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# The Centrality of Religious Festival Experience and Satisfaction on The Subjective Well-Being of Visitors: Evidence from Udupi Paryaya Festival

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Themed public celebrations, known as festivals, that explore and promote different aspects of local culture contribute significantly to the economic and social well-being of regions. They provide a distinctive image to the place and create a unique, shared, and memorable experience (ME) for visitors. In India, large-scale festivals represent a source of social interaction that generates positive socio-cultural, hedonic, and functional benefits, which are believed to increase happiness and, subsequently, subjective well-being. This paper explores the religious essence of the historic sacred religious site in Udupi, Krishna Matha. To do so, it examines visitors' ME from attending a unique biennial religio-cultural festival known as Paryaya. The quantitative study investigates the impact of ME on subjective well-being (SWB) and the mediating role of satisfaction on this relationship. The study results show that ME has a significant influence on satisfaction and SWB. This study is one of the first in the indigenous tourism literature to test a framework that characterises the relationship between ME, satisfaction, and SWB of visitors in a religious festival setting. It provides a new perspective from which festival organisers and tourism policymakers at the local and state government levels can respond to visitors' needs and plan for the sustainability of such mega-events. Locally, organisers and managers of Krishna Matha may focus on continuing their profile-raising outreach efforts on behalf of the location.

**Key Words:** religious festival, memorable experience, subjective wellbeing, satisfaction, Udupi-India

## Introduction

Themed public celebrations known as festivals, that explore and promote different aspects of local culture (Gibson *et al.*, 2011) contribute significantly to the economic and social well-being of regions (Chou, Huang & Mair, 2018). As such, festivals are predominantly attended by local visitors and residents, the benefits of which significantly impact the service economy of the region (Clifton, O'Sullivan & Pickernell, 2012). Moreover, these short-term events provide a distinctive image to the place and create a unique, shared, and memorable experience (ME) for visitors (Morgan, 2008).

Evidence of this in the recent past is studies which have analysed the impact of experience dimensions on visitors' overall festival experience in a religious festival context in India (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021). Though it seems obvious that festivals should enhance visitors' satisfaction, considering the experiential nature of festivals' destination experience is critical in attracting visitors to enhance festivals' memorability (Kim, 2014; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014). Today, therefore, experience is considered as a key construct in the tourism and festival domain where consumers look for affective memories and lasting experiences.

In India, spirituality and religion are integral parts of everyday life (McIntyre, Saliba & McKenzie, 2020); indeed, religious faith is becoming more prevalent (Sheerwood, 2018) and festivals are integral to Hindu religious practices (Shinde, 2010). Unlike the Western world, where festivals are considered cultural events that fulfill leisure and recreational needs, many festivals in non-Western societies are rooted in cultural and religious traditions (Kraft, 2007). Festivals at Indian pilgrimage / religious sites impact the socio-cultural and religious fabric of the surrounding communities and increase the inherent traditional religious values among the visitors (Shinde, 2008). Lesser-known festivals and religious events take place in rural settings where visitors have the opportunity to understand the area's heritage, traditions, cultural landscapes, and religious values (Patwardhan *et al.*, 2020). Though such festivals are typically organised to aid local economic development (Gaur & Chapnerkar, 2015), social cohesion (Getz & Andersson, 2009), and preservation of local culture (Egresi & Kara, 2014), the fact that they impact festival visitors' satisfaction and well-being cannot be ignored.

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to 'how individuals experience and evaluate their lives, specific domains, and activities in their own lives' (Stone & Mackie, 2013:15). It is believed to be stable (Diener *et al.*, 1999) and strongly influenced by personality traits (Steel, Schmidt & Shultz, 2008). While several factors contribute to the SWB of an individual, past research suggested that events (e.g., religious, food and wine, cultural, and film festivals) that provide an opportunity to enhance social interactions are positively associated with SWB (Newman, Tay & Diener, 2014; Yolal *et al.*, 2016). Visitors' participation in the celebrations of unique cultural traditions during festivals (Tanford & Jung, 2017) is likewise believed to raise their level of SWB (Ahn, 2021; Payini *et al.*, 2021).

The experience economy framework has received considerable attention in both academia and the tourism industry in the recent past. However, the components of this framework have yet to be studied in the context of religious festivals. Few studies in general (Fuentetaja & Abad-Galzacorta, 2019; Kim & Sam Kim, 2019; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Rivera, Semrad & Croes, 2015), and none in the context of religious festivals, have examined the relationship between experiential

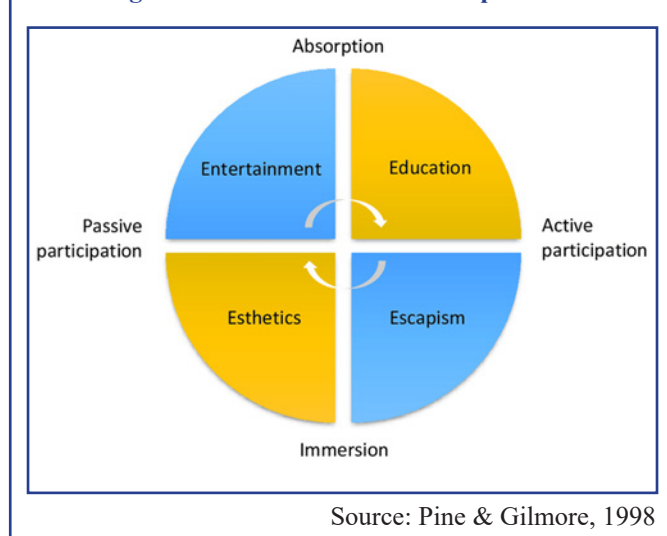
dimensions and other consequential variables, such as visitors' satisfaction and SWB. This study attempts to fill this gap by testing a framework that characterises the relationship between memorable festival experiences, satisfaction, and SWB of visitors in a religious festival setting. Additionally, thus far there is no evidence of the mediating effect of satisfaction in the relationship between MEs and SWB in the religious festival context. Therefore, this study provides a new perspective from which festival organisers and tourism policymakers at the local and state government levels can understand the organisation of festivals, respond to visitors, and plan for the sustainability of such mega-events.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

### *Experience Economy*

The concept of 'experience economy' is an emerging paradigm for enhancing business performance across a wide range of industries. It is defined as 'events that engage individuals in a personal way,' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:12) and comprises four realms (or dimensions) of experience (entertainment, education, escapism esthetic - see Figure 1) differentiated by the level and form of customer (visitor) involvement in business offerings. Initially, the concept of experience economy was focused on business; later, the idea was adopted by other disciplines, including tourism and hospitality, where the purpose is to create experiences (Alexiou, 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019). As a cornerstone of consumer experience management, the concept was later adopted in the context of events and festivals (Dieck, Jung & Rauschanabel, 2018; Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Rivera, Semrad & Croes, 2015).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), visitors tend to gain diverse experiences — such as entertainment, education, escapism, or esthetic reward — when they passively or actively associate with the environment. Using the experience economy as a baseline framework, and drawing conclusions from Pine and Gilmore's (1999) original framework, we propose that satisfaction and SWB can be considered as potential outcomes of the four realms of the consumption experience. As per the framework, along the customer participation axis, passive

**Figure 1: The Four Realms of Experience**

participation of visitors characterises the entertainment and esthetic dimensions, while educational and escapist dimensions reflect active participation. Along the absorption-immersion axis, the visitor typically ‘absorbs’ entertaining and educational offerings of a festival and immerses themselves in the festival environment, resulting in esthetic or escapist experiences (Figure 1). Absorption in this context is defined as ‘occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind,’ and immersion as ‘becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself’ (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:31). To create an ME in the mind of visitors, an effective design of the overall experience is essential. Past research has shown that the combined effects of the four experiential dimensions of experience economy support the creation of overall experience (Morgan, 2007; Rivera, Semrad & Croes, 2015).

### ***Memorable Festival Experience and Subjective Well-being***

Much research has addressed the significance of travel experiences that will last in a visitor’s memory for a long time and be remembered through recollection (Azevedo, 2009; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). A memorable tourism experience is a significant experience that is placed in the memory, and can be remembered, recalled, and selectively reconstructed by the visitor when unfolding a specific travel experience (Kim, 2018; Kim, Brent Ritchie & Tung, 2010). A visitor’s decision to travel is based on their assessment of the hedonic quality of potential locations, which is a part of ME (Chang,

2018). Visitors’ experiences, in general, are related to the subjective mental state felt. Their interpretation of the meaning of products, activities, and destinations (Knobloch, Robertson & Aitken, 2017; Zhong, Busser & Baloglu, 2017), and the components (experiential factors) of memorable tourism experiences, enhance the memorability of those experiences (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012). Hence, from the festival perspective, the 5Es — entertainment, education, escapism, esthetics, and economic value — can be proposed to determine whether the overall festival experience is memorable (Semrad & Rivera, 2018).

SWB can be divided into two components— affective and cognitive. Though measuring both components of SWB is important, it is evident from the literature that researchers have focused more on the measurement of affective well-being, such as emotions, moods, and feelings (Kammann & Flett, 1983; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). To obtain a more robust measurement, Diener, Horwitz and Emmons (1985) developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to measure one component of SWB: life satisfaction. Since its introduction, the SWLS has been used in several studies (Liu & Draper, 2021; Payini *et al.*, 2021; Walters & Venkatachalam, 2021; Yilmaz, 2020), and has demonstrated good psychometric characteristics. Therefore, the present study adopts this scale to measure the affective assessment of SWB in the festival context.

There is an association between religious involvement and psychological well-being. Religious involvement is considered central to SWB owing to personal faith and organized religious activities (Durkheim, 1915). In the context of India, spirituality and religion are important contributors to life satisfaction and SWB (McIntyre, Saliba & McKenzie, 2020). In addition, religious events contribute significantly to people’s SWB, as they enhance spirituality, interpersonal contact, freedom, mastery, involvement, and spontaneity (Mellor *et al.*, 2012). Events such as local large-scale festivals, including religious festivals, food and wine festivals, cultural festivals, sports events, and so on, that provide an opportunity to enhance social interactions are positively associated with SWB (Ahn, 2021; Newman, Tay & Diener, 2014). Rituals included in events and festivals often produce emotional energy and arouse feelings of happiness and flow. Alongside this, happiness as a construct of



SWB is relevant to the context of festivals. 'Intentional activity,' a factor that includes both behavioural (e.g., participating in events) and cognitive (e.g., listening to music, volitional action) components is also significantly associated with SWB (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007). In all, based on the consensus across research studies, it can be concluded that festival participation has a positive impact on satisfaction and SWB (Jepson & Stadler, 2017; Payini *et al.*, 2021; Yilmaz, 2020; Yolal *et al.*, 2016). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Memorable experience has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being.

### **Memorable Experience and Satisfaction**

For a visitor to any destination, the most valuable information source is what they reminisce about, which is drawn from their memory (Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2017). The travel industry benefits from facilitating visitors to memorise and recollect the positive experiences created by pleasant experiences (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014; Park & Santos, 2017). Aligned with this experiential view of ME, in the tourism context, ME can be termed 'an experience [that is] positively remembered and recalled after the event occurred' (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012). Most of the ME literature has focused on the positive experience of visitors (Knobloch, Robertson & Aitken, 2017), which, in tourism, is considered as a foundation for tourist satisfaction (Zhong, Busser & Baloglu, 2017). Satisfaction against this background can be seen as a level of happiness resulting from consumption experience. Thus, festival satisfaction is conceptualised as an 'attendee's overall evaluation of their experiences at a festival' (Akhoondnejad, 2016:471). Hence, this study proposes that ME positively affects festival visitor satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 2:** Memorable experience has a significant positive impact on festival visitors' satisfaction.

### **Satisfaction and Subjective Well-being**

The travel research has shown a significant and positive relationship between visitor experience and satisfaction (Ali, Amin & Cobanoglu, 2016; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021). Some studies have centered on the interpretation

of experiences based on satisfaction's expressive and instrumental attributes (e.g., Tung & Ritchie, 2011). This includes the actual act of experience and several indicators that act as facilitators to the individual's attainment of the experience. Therefore, satisfaction in the event context is generally referred to as the cognitive-affective state resulting from experiences (Armbrecht & Andersson, 2020). The construct of satisfaction has primarily been studied in the context of events and festivals (Papadimitriou, 2013; Son & Lee, 2011; Yilmaz, 2020). Likewise, there is evidence from the literature on the influence of mass gatherings, such as carnivals and religious festivals, that such events result in a long-term increase in well-being among participants (Tewari *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, festivals and events meet a wide range of psychological needs by providing opportunities for sociability, entertainment, and novelty (Krause, North & Davidson, 2019). However, in local festival settings, minimal studies have focused on the relationship between satisfaction and SWB (Yoon, Lee & Lee, 2010). Based on prior findings, we argue that participants' experiences and satisfaction with religious festivals positively impact their SWB. Accordingly, we hypothesise that festival satisfaction has both direct and mediating effects on the SWB of festival attendees:

**Hypothesis 3:** Festival satisfaction has a significant positive impact on festival visitors' subjective well-being.

**Hypothesis 4:** Festival satisfaction significantly impacts the relationship between memorable experience and subjective well-being

## **History of the Study Site**

Karnataka, a southern state in India, is known for its Hindu temples, including the well-known 13th-century Sri Krishna temple at Udupi (Chugh, 2017; Rao, 2020). Udupi is a sacred place for Hindus that attracts millions of visitors every year. Traditionally titled as a sacred religious site, Udupi offers visitors a wide range of spiritual and non-spiritual happenings that complement each other to provide a complete experience. It is a coastal commercial and pilgrimage destination that maintains spiritual and religious integrity. Locally, the Krishna temple is known as a *Sri Krishna Matha* (monastery). Sri

**Figure 2: Lord Krishna**

Source: <https://udipikrishnamutt.com/>

Madhvacharya (1238–1317 CE), Vishnavite, a saint in the 13th century, established the *Ashta* (eight) *Mathas* around the Krishna temple in Udupi to propagate Dvaita Vedanta

philosophy (Archive.today, 2013; Rao, 2002). The puja and administration of *Krishna Matha* are distributed among eight *Swamijis* (monks or pontiffs) of the eight *Mathas* established by Sri Madhvacharya. With an 800-year history, *Krishna Matha* is known for its calendar of grandiose festivals, which attract local visitors, as well as travellers from different parts of the country. One of the most famous religious festivals at *Krishna Matha* is the *Paryaya* festival, which is celebrated biennially (Charya, 2020; Rao, 2002).

#### ***Study Context: Paryaya Festival***

Beginning in 1298 AD, *Paryaya* is a religious festival that takes place every alternate year in *Krishna Matha*. The biennial *Paryaya* festival is a purpose-built religious attraction (Thampi, 2017) organised by *Krishna Matha*, signifying the change in the administration of the Krishna temple. The *Ashta Mathas* take turns managing *Krishna Matha* in a two-year term called *Paryaya*, which means change or transition in Sanskrit. The transition occurs through a grand ceremony that marks the transfer of the right to worship Lord Krishna and manage the *Krishna Matha* from one pontiff to another. In the *Krishna* temple, January 14 of every year is celebrated as *Sri Krishna Pratishthapana Dina* (consecration of the image of a deity), an auspicious day of *Makara Sankranti*, as per the Hindu solar calendar. Approximately 200 years ago, the *Swamijis* of eight *Mathas* decided to organise

**Figure 3: Paryaya Swamiji in Procession**

Source: <http://www.kemmannu.com/index.php?action=topstory&type=14462>



Figure 4a and 4b: Tableaus



Source: <http://happiestladies.blogspot.com/2016/01/udupi-paryaya-2016-18-pura-pravesha.html>

the *Paryaya* festival on a fixed calendar day and chose January 18 (four days after the *Pratishthapana Dina*); the tradition continues to date. This is a mega-event of religious significance that is a primary attraction for religious travellers and local visitors who seek to experience the authentic culture of the place and the temple (Thampi, 2017).

By dawn (around 3 am) of January 18, the *Paryaya Swamiji* and *Swamijis* of other Mathas enter the temple square in a huge procession (Rao, 2002) (Figure 3). During the procession, the presiding deity of the *Paryaya Matha* is also placed in a decorated golden palanquin alongside tableaux and cultural shows.

The event includes hundreds of beautiful tableaux and cultural troupes (Figures 4a and 4b) depicting the heritage of the spiritual and cultural traditions of the land accompanying the grand procession (Naik, 2020).

The outgoing *Swamiji* welcomes the new one, and they go to the *Madhvasarovara* (Figure 5) to wash their feet before entering the sanctum sanctorum. Afterward, they move to *Simhasana Shala* to receive the *Akshaya Patra* and *Sattuga*, which are a vessel and ladle, respectively (Figure 6); this marks the transfer of power.

The *Swamijis* arrive together at *Rajangana*, the ceremony hall, in a procession to attend the *Durbar*, or formal

Figure 5: Madhva Sarovara



Source: <https://udupidarshan.com/index/index.php>



Figure 6: Akshaya Patra



Source: <https://sripalimarumatha.org/sri-krishna-pooja-paryaya>

meeting place (Figure 7), where they bid farewell to the outgoing *Swamiji* and welcome the *Paryaya Swamiji*. This mega-function is attended by guests, celebrities, and *Swamijis*, and the new developmental plans of the *Paryaya Matha* are announced.

The *Paryaya* festival is a spiritual, religious, traditional, and cultural extravaganza portraying the legacy of the *Krishna* temple. Approximately 100,000 visitors witness

the celebrations, and at least 50,000 people attend the special *Prasadam* on this day. Farmers, citizens, and organisations of different religions in the Udupi district donate food, grain, and vegetables, termed as *Horekanike*, to support the sacred tradition of offering food to others. From 7 pm on January 17 until 7 pm on January 18, myriad cultural programs are held across the city within a 2 km radius to mark the event (Figures 8–11).

Figure 7: Paryaya Darbar with Eight Swamijis



Source: <https://www.deccanherald.com/>



**Figure 8: Visitors to Paryaya**



Source: /www.mangaloretoday.com

**Figure 9: Horekanike**



Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>



Figure 10: Yakshagana



Source: <https://www.sripalimarumatha.org/events/gurudakshine-yakshagana>

Figure 11: Mythological Dance Drama



Source: <https://thecanarapost.com/2022/01/18/sri-krishnapura-paryaya-2022/>



## Research Methodology

## Data collection and Sampling Techniques

### Survey Procedure

The participants of the study included visitors and residents of the region and other parts of the state. To address the language barriers, the questionnaire was developed in English and Kannada language. The questionnaire was initially developed in English, then translated to Kannada, and verified by language experts to ascertain the correctness of the translated version. The items of the questionnaire were borrowed from existing validated scales in the extant literature. The scale to measure Memorable Festival Experience (five items) was adapted from the MTE scale (Kim, 2018). The SWB scale (five items) was adapted from Diener, Horwitz, and Emmons (1985). Overall satisfaction (three items) was measured using the scale developed by Yoon, Lee & Lee (2010a). The items were anchored on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). The socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education, visitor type, and visitation pattern) were part of the questionnaire to comprehend participant characteristics and visitation behaviour.

The data were collected by the research team members (three teachers and three students) at the festival site. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to select the participants. The adoption of the convenience sampling method was inevitable due to the continuous movement of visitors, simultaneous cultural programs at different locations, and their partial willingness to partake the task. The data collection process started at 9 pm on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and continued for five days until the completion of the religious events and cultural programmes organised as part of the festival. The research team members approached festival attendees at six different locations within the vicinity of the *Matha*. The study objectives were explained, and consent was sought before administering the questionnaire. To minimise the measuring error, only departing festival attendees were invited to participate in the study. Overall, 952 respondents participated in the survey and a total of 744 surveys were considered for analysis after eliminating missing cases and outliers.

**Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results**

Subjective well-being	Factor Loadings	t-value	$\alpha$ (Cronbach's Alpha)	CR (Composite Reliability)	AVE (Average Variance Extracted)
SWL1	0.629***	N/Aa	0.734	0.708	0.340
SWL2	0.593***	12.013			
SWL3	0.651***	11.487			
SWL4	0.545***	9.915			
SWL5	0.588***	10.53			
Memorable Festival experience			0.694	0.701	0.441
MFE3	0.66***	N/Aa			
MFE4	0.634***	12.321			
MFE5	0.658***	13.661			
Satisfaction with Festival			0.695	0.702	0.441
SAT1	0.646***	N/Aa			
SAT2	0.73***	12.774			
SAT3	0.609***	12.207			

\*\*\*Significant at p<0.001

**Table 2: Discriminant Validity Results**

	Mean	SD	SWL Subjective Wellbeing	MFE Memorable Festival Experience	SAT Satisfaction with Festival
SWL Subjective Wellbeing	3.97	0.66	0.583		
MFE Memorable Festival Experience	4.17	0.72	0.566***	0.664	
SAT Satisfaction with Festival	4.37	0.54	0.539***	0.613***	0.664

\*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.001$

## Analysis

### Sample Characteristics

The sample consists of 420 male (56.5%) and 324 female (43.5%) participants. 652 (87.6%) participants are Hindus, 49 (6.6%) are Christians, and 43 (5.8%) are Muslims. 654 (87.9 %) participants are mainly repeat visitors, and only 90 (12.1%) are first-time visitors. 249 (33.5%) belong to the age group 20-30, followed by 183 (24.6%) in group 31-40, 112 (15.1%) in group 41-50, 103 (13.8%) in age group 51-60, 51 (6.9%) in age group 61-70 and 46 (6.2%) in age group above 71. 224 (30%) participants identified themselves as pilgrims, whereas 277 (37.2 %) classified themselves as visitors and the remaining 243 (33%) considered themselves as both (pilgrims and tourists).

### Measurement Model

Before testing the hypotheses, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to check the factorability of all items. CFA is a multivariate statistical procedure that is used to test how well the measured variables represent the number of constructs. Goodness-of-fit is evaluated using a range of model fit indices. The model fit indices used in this were: CMIN/df= 3.861,  $p < 0.001$ , Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.919, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.942, Standardized Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.062, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.0404. The factor loading values of all items were above 0.5 and were significant at a 1% level (Table 1).

The Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.701 to 0.702, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were between 0.340 and 0.44. Though an AVE higher than 0.5 is recommended, a lower value is acceptable when the CR is higher than 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Since the CR values, in this case, were higher than 0.6, convergent validity could be assumed for all constructs. The square root of the AVE for each construct was compared to the correlations among latent variables in the model to determine discriminant validity. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of all measurement constructs should be greater than the bivariate correlation values. The values, as shown in Table 2, demonstrate discriminant validity.

### Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using Model 4 of PROCESS v3.5 (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS 24.0.

**Hypothesis 1** posited that festival attendees' ME positively impacts their SWB. The results suggest that the festival experience has a significant positive impact on visitors' SWB, supporting the hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.402$ , 95%, CI [0.2278, 0.3848]).

**Hypothesis 2** proposed that memorable experience has a significant positive effect on festival satisfaction, supporting the hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.454$ , 95%, CI [0.4013, 0.5065]).

**Hypothesis 3** postulated that festival visitors' satisfaction significantly influences their SWB; this hypothesis was also supported ( $\beta = 0.468$ , 95%, CI [0.1924, 0.376]). The results of hypothesis 3 indicate that one unit of change in satisfaction explains 46% of the variation in the SWB of festival visitors.

### **Mediating Effect of Satisfaction**

We have used Bias-corrected Confidence Intervals (CI) (95 %) for testing the significance of the indirect effect of the independent variable (ME) on the dependent variable (SWB) through the mediator (Satisfaction) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The results show that festival visitors' satisfaction mediates the relationship between memorable experience and SWB ( $H4_{MFE-SAT-SWL}$ :  $\beta=0.1290$ , 95%, CI [0.0837, 0.1782]).

### **Discussion**

As the second-most populous country after China, and with diverse societies and cultural traditions unlike those of other countries in the world, India represents an interesting case study of national and international happiness (Biswas-Diener, Tay & Diener, 2012). According to Indian tradition, well-being is a worldview, where the fulfillment of desires leads to pleasure orientation / hedonism (Kumar, 2003). This represents an outside-in approach to happiness. Though well-being and happiness are not synonymous, they are interconnected (Tandon, 2016). Indulging in activities that provide occasions for social interaction and relationships is connected with happiness and SWB (Yolal *et al.*, 2016). In India, festivals are sources of such social interactions that generate positive socio-cultural, hedonic, and functional benefits, which are believed to increase happiness and, subsequently, SWB.

This study was undertaken to clarify how participation in religious festivals positively impacts visitors' experiences, satisfaction, and SWB. Past research in tourism has focused on loyalty as an outcome of visitors' experiences. This study adopts SWB as an outcome variable to measure visitors' ME in a unique religious temple festival context. Consistent with previous studies (Ballantyne, Ballantyne & Packer, 2014; Birdie, 2015; Payini *et al.*, 2021), our findings provide empirical evidence of a significant positive influence of festival experience on individuals' SWB. This positive association could be due to India's collectivist culture: Individuals from collectivist cultures seek happiness and well-being in more socially engaging ways (Ford *et al.*, 2015) than do individuals from individualistic cultures (Suh & Choi, 2018); therefore, it is likely that religious events such as

*Paryaya* that provide opportunities for social interactions among visitors will impact on a visitor's SWB.

The study findings also provide empirical evidence of a significant positive relationship between memorable festival experience and festival satisfaction. These findings align with those of studies conducted by Woo, Kim and Uysal (2015) and Sharma and Nayak (2019), and provide additional support for the causal link between visitor satisfaction (a psychological state) and ME from religious events. Furthermore, the results reveal that visitor satisfaction has a significant positive impact on SWB, which aligns with previous results (Chen, Huang & Petrick, 2016; Sirgy, 2010; Yoon, Lee & Lee, 2010b). Finally, the findings provide empirical evidence for the mediating effect of festival satisfaction on ME and SWB, similar to findings by Chen, Huang and Petrick (2016). In religious destinations, festivals are celebrated as means of worship and to fulfill the needs of certain groups of stakeholders. Though religious, they bring benefits to stakeholders in various ways. Our results may provide organisers with an enhanced understanding of visitors' experiences of the impact of the *Paryaya* festival, which will enable both organisers and community representatives to garner increased support for similar festivals.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research adds to the body of knowledge on religious tourism by providing some new viewpoints on the benefits of organising large-scale festivals for the well-being of people and the local community in general. Many studies have investigated and analysed the economic impacts of religious festivals on the community. However, very few studies have dealt with the non-economic benefits of religious festival events, such as ME, satisfaction, and SWB. Thus, this study advances the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence for the positive relationship between ME, satisfaction, and SWB.

The results show that participating in religious festival events can enhance attendees' SWB. Though the relationship between these constructs can be assumed, this study is one of the first to provide empirical evidence thereof. It also confirms that non-economic life domains, such as religious events, are essential elements for



individuals' SWB. Additionally, this study advances our knowledge of experiential economy theory by integrating festival visitors' ME into the ME–satisfaction–SWB framework. Such understanding is essential for festival organisers because visitors' experiences predict satisfaction and SWB.

### Practical Implications

The findings imply that the *Paryaya* committee of *Krishna Matha* should focus on festival attributes that uphold the local culture, traditions, and religious faith of the community. These aspects are important to create MEs that satisfy festival visitors and subsequently augment the well-being of the community. *Paryaya* has a legacy that has percolated down through generations by retaining the essence of divinity while creating a space for pleasant visitor experiences in general. Various dimensions such as spirituality, social unity, and serving others are also found to be important for festival visitors (Buzinde, *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, to provide unique experiences, organisers must focus on the spiritual and hedonic dimensions of experience, based on a destination's history, culture, and ways of life. Additionally, the creation of a material base is essential to strategically plan and design large festivals. Festival organisers may bring together more religious and entertainment activities related to the event's theme during festivals. Such activities will appeal to varied groups of visitors belonging to different religions as well.

Further, the research model proposed here established a direct and mediating effect of satisfaction on ME and SWB. Individuals' SWB is vital for creating and maintaining a healthy and productive society. This indicates that religious events such as *Paryaya* offer benefits beyond the purely economic. They are tools to reduce social costs and enhance social benefits. Therefore, continued support from the state and local government is essential to support such religious events. Organizers of *Krishna Matha* should focus on continuing profile-raising outreach to potential visitors so that they will attend and experience the place and spread happiness among the community.

### Limitations

Though the study contributed several interesting findings, it is subject to some limitations. First, the findings may not be generalisable because the results are specific to

one culture and a single festival. Therefore, future studies should consider replicating this model across diverse religious festival events across India. Second, as the data were collected from a single source, common method bias is possible. Likewise, the usage of the cross-sectional design may have limited the proof of causality. Hence, future research should consider combining data from several sources or conduct a longitudinal study. Third, past research has shown that an individual's evaluation of SWB frequently changes (Diener, Horwitz & Emmons, 1985). Therefore, the subjective element associated with the SWB measurement scale may hinder in-depth understanding. Fourth, future studies may incorporate all dimensions of ME and include diverse constructs such as tangible benefits, place attachment, loyalty, and so on, to determine the direct and indirect effects on individuals' well-being. Finally, future research should examine the moderating role of demographic variables (e.g., education, income level, visitation pattern, etc.), which were not investigated in this particular study.

### Conclusion

The living philosophy of *Krishna Matha* holds an essential place in India's religio-cultural realm as a spiritual and cultural center that attracts thousands of devotees and visitors. Past research has acknowledged that religious events in India (e.g., *Kumbha Mela*, *Thrissur Pooram Festival*) draw the largest gatherings of tourists (Kantar IMRB, 2015). This study examined attendees at the 2020 *Paryaya* festival, a well-known Hindu religious festival that takes place in *Krishna Matha*, Udupi, Karnataka. The findings are important to understand the multifaceted nature of festival attributes that may influence visitors' ME, satisfaction levels, and SWB. Though temporary and contextual, the encompassed experiences of divinity, social bonding, and other experiential factors influence religious festival visitors' satisfaction. Religious destinations provide myriad opportunities for visitors to engage in various activities—both religious and cultural (Buzinde *et al.*, 2014; Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021). Therefore, exploration of the multidimensional aspects of the festival experience is important because such festivals can enhance the communal well-being of the region. This research supports this belief by testing the relationships between three important concepts (ME, satisfaction, and SWB) in the relatively unexplored domain of religious festivals.

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