

TESTING THE TWO-STEP MODEL OF MARKETING KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

Krishna Consciousness is a new religious movement, which has gained higher and higher importance in the past decades in Europe. During multiple researches between 2013 and 2020 (Bence, 2014; Bence-Kiss, 2020) a two-step model was identified, in which Krishna-conscious communities of Europe attract people outside the religion as tourists to rural communities in the different countries, where they gain more knowledge about the religion in informal, non-pressing ways. The Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change (TTM) (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) may be applied to analyze the behavior through which people transform from tourists to actual members of the religious community via a set of behavior changes. The objective of this study was to test the applicability of this concept previously found (Bence-Kiss, 2020) on two countries, which have not been part of the initial research: France and Italy. Online content analysis, observations and in-depth interviews were applied to identify the general structure of the religious community in each country; and the results were compared to the previous findings, confirming that the two-step model and TTM may also be applied to analyze the involvement in Krishna Consciousness in these countries as well.

Keywords: religious marketing, marketing religion, marketing mix, tourism marketing

JEL codes: M31, N34, L83

INTRODUCTION

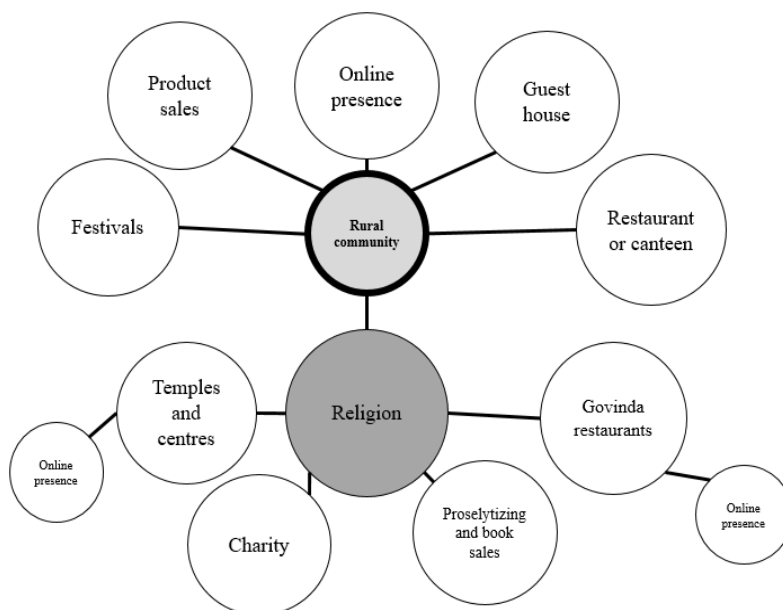
Being a relatively new field of study, the literature of religious marketing is still somewhat limited; especially in terms of the different religions studied. The subject of this study, Krishna Consciousness has also received moderate attention concerning the marketing activities, even though among the public the religion is known for its promotional activities, initiated by people stopping pedestrians on the streets, and introducing the religion to them. Nowadays, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness is a large international religious organization owning numerous temples, centers, farms and educational institutions and its sub-organizations all over the world are organizing a great variety of religious festivals all through the year. Being able to raise the interest of thousands of people in countries both geographically and culturally far from India is a great achievement worth studying, as it may teach us a lot about marketing religions efficiently in the 21st

century (Bence, 2014; Bence-Kiss, 2020; Goswami, 2001; Harvey, 2000; Isvara, 2002; Kamarás, 1998; Klostermaier, 2000; Rochford, 2007; Wuaku, 2012).

Previous researches

Previous studies between 2014 and 2020 covered the countries of Europe, identifying those with the highest level of activity concerning marketing. More enhanced and diverse marketing activities targeting people not involved in Krishna Consciousness could be observed in the countries where farming or rural communities are present, while temples, restaurants and educational institutions focused mainly on the audiences already involved in religious life. *Figure 1* represents the molecular model of the seven communities of six countries examined – Hungary, Belgium, Germany (two communities), the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Italy – aggregating the most common institutions and marketing practices related to them. The molecular model was created after the analysis of each country with a farming community, creating each model separately and aggregating their contents; therefore, it contains those elements and institutions, which may be found in more than one country (Bence-Kiss, 2020; Shostack, 1977; Srinivasan, 2012).

Figure 1: Molecular model of marketing Krishna Consciousness in countries with farming communities



Source: Bence-Kiss, 2020

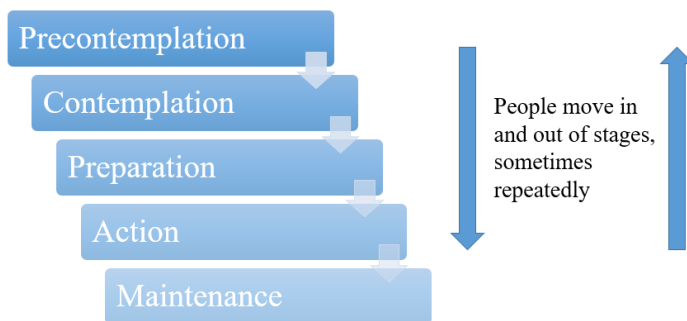
As seen in *Figure 1*, the activities and facilities grouped around the rural communities are not purely religiously bound; additional elements, such as guest houses, restaurants and product sales appear, which seemingly do not fit into a sacred place, but are characteristic of a religious tourist destination described by Terzidou *et al.*

(2017): religious locations (visited both by religiously and non-religiously motivated tourists), where additional facilities have appeared to fulfil the needs of the visitors, regardless of their motives (Lengyel, 2004; Irimiás-Michalkó, 2013; Terzidou et al., 2017).

This implies that these farming communities are more than just another institution of the religious life; the analysis has proven the presence of tourist destinations with religious characteristics. As it was visible in Figure 1, devotees managed to partially overcome the boundaries of religious economics and received larger freedom in the marketing mix by shifting the focus on tourism, which suggests the possibility to analyze rural communities separately, by using the 7P of services marketing, as in the case of other tourist destinations (Aminbeidokhti et al, 2010; Bence, 2014; Kolos & Kenesei, 2007; Mendoza Vargas & Culquita Salazar, 2019; Piskóti, 2007; Sheikhi & Pazoki, 2019).

The previous researches (Bence-Kiss, 2020) have also shown that the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM) may be applied to analyze the behavior of people during the process of getting acquainted and engaged with a religion. The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM) is a model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) to conceptualize the intentional changes in human behavior. The model aimed to interpret what processes people fighting addictions or seeking for a healthier life are going through. It was tested and validated on twelve different health behaviors and showed consistency in the stages and processes of change. The model identified five stages of behavior change: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance, as Figure 2 shows (Newcomb, 2017; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Szabó, 2016; Szakály, 2006; University of Maryland, 2020; Velicer et al., 1998).

Figure 2: The stages of change in the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change



Source: Based on Newcomb, 2017

Promotion tools of a religious community may also be aligned to the TTM distinguishing the promotion tools, which may be applied the most efficiently in each phase and there is a significant relationship between the exposure to the different promotion tools and the stage of behavior change the respondents are in. Communities devoted to Krishna Consciousness apply the rural communities – and the wide range of their promotion opportunities due to the tourism product created – to attract those

in the Contemplation phase and educate them about Krishna Consciousness in an informal, invisible manner. Through this educational process people may step forward, towards the Preparation phase, where they already start to get involved in the religion by changing certain behavior patterns. It is also important, however, not to stop in this phase, since those in the Preparation – or even in the later, Action and Maintenance phases – may easily fall back after a while without support to keep on with the changes they have made. This implies that promotion tools need to follow all the stages of behavior change, always focusing on the needs of the current phase of the individuals (Bence-Kiss, 2020; Newcomb, 2017; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Szabó, 2016; Szakály, 2006; University of Maryland, 2020; Velicer et al., 1998).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the current research was to test the applicability of the TTM by analyzing the structure of the religion in the different countries and finding similarities and differences to the patterns observed previously. Qualitative research methods similar to those of the previous research (Bence-Kiss, 2020) were used to analyze the communities of New Mayapura (FRA), Prabhupada Desh and Villa Vrndavana (ITA) With the help of online content analysis the online presence of each country within the sample was analyzed (including the data published in the ISKCON database and the websites and social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) of each community), with special respect to the direction of the communication (internal, towards the members of the Krishna-conscious community or external, towards those not involved in the religion). With the help of the content analysis the molecular models of each country were created based on the work of Shostack (1977) and Srinivasan (2012) applying the modifications to the model, like in the previous research (Bence-Kiss, 2020): the molecular model does not represent the tangible and intangible elements of a service, but the physical appearances and communication methods in which the religious community is present. The modified model therefore includes all the institutions and communication tools, which contribute to spreading the religion.

In the next phase of the qualitative research observations and in-depth interviews were carried out. During the structured observations – based on a predetermined script following the elements the 7P of services marketing – the molecular models were validated and updated with the elements unseen in the online content analysis.

The in-depth interviews were carried out partially in person, but – due to the circumstances caused by the pandemic – partially online. The script was the same in both cases; the online interviews took place via Zoom calls while the personal ones in the rural communities. In these communities three interviews were arranged – one online and two in person – in the summer of 2021, all with devotees working in the fields of communication, guest management, tourism or in the general management.

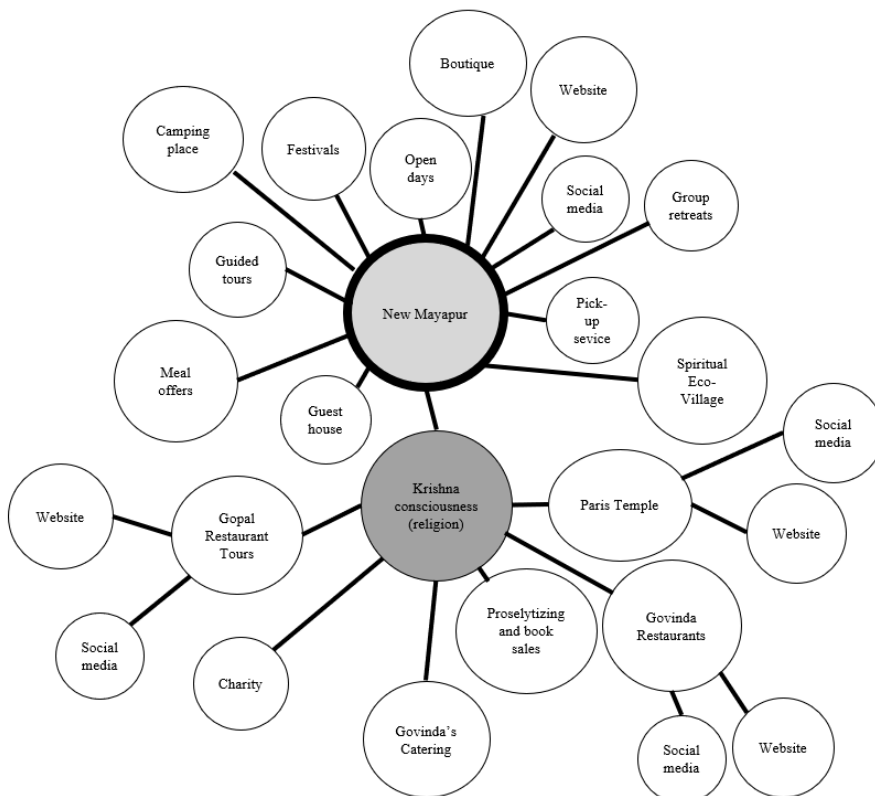
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyses carried out in France and Italy have immediately shown that there are going to be similarities to the countries examined before: in both countries there is

one rural community operating, which is also promoted as a place for visit, not just for devotees but for the wider public (*Figure 3* and *Figure 4*). The remaining institutions (temples and local centers, restaurants and educational institutions) operating in both countries generally focus on the communication with those already involved in the religious life in a way (via nutrition or yoga practices), their online presence generally focus on information about these areas. The other activities bound to religion show the same pattern as in other European countries, as well: charity activities are carried out to help the local community while devotees also proselytize and sell books to spread the word about Krishna in larger towns regularly.

In *Figure 3* we can see that in France there is a company called Govinda's Catering, which is not strongly bound to the rural community but this is also mainly operated by the devotees of New Mayapura. According to the content analysis, as *Figure 3* shows, all the activities, which are dedicated to provide information about Krishna Consciousness to non-devotees are related to New Mayapura.

Figure 3: The molecular model of France



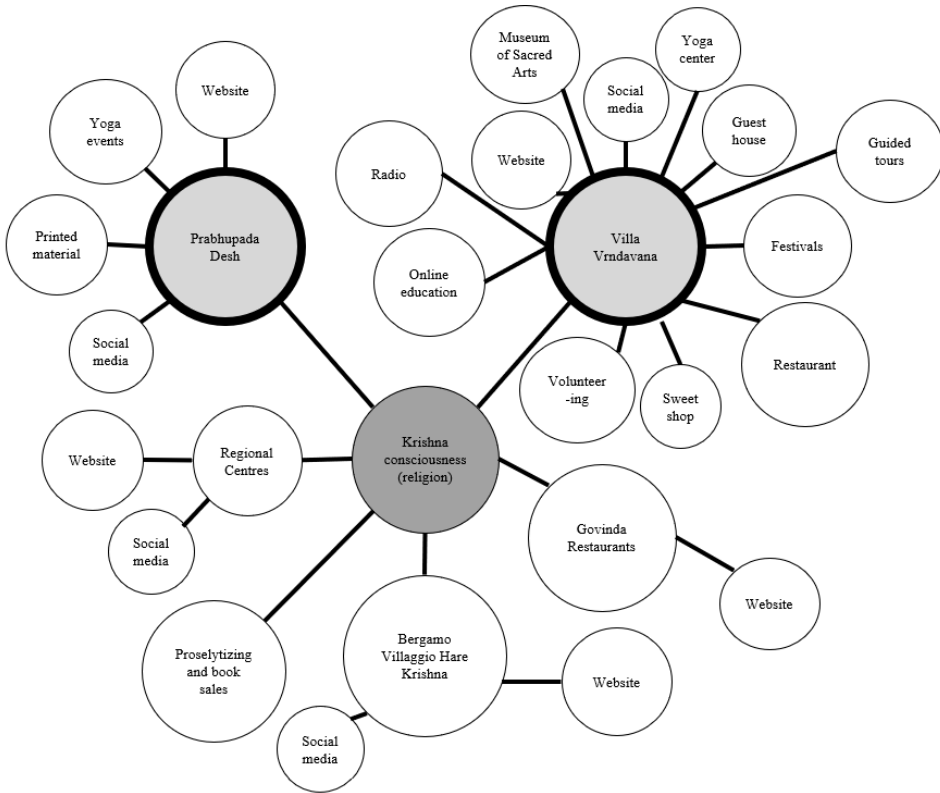
The observations and the in-depth interview have, however, also revealed that these activities are currently not so enhanced as they were a couple of decades ago. Formerly, in the 1970s and '80s New Mayapura was the European headquarters of

Krishna Consciousness, organizing huge festivals, operating a school and being home to approximately 200 devotees; but the loss of a visionary leader, financial issues and the inability to be self-sufficient brought decadence to the life of the once flourishing community in the '90s. Yet nowadays vision and progress have been brought back by dedicated devotees, who operate a guest house, created the Spiritual Eco-Village and guide and provide meals for the visitors. According to the in-depth interviews currently there is no active advertising of the community besides the website and social media, since they would not be able to fulfil the needs of the visitors arriving. The plans of the community include improving the guest house, building a yoga hall and a restaurant, which is going to enable them to organize more festivals than the one currently being held.

The facilities in progress such as the yoga hall and the restaurant all serve the purpose of fulfilling the needs of wider public beyond the devotees; and the enhanced focus on festivals (formerly attracting 5-10000 visitors each) shows the intention to attract people in Contemplation phase to get more acquainted with the religion. The current members of New Mayapura see the opportunity for progress in creating a self-sustainable community – nowadays three quarters of the inhabitants needs in food are fulfilled from their own grounds –, which is an important tool not only to attract people in the Contemplation stage but also support those who move up to the Preparation, Action and Maintenance stages. The example of New Mayapura has clearly shown that even a prosperous rural community may fall back and lose its role if the necessary actions are not taken not only to attract and involve but also to retain the individuals whose attention and interest have already been raised. According to not only the French interviewees but also to numerous devotees in different communities of Europe (Bence-Kiss, 2020), self-sufficiency – achieved like in Krishna Völgy in Hungary – is one of the key factors in retaining devotees efficiently since this provides stability and support to those in further phases of behavior change, such as Preparation, where nutrition is a key factor.

The Italian Villa Vrndavana community has already stepped on a similar path by trying to achieve the level of self-sufficiency their own lands allow while also selling some products externally such as olive oil, vegetables or wood to local business partners, which provides them with a certain level of income, as well. Villa Vrndavana follows a strategy focusing on individuals both in the stage of Contemplation, and on those further on at the level of Preparation, Action and Maintenance. For those in the Contemplation phase – as *Figure 4* shows – Villa Vrndavana offers a rich tourist experience including festivals, guided tours, catering, possibilities to stay overnight, yoga events and sweets on sale. Festivals, once again, have been named as the most important attraction to involve those not in connection with the religion yet. At the same time, volunteering opportunities and online education are also available for those who are beyond Contemplation phase and would like to get more deeply involved in Krishna Consciousness. The community organizes a large number of cooking sessions, feasts and puts a huge emphasis on catering since they have rightly realized that this is a very important aspect of involvement into the religion, and one of the most important drivers in the Preparation phase.

Figure 4: The molecular model of Italy



Prabhupada Desh, the other community of Italy stands out of the line of the communities examined so far, differs both from those examined in the previous research (*Bence-Kiss, 2020*) and the subjects of the current analysis. Except for yoga events the community does not plan to open up more for the public; they intend to keep their community as a place for retreat focusing on the devotees and not on those outside the religion. This community operates a website and social media pages as well, but the focus is mainly on the religion and not on the visitors or attracting new participants: they focus on those already in Action on Maintenance phase rather than those less involved. This shows that it is not totally uniform how Krishna-conscious communities utilize rural communities throughout the different stages of the TTM but also underlines the importance of such communities in the life of Krishna Consciousness in Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important result of this qualitative research is the validation of the research results of the previous research (*Bence-Kiss, 2020*) carried out in seven communities of six countries. This research, covering three communities of two countries has

resulted in the creation of the molecular models of the Krishna-conscious communities of France and Italy, which match the previously drawn, aggregated molecular model, showing the same pattern as in other, previously examined countries. This means that it is true for France and Italy, as well, that rural communities of Krishna Consciousness - known as tourist destinations - are applied as the most important tools of promoting the religion. During the two-step method – just like in the countries examined previously – the first step means the attraction of people in the Precontemplation, and especially in the Contemplation phase of TTM to visit the tourist destination, decreasing the perceived cost, which would have been incurred by promoting to join the community. This result supports the applicability of TTM in France and Italy, just like in the countries examined previously to create the marketing communication strategy of Krishna Consciousness and improve it further to attract more people.

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