

Exploring Extraordinary Experiences - Temple Festivals in India

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Abstract

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The study of extraordinary experiences has been a rich area of research in marketing. However, these studies have been largely restricted to the consumption sphere in the United States and other developed markets (Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk & Costa, 1998, Kozinets, 2002). Even as this stream of research has provided seminal insights about consumer behaviour in the consumption of extraordinary experiences, they have also left open the opportunity to explore this phenomenon using other marketing perspectives. In this special session, we aim to explore and study the context of temple festivals in Kerala, India, to understand how extraordinary experiences evolve, are branded, are consumed, and serve as a site for itinerant retailing.

We have chosen to study temple festivals as religion and temples play an important role in the lives of the average Indian. A large number of temples celebrate an annual festival, typically on the day the main deity was originally installed, with great fanfare and activities. By adopting a naturalistic design, and prolonged engagement, we are interested in studying the development and branding of such festivals, consumption by attendees and devotees, and the role played by itinerant retailers in constituting the overall experience. The major contribution of this research is a deeper understanding of how temple festivals influence the overall consumption experience, based on its history, branding, and the festival itself with all associated offerings, including itinerant retailers.

Paper 1 titled, "Evolution of a temple festival: An anthropological study," by Jossin Shaji, at the Indian Institute of Management, Udaipur, traces the development of the temple and the festival from its beginnings and examines the festival from an anthropological point of view. Paper 2 titled, "Branding of a Temple Festival," by

Sridhar Samu at the Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai, focuses on the branding of the festival using standard branding concepts, including both development of brand awareness and specifically brand image. Paper 3, titled, "Itinerant Retailers: Enjoying the Sale," by Prakash Satyavageeswaran, at the Indian Institute of Management, Udaipur, studies how retailers add specific value to the consumption of the traditional activities by bringing items that are usually not available, but have become a part of the temple festivities. And paper 4 titled, "Consumption of festival experience," by Rajesh Nanarpuzha at the Indian Institute of Management, Udaipur, ties all aspects of the consumption experience by focusing on the consumers who attend the festival and consume all activities with their friends and family.