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Religious tourism and spiritual leadership development: Christian leadership conferences

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ABSTRACT

Christian leadership conferences are an increasingly relevant form of special events for leaders within ministry roles. Despite considerable anecdotal research, it is largely unknown what intrinsically motivates these leaders to attend a Christian leadership conference and if this motivation/s is homogenous. Through employing spiritual leadership and core competencies to identify intrinsic motivations to attend a Christian leadership conference, five segments are conceptualised. Whilst two motivations that mirror the key event theme and manifest the internal reward for most respondents, the segments differ significantly on key criterion, most notably their usual place of residence. Tourism and event academics and practitioners should carefully use the research findings when seeking to develop theory or attract attendees to Christian leadership conferences.

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1. Introduction

Religious tourism is defined as all kinds of travel that is motivated by religion (Rinschede, 1992) that is voluntary, unpaid and for a limited time (Blackwell, 2007). Popular options include pilgrimage to sites of historical and religious significance (Hudman & Jackson, 2002; Raj & Morpeth, 2007). In addition to its historical and spiritual significance, religious tourism's relevance as a form of economic injection to local economies cannot be underestimated. UNWTO (2014) estimated that between 300 and 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites each year. Further, approximately 2.7% of Saudi Arabia's Gross Domestic Product is tourism related, with the largest tourism cohort being religious tourists (Jeddah Chamber, 2016).

Despite considerable insight into religious tourism (e.g. Cohen, 2006; Stausberg, 2011), research has largely focused on conceptualising tourists' self-gratifying motivations for attending religious events such as Christian music festivals (e.g. Pastoor et al., in-press; Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2013). This research seeks to contribute to the tourism and events literature by conceptualising an intrinsically motivated religious tourist. Despite considerable research focusing on external benefits of attending conferences (e.g. Mair & Thompson, 2009; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007), these extrinsic "touristic" motivations are not the mission purpose of Christian Leadership Conferences. Consequently, rather them employing existing conference motivational literature (Mair, 2010; Tanford, Montgomery, & Nelson, 2012) to profile religious tourists, this research employs Fry (2003) spiritual leadership framework to identify how religious tourists to a Christian leadership conference are potentially motivated, valued and committed to perform productively within their organisation (e.g. church). It also aims to confirm whether Malphurs and Mancini (2004) four core competencies of character, knowledge, skills and emotions for church leadership development are exhibited within a special religious event context. Therefore, through applying Fry (2003) theory of spiritual leadership, in addition to Malphurs and Mancini (2004) core competencies for church leadership development, this research will conceptualise a tourist that is motivated to attend a religious event (Christian leadership conference) for self-development and altruistic purposes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Religious tourism

Travelling to a site of spiritual significance such as a cathedral or

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Fig. 1. Fry's (2003, p. 695) Causal model of spiritual leadership.

church (Cohen, 2006; Eade, 1992) or at a non-religious site such as a purpose built attraction, special event site or public place (Shackley, 2003) can be of prime importance for tourists with high religiosity and/or wishing to provide meaning in their lives (Rinschede, 1992; Stausberg, 2011). A religious motive can, however, be complex with multiple meanings that has different intensity levels based on the individual and their level of faith and the social context such as who they are travelling with (Blackwell, 2007). Whilst tourists may exhibit high religiosity and be motivated to travel for a spiritual experience to fulfil their cognitive beliefs and awaken their emotions (e.g. Barnett & Bass, 1996), non-religious tourists may also choose to participate in a religious tourism experience for reasons such as historical understanding, emotional interest, adventure or excitement (Gutic, Caie, & Clegg, 2010).

2.2. Spiritual development

A primary concern for religious organisations (e.g. churches) is leadership development (Chand, 2015; Forman, Jones, & Miller, 2007). Individuals within religious leadership positions will often need to perform their roles with little or no financial reward and/or external gratification and at a huge opportunity cost of less time spent with a partner, friends or family. They also need the maturity to share a common vision that they may not wholeheartedly support. These individuals must also tolerate interacting with others that they may not like to fulfil a leadership goal (Watt, 2014). These issues have caused what is termed "leadership pain" (Chand, 2015) that has driven potential or current leaders away from positions of leadership (e.g. ministry) due to burnout, disappointment or lack of interest.

An organisational strategy proposed by Fry (2003) to limit these leadership issues across various organisational contexts is spiritual leadership theory. Although the model has been criticised for being potentially outdated and having a shallow conceptualisation of spirituality (e.g. Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Benefiel, 2005),[1] spiritual leadership theory is seen as a major leadership theory that facilitates both a leader and a follower's character, competence and performance (Strum, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). Both spirituality and leadership are essential for organisational success (Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005; Strack, Fottler, Wheatley, & Sodomka, 2002) and utilising spiritual leadership theory can potentially lead to a successful yet transforming and learning organisation (Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014; Strum et al., 2017).

As outlined in Fig. 1, spiritual leadership theory is a theoretical framework where the actions, values, attitudes and behaviours of leaders represent core organisational values (Strum et al., 2017). Utilising spiritual leadership theory requires an organisation to create a vision where both leaders and followers (members) experience a calling to make their life meaningful and a benefit to others, which simultaneously establishing a culture based on altruistic love whereby every member is understood and appreciated (Fry, 2003; Fry, Latham, Clinebell, & Krahnke, 2017). In other words, leaders will model spiritual values through their attitudes and behaviour (Fry et al., 2017). Followers will trust their leaders, as it is perceived by followers that leaders will have all members' best interest at heart. These followers are, therefore, motivated to expend effort which gives intrinsic meaning and purpose to life (Afsar, Badir, & Kiani, 2016; Chen & Yang, 2012). Spiritual leadership will ultimately make both a leader and a follower more organisationally committed and productive (Chen & Yang, 2012; Strum et al., 2017).

Empirical research on spiritual leadership has been sparse, with an emphasis on validating Fry (2003) theoretical framework (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Fry (2005) extended spiritual leadership theory by investigating the concept of positive human health and well-being through character ethics, positive psychology and workplace spirituality. Fry et al. (2005) also tested the spiritual leadership theory within the military. Results indicated that spiritual leadership theory produced commitment and unit productivity amongst United States' soldiers. Based on the scale items of Fry et al. (2005) study within the financial and retail industries in Taiwan, Chen and Yang (2012) identified that spiritual leadership positively affected employees' perceptions of meaning/calling and membership, which, in turn, affected their altruism and conscientiousness. Similarly, Chen, Yang and Li (2012) examined 20 companies in Taiwan and 12 in China across the manufacturing, financial/banking and retailing sectors. The authors confirmed that spiritual leadership produced a positive impact on self-career management behaviour and unit productivity.

Bodla and Ali (2012) studied the impact of spiritual leadership on banking executive and their employees in Pakistan. It was concluded that vision and altruistic love positively influenced calling and membership, which resulted in job satisfaction, productivity and organisational commitment. Within a Korean context, Jeon, Passmore, Lee, and Hunsaker (2013) found inner life positively influenced hope/faith, vision and altruistic love of employees of a private corporation. Finally, Egel and Fry (2017) integrated spiritual leadership theory with an Islamic leadership model in cross-cultural organisational fields within Saudi Arabia. This integration can be utilised to advance leadership practices in religious organisations.

2.3. Christian leadership conferences

Based on anecdotal research, it can be concluded that internal leadership development has been ineffective for religious organisations such as churches (Hussey & Tkaczynski, 2014; National Church Life Survey, 2012). One strategy that has gained

[1] defined as the "quest for experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy" (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 3).

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