the most important predictor of tourists' overall experience at religious festivals that signify the customs and traditions of a specific religion or religious institution. The results of the study are in line with the findings of Bandyopadhyay and Nair, (2019) and Buzinde *et al.* (2014) that Indian travellers visiting religion-based events look for spiritual experiences and spiritual connectivity rather than hedonic experiences, which may be contrary to the western context. *Communitas* and Authenticity are the other experience dimensions that are positively associated with tourists' overall festival experience. The findings of the study fall in line with the findings of authors such as Mody, Lehto, and Suess (2017) and, Russell and Levy (2012). However, the results of this study are inconclusive on the role of crowding in influencing overall experience at this type of event. The statistically insignificant negative influence of overcrowding reveals that Crowding does not influence participants' overall festival experience at Paryaya; however the literature does suggest that Crowding can negatively impacts festival experience.

The findings in this study support our assumptions which evolved from the literature review (Lee, Hwang & Shim, 2019; Bandyopadhyay & Nair, 2019; Gupta & Basak, 2018; Buzinde *et al.*, 2014) that participants in religious festivals can be considered to be spiritual tourists. Various festival experience dimensions that significantly contributed to overall festival experience in this study context fulfil the criteria suggested by Norman (2012) that a spiritual tourist might exhibit two or more realms of experiences. The significant effects of Education and Authenticity experience in the current study indicate that tourists consider religious festivals as a source of knowledge that fulfils their quest for the meaning of life, which is similar to Norman's idea of 'quest'. The Escapist dimension reflects religious festivals as a way to escape

from tourists' day-to-day life which is similar to retreat. The significant impact of the *Communitas* dimension of experience on overall festival experience indicates that travellers visiting a religious festival want to be part of the community - that reflects the 'collective' discussed by Norman (2012). Similarly, the perceived sacredness of religious festivals leads travellers to feel a sense of being close to the divine and attaining inner happiness – this resembles the term 'healing'.

## Conclusion

The findings imply that religious festival organisers should focus on creating an environment that reflects authenticity, emits spirituality, and acts as a path towards knowledge of local culture, traditions and values in order to provide a memorable experience that subsequently contributes to the economics and wellbeing of the local community. In other words, festivals should allow participants to become spiritually aware, develop social interaction, escape from their daily life, and learn new things. Therefore, the key to a successful religious festival lies in creating space for learning, social interaction, and ensuring participants' personal experiences ultimately provide inner satisfaction.

The findings of the research contribute to existing literature and knowledge in the field in three ways. First, the research advances tourist experience literature by analysing various dimension of experience in the context of a religious event. It demonstrates that specific realms of the experience economy act as antecedents of spiritual experience derived from religious festivals while also impacting on revisit intention in the context of religious festivals. Second, it advances the experience economy literature in the context of religious festivals by introducing new dimensions of experience, i.e., Spirituality, *Communitas*, and Authenticity and examining their significant role in the overall festival experience. Finally, these empirical findings confirm that the religious festival experience should be looked at through the lens of multidimensional aspects of experience. It also explores the various dimensions of experiences which are considered most important for tourists / participants visiting religious festivals in India (Buzinde *et al.*, 2014).

Although this study contributed several new findings, it has limitations which emphasise that result should only be generalised with caution, considering the contextual

factors. The limitation also open new avenues for research. Adoption of convenience sampling specific to Paryaya held during the year 2020 limits the generalisation, thus, future studies could consider a longitudinal study to ensure a deeper and broader understanding of various realms of experience in relation to revisit intention. The effect of overcrowding on religious festivals also provides an opportunity for further studies. As experience is considered to be both personal and emotional, adopting a qualitative research designs to understand the relationship between experience and revisit intention could be worthy of further investigation. Despite the limitations, this study contributes to advancing knowledge on the role of the experience economy in festivals in general, and spiritual / religious festivals in particular.

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