Exploring the intersection of religious festivals and tourism approaches: a scoping review

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Abstract: Religious festivals have become significant in the context of global tourism interactions. Recognising their potential, governments are increasingly promoting religious festivals as key tourist events within annual calendars. This study critically reviews relevant literature to analyse the major trends and subjects from the past decade, emphasising their implications for the field of anthropology. To conduct our review, we retrieved peer-reviewed articles from the Scopus Index database. Subsequent classification and critical reading of articles specifically related to religious festivals and tourism was undertaken. Through this process, 44 articles were identified as foundational for our literature analysis, which were then thematically categorised. The findings are further discussed in relation to the cultural dynamics of human travel behaviours and the anthropology of tourism. The significant contribution of this study lies in the identification of a future research agenda.

Keywords: religious festivals; tourism; cultural; pilgrimage; motivations; developments.

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1   Introduction

In this scoping review, we aim to understand the current body of scholarly knowledge at the intersection of religious festivals and tourism. We undertake this study from the perspective that religions act as symbolic reservoirs of meaning which support the construction of social reality, thus fulfilling a basic and central aspect of human life (Luckmann, 2022), while tourism in all forms, be it religious or leisure, can be seen as a ritual expression of values, which may fulfil multiple modes of experience, ranging from the pursuit of pleasure to the quest for meaning (Cohen, 1979). Similarly, we contend that festivals are timeless elements of human existence, reflecting the celebration of cultural and religious traditions which have developed over millennia. Even in the earliest records of our species, evidence suggests that such events were celebrated, and often related to political activities such as the election of a chief or king, or demarcating time, such as the marking the beginnings and endings of seasonal activities such as the annual planting and harvesting of crops (Cudny, 2016). Further to this, such festivals incorporated mobility; archaeological research has shown that as far back as 30,000 years ago, aboriginal Australians were engaged in travel for the purpose of religious festivals, ritual, and ceremony. With this in mind festivals are therefore significant for our species, and give humans chances to develop, express and engage with their individual and collective identity (Blackwell, 2007). We argue that religious festival tourism may be seen as a fundamental aspect of a broader vision of tourism, which Smith (1989) defines as an aspect part of human exploratory behaviour and the expression of culture. These are core

activities which give life meaning and purpose and are distinct from Smith's (1989) second definition of tourism as a manifestation of leisure, which is a specific, recreated, socially and economically culturally-mediated institution.

In contextualising our study and call for further research on the subject of religious festival tourism, it is important to note there has recently been a resurgence of interest in the study of religion across all disciplines (Salamone, 2004). This resurgence, coupled with the fact that festivals are a rich resource for tourism leads us to posit that it is an opportune time to explore the depths of knowledge in this field. Consequently, this scoping review aims to contribute to the need for deeper understanding of how religious festival tourism is enacted and its implications globally (Rashid, 2018).

One of the central issues that complicates undertaking such a review in the view of anthropology is establishing a set of definitive criteria on what defines 'religious festivals'. There are many areas of debate over the difficulty of defining religion (Spiro, 2020) which lie beyond the scope of our paper. Further complicating matters is how religion can be viewed as a touristic activity. In one of the largest literature reviews on the subject to date, Rashid (2018) found that 'religious tourism' was often used interchangeably with concepts such as 'heritage tourism', and identified tourism publications that equally describe non-religious museums and amusement parks as having a religious shade of meaning, while Cànoves et al. (2012) asserted that both religious and cultural tourism are two parts of a combined trend which emanates from the commercialisation of culture, drawing on fieldwork of religious tourism in Spain to illustrate this point. In addition, sacred sites are now becoming areas for multiple different activities to take place, including religious, leisure, and nature-oriented activities, while temples, shrines, churches, and other traditionally religious sites are now becoming secularised and touristic in orientation (MacCannell, 1999). This suggests an overall cultural change in religious sites' purpose in activities of performance and celebration, along with a potential shift in their sacredness, and the normative rules of practice that govern their use.

Furthermore, subjects of study in tourism that are typically thought of as being religious in nature, such as rituals, festivals, and pilgrimages, may not be explicitly 'religious' by definition – Salamone (2004) gives the example of the annual vigil held at Elvis Presley's home as an example. This suggests that our understanding of a 'pilgrimage' can refer to a meaningful journey that relates to something bigger than oneself. Equally, Nash and Smith (1991) draw attention to the similarity between the liminal experiences of pilgrimage and the experiences of spontaneity, wholeness, and communitas found during non-religious leisure tourism experiences, while (Nash et al., 1981) identifies that pilgrimage may comprise elements of leisure activity.

To ensure clarity in this scoping review, we chose to use Spiro's (2013, p.96) definition of religion, which consists of an "institution consisting of patterns of cultural interaction with culturally believable supernatural beings." Following this definition, although we identify that traditionally seemingly 'non-religious' events may provoke religious feelings, we rely on the 'culturally believable supernatural beings' aspect of the definition in the broadest possible sense, to distinguish between religious and non-religious festivals. Thus, while a non-explicitly religious music festival may incorporate a pattern of cultural interaction, the absence of a culturally believable supernatural being as part of this interaction would not lead us to define it as a religious festival.

Pilgrimage and festival are similarly difficult to delineate. To illustrate, in much of the academic literature religious festivals are often intertwined with pilgrimage and treated as a single category, or two aspects of a singular event. This can lead to confusion in the categories of 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' (Raj and Morpeth, 2007), with the reality being that those engaging in religious pilgrimage, festivals, or events may instead fall somewhere on a continuum between the two. Furthermore, although we consider that pilgrimages and religious tourism can both be sacred journeys (Blackwell, 2007), we distinguish pilgrimage as conceptually distinct based on the definition given by Barber (1991, p.1) as "a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding", and take this further by including Palmer et al.'s (2012) work, which contends that while secular pilgrimages [for example those described by Gamboa (2021) and Mamoulaki (2016)] exist, the fact that 'secular' is required as a modifier leads to the conclusion that pilgrimages are by definition typically religious, and to qualify as a pilgrimage, there must be an element of religious sacrifice.

In contrast to the above conceptualisation of pilgrimage, religious festivals occupy a more liminal space, able to function as a time-circumscribed, independent event or equally as a component part of a pilgrimage. Following this, while a journey may be involved in attending a religious festival, it is not the journey itself that necessarily forms a core of the experience of attendance, nor does attending a religious festival require an element of religious sacrifice. Although there is no agreed consensus definition of a festival (Cudny, 2016), we follow Cudny's (2014, p.642) classification that a festival is an "organised, socio-spatial phenomenon that is taking place at a designated time – outside the everyday routine – increasing the overall volume of social capital and celebrating selected elements of tangible and intangible culture." This then contrasts to the definition of a pilgrimage by virtue of its not requiring a journey to a holy site. By adopting clear designations for each of these terms, we are better placed to map the terrain of the field and interpret the current bodies of academic knowledge regarding how this core human activity is understood.

Having set the scene for the study of religious festivals and clearly defined the parameters, the next section of this article summarises the significance and dynamics of festivals in modern societies and further contextualises the study by describing the interrelatedness of tourism, religion, and festivals. Following this, our method for the scoping review is described in detail prior to the presentation of results and a discussion of the findings.

2   Significance and growth of festivals in human societies

Festivals fulfil a multitude of human needs and social functions, offering the chance to engage in group celebration, to highlight identity, and to give visibility to hidden diasporas or other social groups. Festivals have wide ranging impacts on the development, change, and shift of cultures, as well as implications for industry, service provision, and social, ethnic, and religious harmony. In an interdependent world in which economic activities are globally linked (Nash et al., 1981), festival tourism may have an economic effect of redistributing resources from tourists to local communities (Smith, 1989). Likewise, the presence of tourists at festivals may lead to secondary effects on communities. For example, cultural features of specific communities (such as religious

festivals) are susceptible to becoming reframed as 'local colour' through the tourist gaze (MacCannell, 1999), and for host communities to meet tourists' desires for authenticity, festivals may become exaggerated and overexpressed (MacCannell, 1973).

The significance of festivals for tourists and non-tourist attendees alike is growing, and this is reflected in records of empirical data. The number of new festivals (both secular and religious) has been increasing since the 1960s, while at the same time, some long-running festivals have undergone processes of renewal and revitalisation (Pickard and Robinson, 2006). In the industrialised global north, this seems to coincide with increasing social isolation and alienation, thus perhaps offering an insight into festivals' significance as a place for sharing an event and experiencing feelings of communitas and interconnectedness.

The significance of festivals to humankind is further corroborated by the quantity and diversity noted in the academic literature. Festivals under study range from rural food and wine festivals (Lee and Arcodia, 2011; Lewis, 1997), to music, media, and film festivals (Lema et al., 2018; Lashua et al., 2014; Báez and Devesa, 2014), festive aspects of national day celebrations (Getz et al., 2010; White and Frew, 2018) and religious and spiritual festivals (Raj and Griffin, 2015; Dowson, 2018; Mellor et al., 2012; Alvarado-Sizzo et al., 2017; Viji and Shrinithivihahshini, 2017). The way in which these are celebrated, even in relatively modern festivals, is diverse and captures a unique array of human behaviours. For example, in terms of national day celebrations, it is noted by White and Frew (2018) that there are a multitude of ways to celebrate the Australia Day festival, ranging from mainstream events funded by the government to self-effacing, satirical, and off beat events such as backyard cricket, lamington-making, whip-cracking displays and pie-eating competitions. The dynamics of attendance motivation and familial roles and responsibilities have also been researched in relation to festivals; Kim et al.'s (2010) analysis of family roles in Korea, is one such example, finding that in this context gender-mediated responsibilities of the nuclear family dictated the types of festivals attended.

Attempts have also been made by researchers to define festivals into generic categories, at least in the context of the UK. To this end, O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002) developed a typology of festivals with an aim of understanding their implications for local economic sustainability. The typology suggests that in the context studied, festivals can be described as belonging broadly to the themes of 'home-grown', 'tourist-temper' and 'big-bang', which although different, equally have the potential for lengthening the tourist season and stimulating local economies. The potential for generating economic value is seen in other contexts too – this is further illustrated in the example of the Holy Week Celebration in the City of Palencia, Spain (Sánchez et al., 2017) and the case of religious festivals in Palakad (Nair, 2022). Here, the spillover effects were not just the hospitality trades but also the financial returns that encouraged the locals to continue their tradition considering tourists' interests. Though locals may find tourists as intrusive in their cultural life (Suntikul and Dorji, 2016), they may also welcome the interactions and sense of pride in sharing their traditional festivals. In these two cases, there is a sense of concern and interest in sharing cultural values.

3   The intersection of tourism, belief, pilgrimage, and religious festival

Religious tourism intersects with other categories of tourist experience, leading to the complicated set of definitions described in the first section of this article. Religious tourism can most easily be identified as the individual's quest for shrines and locales where, in place of piety, the visitors seek to experience a sense of identity in relation to sites of historical and cultural meaning (Pavicic et al., 2007) or as a special tourist activity which is oriented by religious culture (Zhang et al., 2007). Although religious tourism has received research interest, Raj and Morpeth (2007) highlight that unpacking the relationship between religion and tourism is not straightforward in a modern context in which what counts as 'religion' is transforming, and secularism in some geographical regions has grown quickly, while other areas have seen a strengthening of traditional religious values. In this context, what can continue to count as a religious event or simply a secularised recreation of a religious event in the field of tourism is also unclear, and is further complicated by the fact that staging of religious ceremonies and events has historically been undertaken by local communities for tourists who are engaged in the quest for an authentic experience (MacCannell, 1973). Furthermore, while much of the scholarly work on religion and tourism in the past has related to pilgrimage, this too is shifting and becoming less transparent. Non-religious pilgrimage has emerged among certain subcultural communities in Japan (Graburn and Yamamura, 2020) while a wide-scale review from Kim et al. (2020) notes that religious tourism research has begun to move away from pilgrimage and toward a broader conception of the meaningfulness of a destination and the role of identity and self.

When describing engagement with religious tourism, including pilgrimage, attention has often been given to the role of participants' motivation. This is unsurprising when examined in the context of foundational works in the sociology and anthropology of religion; Smith (1989) contends that religious journeys and pilgrimages are driven by culturally-specific purposes and goals, giving the examples of pursuing suffering for spiritual progress in native American societies, and the seeking of enlightenment through religious pilgrimage in Indian, European, and Islamic societies. In relating this to the recent literature, Bond et al. (2015) found through an analysis of three religious pilgrimage sites that there are a variety of different experiences which attract visitors, including the most prominent as restorative experiences, which have wide ranging effects that include yet also supersede the categories of simple spiritual or cognitive benefits.

Further focusing on motivation, Blackwell (2007) identifies that attendance of religious festivals and motivation has mainly been explained in terms of content theories and process theories. Under content theories, focus is given to the motivating factors that drive people to participate. Process theories on the other hand emphasise the relationship between changeable variables, for example expectation and value, which affect the motivation of individuals, and that motivation for religious travel is multifaceted. This assertion highlights the need for further study in the field to identify patterns or trends among diverse groups participating in religious tourism. Perspectives on religious tourism and festivals also holistically examine the relationship between such events and the expansion of a globalised, commodity-oriented international society. Richards (2006) points out that traditional culture, of which religion can be a part, has in modern times undergone a 'festivalisation' process which includes an aspect of contemporary popular culture, as part of a broader economic process under which the extraction of commodities has given way to the delivery of services and 'stage' of experiences in creating value. As

such, destinations are places to visit and consume, resulting in religion becoming an aspect of the symbolic economy.

Religious festivals may also be a site for traditionally non-religious activities. In the Indian context for example, Shinde (2007) points out that religious festivals normally integrate both touristic and more specifically religious activities, while Griffin (2007) describes an Irish 'Pattern Festival' which mixes a Holy Mass with activities such as fashion shows and card games, demonstrating that religious festivals may incorporate non-traditionally 'religious' activities which are nevertheless a social norm in the context of the community. This can lead to a problem of categorisation, as noted by Wang et al. (2020), who found through an analysis of the Mazu festival in Taiwan, that there is difficulty in distinguishing between 'pilgrims' and 'tourists' because of the blurred lines between the activities that they undertake. Building on this insight, the authors developed a typology of four distinct categories of motivation: fun traveller, devout believer, cultural enthusiast, and religious pragmatist. A looser system of classification is given by Pavicic et al. (2007), who identify that visitors can be described as occupying a space on a pilgrim-tourist axis from sacred to secular, with an infinite combination of possibilities made up of differing components of motivations.

Research has similarly shown that religious festivals may also have implications for the driving of social and political change, highlighting the significant cultural impacts that these events may precipitate as a result of the shared experiences of solidarity and connection. To exemplify this, Rao and Dutta (2012) draw on the role of religious festivals in triggering departmental mutinies in the 1857 Bengal Native Army. The authors theorise that religious festivals constitute 'free spaces' which enable the development and triggering of collective identities. As a result, mutinies in this context were the result of the 'free space' of the religious festival as enabling high-cost and dangerous collective actions. Blackwell (2007) highlights that not all religious festival attendees may fit this cohort. By analysing work on the motivational factors that drive engagement in religious tourism, pilgrimage, festivals, and events unpacks the relationship between different theories of motivation and how they may apply to participation. Specifically, Blackwell points out that visitors to sacred sites and participants in religious festivals may be secular tourists, pilgrims, or a combination of the two. This demonstrates a compelling case for further delineating between the act of a pilgrimage and the participation in a religious festival. On the other hand, new forms of secular pilgrimage with quasi-neo-religious dimensions may be emerging. Graburn's (2020) work on 'contents tourism' has focused on this emergence of new forms of pilgrimage among young people in Japan, in which 'fandoms' emerge which resemble forms of sociality akin to pilgrims, cults, or religions. Driven by the development of 'visual consumption' modes of tourism, those engaging in contents tourism may seek 'power spots', which involves pilgrimage and worship at sites that do not belong to the realm of traditional Japanese religions (i.e., Shintoism) (Graburn and Yamamura, 2020).

In summarising this literature, it seems that there is an understanding that religious tourism is no longer equivalent to a pilgrimage, and that secularisation and globalisation have both impacted the blurring boundaries of religious tourism, while the vital aspects of interconnectedness, shared experience, and the possibility of motivating individual and collective social change are at the heart of religious festivities among guests and hosts, whether they are devout followers of the belief system celebrated or not. These findings

underscore the relevance and timeliness of our scoping study, providing an additional lens through which to view this evolving field of human culture and behaviour.

4   Research method

Scoping studies aim to identify the focus and volume of extant literature on a subject (Munn et al., 2018). With this in mind, our aim is to identify and map the evidence currently available regarding religious and cultural festivals and tourism approaches, which we believe to be a growing yet understudied field. To structure our scoping review, we used an established framework: the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) extension for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). PRISMA was first introduced in 2009, the initial aim was to assist systematic reviewers in transparently documenting the purpose, methodology, and findings of their reviews (see Page et al., 2021). However, due to advancements in systematic review methodology and terminology over the last decade, in this research the extension of it has been used (Mohammadi et al., 2023). This approach was used to ensure replicability, quality, and trustworthiness in our analysis. Top of form we developed our approach in data collection based on the procedure followed by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2023). This scoping review on tourism and sustainability justified the use of the Scopus database over other scholarly indexing services based on several unique criteria. Firstly, Scopus includes no grey literature, in contrast to broader services such as Google Scholar. Secondly, Scopus incorporates more tourism journals than other often-favoured databases such as Web of Science (WoS). On the other hand, Scopus does include a variety of article types and all essential information of the authors, publication, and affiliated details.

We conducted a keyword search in the Scopus database using the key terms 'religious festival tourism'. Following this, several other permutations of the key terms were used, including 'tourism policies', 'religious festivals', 'religious festival policies', and 'religion and tourism'. As a result of this initial search, 105 entries were collated and downloaded from the Scopus database. Inclusion criteria were then established. To be included in the review, it was decided that the articles must meet three key criteria. Firstly, articles needed to have a clear focus on religious festivals, and articles focusing on cultural heritage with no mention of a religious dimension were excluded. This is somewhat limiting given that cultural heritage is often inextricable from religion, yet to maintain the focus on religiosity as part of the fundamental objectives of the scoping review, it was decided that a specific mention of a religious dimension needed to be featured in either the title or abstract. To exemplify this, a paper which discussed tourism policies related to music festivals in general was excluded, but a paper that discussed tourism policies in specifically Christian music festivals was included. Secondly the papers surveyed had to have some relation to tourism, which was identified when screening abstracts. Once the inclusion criteria had been established, manual analysis was undertaken to exclude any studies out of scope. Of the 105 identified initially through keyword search, 58 were deemed not to meet the inclusion criteria and so were excluded from the review. This resulted in 47 remaining articles. Three duplicate articles were located through manual screening and subsequently removed, leaving a total of 44 articles to be included in the review.

After the 44 articles were accepted for inclusion, close reading of the full texts was undertaken and inductive thematic analysis at the semantic level was undertaken to

identify salient features, following the procedures set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). In addition to the searching for specific identifying thematic features, data was also analysed for both temporal distribution and geographical distribution of the articles' data source. The themes identified were then used to categorise the data and arrive at the findings. Five themes were formulated which captured the overarching research focus of the papers, which are then presented in the discussion section in relation to their implications for religious festival tourism research.

5 Results and discussion of the scoping review

The findings of the study were analysed initially based on temporal distribution to identify whether there were any significant trends in the uptake of recent studies focusing on tourism and religious festivals. A holistic interpretation of the data suggests that there may be an increase over time regarding publications covering religious festivals, particularly when considering a single article was published in the six years between 2002 and 2008. This contrasts sharply to the midpoint of 2023, during which six publications had already been made available in the Scopus database. As a result, it is possible that the noted increase in festivals in recent years is now attracting increased scholarly attention. From the view of cultural anthropology, this may suggest that the increase in scholarship is linked to the increased growth and revitalisation of festivals in modern global societies, suggesting that there is a significant shift towards community meaning-making events.

Figure 1 Temporal distribution of publications collected for the scoping review
(see online version for colours)
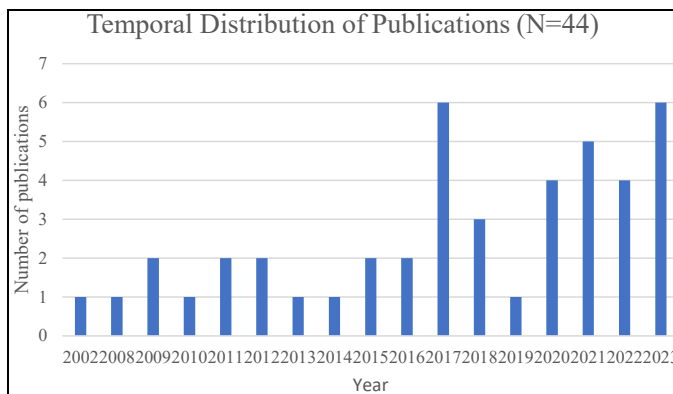
During the screening of titles, abstracts, and keywords, data was also collected regarding the region of the data sourced for the study, with the rationale of identifying areas of scholarly interest and further considering whether such results can give insight into the significance of religious festivals in specific cultures. By taking this approach, it is possible to see where most of the religious festival research has currently taken place. Overall, 12 of the 44 (27%) of studies took place in Africa, in Nigeria (4), South Africa (2), Ghana (2), Ethiopia (2), Morocco (2), while 10 took place in South Asia, in India (8) and Bhutan (2). Comparatively, less research has been undertaken regarding religious

festivals in Europe, East Asia, Oceania, South America, and Southwest Asia. This suggests that there may be opportunities to pioneer these kinds of research in such contexts, and leaves the door open for questioning why religious festivals have attracted academic scrutiny and study in some cultural landscapes more than others.

Figure 2   Regional distribution of publications (see online version for colours)
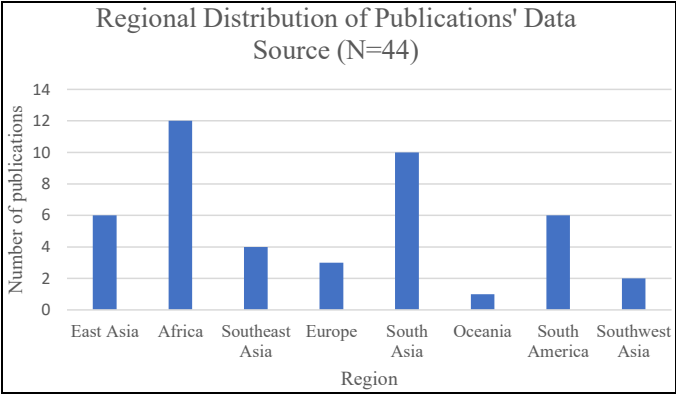
By using inductive thematic analysis at the semantic level, we identified patterns of shared meaning and content across the publications, allowing for the development of three broad, overarching themes which fit the dataset and described accurately the focus of these studies. Although a variety of studies touched on multiple aspects of the tourist experience, religious festival experience, and policy and planning approach, each article could be adequately described as belonging to one of the three themes. To an extent, the high degree of crossover between the themes exemplifies the poorly demarcated boundaries of aspects of performance, heritage, religion, culture, and festival.

Table 1   Themes identified through scoping analysis

Theme	Description
Impact of religious festivals	Under this theme, the major focus is both the positive, negative, or mixed impacts in a tangible or intangible sense on the surrounding environment.
Motivations and experience of festivalgoers	The primary focus under this theme is for the research to explain, understand, interpret, or otherwise characterise the motivations and driving forces behind those attending religious festivals.
Proposals for or demonstrations of tourism as development	Offers a case study of an existing religious festival and discusses its implications and potential for tourism development.

Although in the initial sections of this review we identified issues with the categorisation of pilgrims and secular tourists, within the context of religious festivals, there does seem to be a broad primary distinction of two types of tourists, matching the definition put forward by Tsai (2021). Those who are on a pilgrimage are defined as spiritual tourists, or religious tourists (Dawson, 2020; Piramanayagam and Seal, 2021) and while those who are curious and wish to partake in the celebrations as an experience are defined as visitors (Chevrier, 2019). In the subsequent sections, an analysis of the emerging themes

in religious festival tourism is assessed and discussed in relation to the religiosity and tourism context.

Figure 3 Prevalence of themes (see online version for colours)
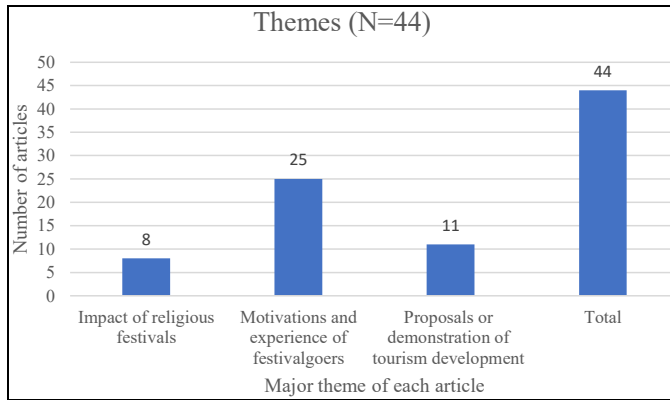
5.1 *Theme 1: impact of religious festivals*

This thematic category identifies both tangible and intangible effects of religious festivals on the surrounding environment of the festival site, the individual, and the collective, and covers positive impacts and negative impacts. After classifying the impacts by sentiment, as either broadly positive (implying beneficial impact) or negative (implying an unwanted impact), most of the articles included under this theme describe negative impacts of religious festivals and associated policies, approaches, and strategies for solving them. Only two studies identified in the literature search specifically described the positive impacts of religious festivals. Barton's (2017) ethnographic study describes the powerful role of food as markers of identity at an Afro-Catholic festival in Brazil in asserting the knowledge and community of diverse groups, while further acting as a site for the amalgamation of multiple cultures and development of glocal tourism, suggesting a broadly positive impact. Secondly, Quan-Baffour's (2023) analysis of the Ghanian Apo festival in Bono Takymi serves to emphasise the positive impacts of a religious festival on the local and surrounding economy, fulfilling a key role in the community.

On the other hand, the studies regarding the negative impacts of festivals are numerous and cut across multiple cultural contexts and geographic regions. Lu et al.'s (2002) quantitative analysis of tourist flows in the Huangshan Mountains in China identifies that peak flows coincide with religious festivals in the delicate mountain ecosystem, creating additional environmental pollution. Similarly, Abdulredha et al.'s (2018) study on municipal solid waste (MSW) during major religious festivals in Kerbala, Iraq, found that religious festivals correlated with increased MSW from one-star to four-star hotels in the city. Specifically, during the Arba'een pilgrimage and festival, MSW rose sharply and to varying degrees across diverse types of accommodation. Nyikana's (2017) analysis of an Easter festival in Limpopo, South Africa, investigates locals' opinions on the positive and negative impacts of such religious festivals, finding that respondents viewed the economic opportunities afforded by increased tourism as positive, but remained concerned about the impact on their local resources. Concerns

were not only related to cleanliness and waste, but also factors such as banking and transport. As a result, Nyikana (2017) identifies that in such religious festivals where local concerns are apparent, event planning must focus on sustainable policy development.

Negative impacts on the environment are also an area for investigation regarding religious festivals. Viji and Shrinithivihahshini's (2017) study of the Christian Annai Velankanni Church Festival in Tamil Nadu, India, focused on parameters of water quality, identifying that due to population density and a lack of regulation surrounding activities related to religious festivals, such as local water bathing, the festival season coincided with significantly increased issues in water quality, including heightened microbiological indicators. As a result, the authors suggest further governmental regulation to limit the impact of poor water quality and the spread of waterborne disease. A further environmental impact study in Tamil Nadu was undertaken by Seshadri and Ganesh (2011) examining the effect of increased traffic density due to a religious tourism festival on animal road mortalities. The authors found that a 299% increase occurred in road mortalities among animals, with an increase to 648% in one specific area (Kalakad Mudanthurai Tiger Reserve). As a result, increased tourism density during religious festivals can have a disastrous effect on local wildlife populations.

Concerns for human health are also an area that has been explored in relation to the Hajj pilgrimage. Bianchi (2017) identifies that an increasing death toll over time during the Hajj pilgrimage has been attributed to inadequate policies for promoting safe visits, which disproportionately affects lower socio-economic status pilgrims. Consequently, Bianchi (2017) suggests several policy proposals and approaches which could reduce pilgrimage related deaths, including suggestions to lengthen the pilgrimage season, although this would defy long-standing cultural and religious tradition. Such an effort would face an uphill battle to fundamentally alter the cultural goals which coincide with calendar-specific events and provide motivation for pilgrims to engage in travel (Smith, 1989).

Analysis of impacts has also focused on intangible effects, and the potential for generating religious and ethnic conflicts. Boum (2012) highlights that in Morocco, state-sponsored religious and cultural festivals in Jewish and Muslim traditions take place but with unique features and rituals not found in other such religious praxis elsewhere, leading to conflict between religious scholars over the permissibility of such acts, and demonstrating that religious festivals can equally cause inter and intra-faith tension.

In many destinations, religious festivals are often commodified and either in parts or segments of the event is commodified to ensure tourists who have a very short span of time can experience them. When catering to tourists, an intangible negative impact can take place in the form of commodification and degradation of traditional values associated with religious festivals. Yan's (2017) research on the traditional Taoist Bun Festival in Hong Kong focuses on this aspect. This festival has become a popular tourist event and has undergone a mass-marketing development process which Yan argues is similar in approach to the development of Disney theme parks. Yan goes on to point out that such an approach leads to the festival becoming a spectacle for tourists which has led to a decline in the authenticity of the event and disturbs the island on which it takes place.

Tourists visiting during the periods of religious festivals, whether intentionally or coincidentally, contribute to the larger staging of the event beyond the significance of religiosity. As interstitially discussed earlier, the economic benefits to the destination can generate a multiplier effect. According to a study by Sánchez et al.'s (2017), the City of

Palencia in Spain witnessed an 82% revenue generation for businesses in hospitality in Holy Week celebrations and festivities. In another example, tourists intentionally visit Bhutan because of the religious Tsechu Festival (Suntikul and Dorji, 2016). In the case of the latter, concerns remain that the number of tourist arrivals become overwhelming during religious festivals can have consequences in terms of cultural influences and a shift on focus from religious practices to staging for tourism, losing its authenticity and further monetising culture (see also Thirumaran, 2009a; Yan, 2017). Similar points have been made regarding the Osun Osogbo and Calabar Festival in Nigeria, as Hackett (2022) investigated the 'festivalisation' of indigenous religion and its reframing as a commodity for tourist consumption.

In summary, the majority of such studies seem to emphasise that while there are certainly associated economic benefits with the development of religious festivals for tourist purposes, there are equally concerns regarding the cultural and environmental impact of such festivals, along with the raising of questions about whether this represents a decline in authenticity and experience for attendees.

5.2   *Theme 2: motivations and experiences of festivalgoers*

The second theme developed during the scoping review process refers to both the motivation for pilgrims and tourists to attend religious festivals, and the experiences which participants have while attending. Rather than two discrete themes, the combination of motivation to attend and the experience during attendance is best described as an interconnected occurrence. In relation to the universality of such experiences across religions, Kapchan (2008) described music festivals as being able to stimulate the shared experience of sacred emotions and feelings in multi-faith audiences in the Moroccan context, suggesting that even participants of different religious backgrounds can develop a sense of collective spirituality. Such experiences can then form the basis for greater mutual understanding and multi-faith actions, which is linked to the first theme of potential positive impacts of religious festival tourism. Tkaczynski and Rundle-Thiele (2013) also focused on religious music festivals and analysed motivations to attend a Christian music festival in Australia among 1,702 participants, finding that religion and gender acted as hygiene factors in driving festival attendance, while Gallarza et al. (2009) sought to understand the rationale for volunteers to participate in a Christian 'mega-event' in Valencia, Spain. Through a series of volunteer interviews, the authors found that volunteer participated spontaneously as part of an experience of participation in a wider community even. This suggests that the feeling of community and shared experience is highly valuable in creating a positive experience for religious festival goers.

In a similar line of thought, Lee et al.'s (2015) study of the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage and the Neimen Songjiang Battle Array Festival in Taiwan found that participants' support for development of the festival was directly affected by how authentic the experience had by the festivalgoers was perceived to be, and how emotionally engaging the experience was. On the other side, secularisation and development for a mass tourist audience has been associated with the decline in authenticity of religious festivals. Porananond (2015), through study of sand pagoda construction during the Songkran Festival in Chiang Mai, makes this point. Porananond argues that this traditional activity has developed as a result of tourist and market economy influence, essentially

commodifying the activity, and leading to an increasingly staged and secularised originally religious practice for tourist consumption.

Studies on religious festival experience have equally focused on how attendees may positively experience what in other contexts may be considered unpleasant. Quezado et al. (2016) through a structural equation modelling approach, found that faith acts as a moderator in the perception of crowding in religious festivals, leading to the conclusion that a higher degree of faith can reduce the perceived negative effects of overcrowding in a densely packed festival environment. Foreign tourist behaviours and their effect on religious participants at festivals has also been a topic of enquiry. Suntikul and Dorji (2016) investigated whether Bhutanese locals found tourist photography as disturbing to the ritual performance of monks at the religious Tsechu festival, finding that 41.7% of those surveyed believed it to be disturbing, while 40.5% believed it not to be disturbing. On the other hand, monks when queried viewed photography as less disturbing (30.5%) and 55.9% of monks found it not to be disturbing at all. This said, the authors argue that approaches to tourism at religious festivals, particularly in the Bhutanese context, must also consider the 'social carrying capacity' of the society and whether tourist's presence is intrusive or irritating to those involved in the event. Such clash between tradition and contemporary technologies has been described as related to the 'liquid modernity' of modern times interacting to transform religious festivals (Suntikul, 2018). On a related note, Porcu's (2020) ethnographic study of the Shinto Gion Matsuri festival in Kyoto, for example, identified the process of negotiation in creating religious and secular boundaries, leading to the identifying that the festival acted as a 'contested zone' among a multitude of different participating stakeholders and conflicting senses of experience in festival attendance.

Another avenue of tourist experience of religious festivals has explored how cultural events influence the overall image of destinations, focusing on Easter festivals in the Spanish contexts of Caceres and Merida. In this research study, Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2018) found that such events serve to promote tourism and develop the profile of a destination. Large scale festivals in India were argued by Patwardhan et al. (2023) to offer socio-cultural benefits which increase well-being of the individual. By analysing sacred religious sites and festivals in Udupi, Krishna Matha, India. Indeed, some research has focused on the whether such religious festivals development for tourism purposes has led to a decrease in cultural understanding and heritage of locals, but with unclear results (Ruiz Palacios et al., 2023).

In terms of a specific focus on motivation, Govender et al. (2020) sought to understand the antecedents of intention to join a religious festival by studying the Holi festival and Christmas in South Africa. The authors found that attitudes toward the festival were the largest predictor of the intention to engage with such festival, while Piramanayagam and Seal (2021) contend that during the Paryaya festival in Udupi, India, the major components that appeal to participants as motivators include education, aesthetics, escapism, communitas, spirituality, and authenticity. Hung Lee et al. (2021) found that through an analysis of 1,244 surveys, both authentic experience and perceived benefits from religious festivals determine levels of support for tourism development, and that individuals who have an 'authentic experience' will subsequently have a more positive set of behaviours to support tourism development. Tsai (2021) explored the Welcome Royal Lord Festival in Donggang, Taiwan, finding that visitors to the festival could be defined in four different categories, including sacred pilgrims, believers, experience companion, and secular polytheists, with each group having a different range

of satisfaction and participation behaviours, attachment to place, and view of cultural authenticity. Tourists who do not necessarily have an affinity (Thirumaran, 2022, 2009b) to the religious festival however, may also be visiting to seek authentic experiences (Getz, 2013). According to Tsai (2021), recognisably, this variety of tourists at the festival may have different expectations and levels of admiration of the festival presentations. However, further reading suggests that it is not clear cut in the distinctions between tourists. As mentioned in the initial sections of this review point out that pilgrims and tourists' motivations overlap as does their activities (Wang et al., 2020).

Other research relating to motivation has focused on the opportunity for reunion and for the celebration of national culture rather than religious identity. Thirugnanasambantham et al. (2023) found that life satisfaction and place attachment had a mediating impact on motivation to attend festivals in India, and subsequently argue that given the possibility for religious festivals to go beyond caste and nationality, such festivals should become multicultural 'mass events' to celebrate society and develop national culture. Nair and Babu (2022) identified in the Brazilian context that religious festivals in the City of Toncantins were a major driver of tourism. Through a sample of 420 individuals living in close proximity to religious temples at which festivals are held, found that religious festivals were considered to be part of the community identity and offered an important occasion for family and friend reunions. In Mexico, research has identified that pilgrimages and festivals related to the Saint Francis Celebration clarify a link between tourism for religious purposes, nostalgic purposes, and familial obligations, with religious festivals offering an impetus to both fulfil spiritual and religious obligations and familial obligations at the same time as engaging in leisure (Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez, 2023). In Nigeria on the other hand, Umejei (2023) found that in some cases returning migrants from South Africa to Nigeria were less likely to engage in festivities at the Osun Osogbo festival as a result of wishing not to identify with local religious celebrations and having doubts about the desire to engage in festivals with religious connotations.

In one of the largest congregations of religious festival celebrations, the Kumbh Mela festival in India, it was indicated that tourists' experience is also dependent on their safety and comfort (Verma and Sarangi, 2019). At the festival, visitors felt discomfort when they faced difficulty to access the deities they wished to worship due to overcrowding. Failing to perform some of the rituals and prayers, to the visitors the experience often is negative. Such experiences call for planners to design experiences that can address overwhelming crowding and the ease in which visitors can navigate the challenges of space and accessibility while at the same time participating in the celebrations of the festival (McDowall, 2010).

In summary, the second area of knowledge currently produced in relation to tourism approaches and religious festivals focuses on the experience and motivation dimension of those who attend festivals, including those who are religiously motivated and those who wish to engage with the festival for other reasons, which could include feelings of national unity, feelings of community identity, and exploring cultural heritage. While there is a lot of research on the experiences and motivations of festivalgoers, it seems that there is less focus on the experiences of locals who offer services and support or sustain the festivals themselves.

5.3   Theme 3: proposals or demonstration of tourism development

The third theme developed from the data under our scoping review relates to proposals for tourism and festival site development. The most common format for such studies is case studies of specific festivals with an analysis of their potential for success as a destination. Di Giovine (2009) for example, arguing that tourism can contribute to the revitalisation of destinations, exemplified this case through an ethnographic study of traditional Buddhist-Confucian lantern festivals in Hoi An, Vietnam. Similar studies have taken place in other areas of Southeast Asia and have identified useful approaches and policy recommendations. For example, Patriani and Burhan (2019) conducted a qualitative, multi-stakeholder study on the Chinese Cap Go Meh festival in Singkawang, Indonesia. The authors identified that this festival's planning and resource disbursement were uniquely controlled by stakeholders who held social and familial connections within the public and private domains. Put simply, the study concludes that in such cases, to develop a coherent policy approach, administrators must understand the unique social factors which determine the methods in which festivals are enacted, and thus network management becomes a key consideration. Anthropologically speaking, a fundamental principle underlying the research in these articles is related to the principles of economic resource redistribution from international or domestic tourists to local communities (Smith, 1989).

In developing greater religious festival attendance to promote tourism, Shinde (2010) also highlighted the importance of social networks in the Indian context, stating that social networks and patronage networks play a vital role in the transmission of rituals which form important aspects of religious festivals. Consequently, to understand the cultural economy of a festival, social network analysis is of high importance. While Shee (2020) conducted a study on the impact of festivals on the local economy in West Bengal. Shee's findings demonstrated that although the economic effects of festivals were positive, leading to direct and indirect growth in employment, equally environmental problems occurred from exceeding the carrying capacity of the site's infrastructure. This includes blockage of sanitary and waste systems, traffic jams, pollution, and water scarcity; consequently, the author suggests the top-down implementation of a 'masterplan' from local governments to sustainably encourage religious festival tourism, while also advocating for the promotion of tourist self-responsibility.

In the Japanese context, Porcu's (2020) study of the Gion festival analysed the ways in which the festival organisers produced elements of local culture to appeal to authenticity for foreign participants and align with the UN sustainable development goals. The author explores the multidimensional representation of the event, including how religion may be emphasised or minimised depending on the audience. In relation to glocalisation, Porcu (2020) identifies actions taken by the Kyoto Government to offer culturally 'authentic' experiences to international visitors, such as the creation of an English language Manga guide to the festival. The author equally explored how elements of the religious festival could be represented differently depending on the group attending; presenting some features of the festival in Japanese-language materials only created for 'local' tourists and excluding them from materials aimed towards international audiences. The dichotomy between 'local' and 'foreign' is also touched upon by Cohen (2012) who analyses the Vegetarian Festival in Krabi, Thailand. This festival represents a combination of Thai local religion, rooted in Indian Brahmanism, with a Chinese cultural tradition or prayer to a shrine. While this syncretic approach to

tourism festival development may appeal to tourists from the Chinese diaspora, or local participants, the author suggests that the 'gruesome' character of performances by mediums which constitute a major part of the festival may act as a demotivating factor for Western tourist attendance.

A significant amount of research related to this theme took place in the African context. Makinde (2011) for example, proposed that the Egúngún festival in Southwestern Nigeria, a festival to honour the dead, which provides the chance for reuniting with deceased family members, has the potential to be packaged effectively as an event worthy of tourism development. Similarly, Diminyi et al. (2022) assessed the obstacles preventing the Igala festivals in Kogi state, Nigeria, from becoming major tourist attractions through a case study design, finding that a lack of governmental support and direction, with few formal policies to encourage tourism to these festivals, was the main obstacle. Tefera et al.'s (2021) study of the Ahdeye/Ashendye/Solele festival in Ethiopia has the potential to be developed as a tourism product, given the unique attributes and cultural events surrounding the festival, as a uniquely gendered event which focuses on femininity. While the above examples encourage tourist site development, other research in Africa has identified the threats to further development of already successful religious festival sites. Awuah-Nyamekye et al. (2014) identify that in East Ghana, the Odwira festival in the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area has already developed into a popular festival that attracts a great deal of tourists. On the other hand, issues such as intensive agriculture, fires, and other human-caused factors threaten the further development of the site, while a weakening of government support further threatens environmental conservation and sustainable tourism development.

In looking more broadly at the results, the scoping review reveals that there is a clear set of patterns surrounding the current research base regarding religious festivals. Globally, it seems that most studies have focused on Africa and South Asia. The reasons for such difference may be a result of many different reasons, including population, density of religious festivals, religiosity, internal and international religious tourism preferences, or more. Regardless of the reason, it seems that there is a paucity of research exploring religious festivals and tourisms in the region of Oceania and Europe.

At present, there is a balance between research literature that focuses on measurable, quantifiable impacts and qualitative research that investigates subjective experience. The literature demonstrates that one of the key priorities for religious festival tourism research is how to limit the negative impacts of religious festivals on local culture, livelihoods, and the physical environment. Studies over several continents discuss a shared range of negative environmental impacts such as death of animals, burden on infrastructure, and potential psychological impacts. There is a growing consensus that at the core of the religious festival experience is authenticity. Much of the studies discuss the important of an authentic experience as a motivating factor for attendees at religious festivals (Porcu, 2020; Hung Lee et al., 2021; Piramanayagam and Seal, 2021; Lee et al., 2015), while Porananond (2015) and Yan (2017) give examples of festivals which may be experiencing a decline in perceived authenticity as a result of attempting to attract a broader range of tourists to experience the festival.

6   Understanding the scope of knowledge in religious festival and tourism approaches

Religious festivals hold profound cultural significance for and serve as essential platforms for both individual and communal expressions (Blackwell, 2007), and tourism, as a cultural and ritual expression of values has strong connections to this fundamental human activity. Religious festivals wield a profound influence on various aspects of society, spanning from individual identity to environmental consequences, economic implications, labour dynamics, social relationships, religious harmony, and, at times, even religious conflicts. Furthermore, they have evolved into prominent tourist attractions, as pointed out by Nolan and Nolan (1992). However, the study of religious festivals and their relationship with tourism has historically been intertwined with pilgrimage or perceived as an extension of it. In our research, we have endeavoured to refine this field by adopting a distinct definition of festivals as outlined by Cudny (2014) and Spiro's (2020) conceptualisation of religion.

Although our study's scope is limited, focusing solely on religious festivals, and not encompassing cultural or heritage festivals, although it is important to acknowledge the unclear distinction that often exists between these concepts. Our findings reveal a growing body of literature concerning religious festivals and tourism, coalescing around three major themes: the impacts of religious festivals, the motivations and experiences of festivalgoers, and proposals or demonstrations of tourism development. These themes often intersect, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the intricate and multifaceted nature of religious festivals and their intersection with tourism. Geographically, while a significant portion of research has been conducted in Africa and South Asia, there is a multitude of studies encompassing diverse religious festivals worldwide. Our findings underscore the fact that the drivers of religious festival tourists often can diverge from ritual participation to surface-level sightseeing experiential visits. Where festivals are easily accessible and facilitate participation and observation with ease, this tends to yield a higher level of satisfaction. The planners of large religious festivals must be mindful of the experience they wish to create for tourists. This includes the importance of the site being visitor-friendly while at the same time balancing the crowd level and influence on local cultural practices.

Given the multifaceted impact of religious festivals, there is an urgent call for further scholarly exploration. Investigating how organisers and attendees approach these events can illuminate shared socio-cultural and behavioural patterns that transcend religious and geographic boundaries. Furthermore, a deeper exploration of the challenges and issues linked with religious festivals is imperative. This can be achieved through individual case studies, highlighting exemplary practices, and enriching the growing body of knowledge regarding the distinctive facets and dimensions of religious festivals in their interactions with tourists. Additionally, comprehensive studies spanning a wide array of festivals can offer invaluable insights, guiding strategies to navigate the intricate dynamics associated with these events.

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