



Applying the TTM Model to Optimize the Marketing of Krishna Consciousness in Europe

Krisztina Bence-Kiss¹ 

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Abstract: Previous studies (Bence-Kiss, 2021) have shown that the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM) may be applied to analyze the process of involving people in Krishna Consciousness in Europe. The model has shown that the visitors of communities devoted to Krishna Consciousness on the continent belong to one of the four stages of the model, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. The initial stage, precontemplation is missing, since the study was carried out on individuals already interested in the life of the community. This study aims to find out how these findings may be applied to plan marketing activities more consciously and to reach consumer groups on the different stages of behavior change efficiently. The research has found that there is a significant relationship between the stages of change and the means of gathering information, which supports the development of a new and more efficient communication strategy, matching consumer needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM), developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983), has been widely used to understand how individuals progress through stages of behavior modification, particularly in areas like addiction recovery and health-related behaviors. However, the application of TTM to religious contexts remains underexplored, despite the profound impact that religion can have on personal identity and lifestyle choices. This study focuses on Krishna Consciousness in Europe, examining how individuals transition from initial exposure to deeper religious commitment through the stages outlined by TTM.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as religious engagement often involves significant life changes, influencing not only individual behaviors but also community cohesion and cultural integration. By investigating the relationship between promotional strategies used by Krishna Consciousness communities and the stages of behavior change, this research sheds light on how religious movements can effectively foster spiritual growth and sustain long-term engagement. Moreover, this study addresses a gap in the literature by linking behavior change theory with religious practice, offering insights into how targeted communication can facilitate religious conversion and retention. Such an understanding is vital in an increasingly secular world, where religious institutions must adapt to new communication landscapes to remain relevant and impactful.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983), was originally designed to explore intentional changes in human behavior. The model's creators outlined five stages of behavior change—precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action,

¹ Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Kaposvár Campus, Guba Sándor utca 40. H-7400, Kaposvár, Hungary

and maintenance – each following the other in a sequential timeline (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Reynolds & Placido, 2020; Vela & Ortega, 2020).

The model's primary aim was to identify the stages and processes individuals undergo when attempting to overcome addictions. Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change is grounded in rational choice theory, which posits that individuals evaluate the costs and benefits before making significant behavioral changes. This connection to rational choice theory, along with the model's temporal structure, suggests its applicability in analyzing other consumer decisions.

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change has also been utilized in religious contexts. Sohn (n.d.) examined how religious beliefs might inspire individuals to make health-related behavioral changes, while Wongkitrungrueng and Juntongjin (2022) explored the relationship between religion and sustainable consumption using Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change. The model's relevance to decisions related to religion – assuming such decisions are rational to some degree – stems from the profound impact these decisions have on an individual's life (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Reynolds & Placido, 2020; University of Maryland, 2020; Vela & Ortega, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

The research focused on the European continent for several reasons, primarily due to its relative homogeneity in terms of dominant religion and the similar status of new religious movements across the region (Crnic, 2007; Luzny, 2023).

Krishna Consciousness is present in 39 European countries, but in many of these, the movement is not fully institutionalized, making it difficult to engage with individuals who are either familiar with or members of the religious community. To address this, the sample was drawn from countries with tourist destinations that introduce the religion to the public. This approach allowed the researchers to reach both members of the community and those who were either encountering the religion for the first time or learning about it. There are 18 such destinations in 14 European countries, and 11 of them agreed to participate in the study. These locations are in Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (ISKCON, 2024). Participants in the study were intentionally selected based on a single criterion: having visited one of the 18 Krishna Consciousness communities in Europe. Paper-and-pencil questionnaires in English were distributed to the 11 European communities involved in the research. Where feasible, the questionnaires were also provided in the local language, and volunteers were available to assist respondents with language barriers and comprehension issues.

A total of 667 responses were collected during the three-month tourist season in the summer of 2019. Among the respondents, 23.8% identified as devotees of Krishna Consciousness. The majority, as expected, were Christians (45.3%), followed by those affiliated with other religious communities (2.5%), atheists (2.2%), individuals not belonging to any religious group (16.9%), and those who chose not to specify their religion (9.1%).

3.2. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The questionnaire included two sets of statements. One included the frequency of exposure to certain communication tools, such as personal selling, online marketing, social media and events, while the other set was made up of religious activities, ranging from seeing posters and devotees proselytizing on the streets to attending worship services and praying regularly. The latter statements were adapted from the original Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change questionnaires (University of Maryland, 2020; Vela & Ortega, 2020) and modified to reflect religious activities, drawing on secondary data and previous research (Bence, 2014; Bence-Kiss, 2021). Similar to the original questionnaires, respondents were asked to rate how often they engaged in each activity on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated “never” and 5 indicated “repeatedly”.

The data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 statistical software, employing factor analysis to identify homogeneous groups of respondents. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to reduce the dimensions, creating four factors out of the 26 different statements. This method helped to understand the underlying factors influencing the responses, effectively addressing multicollinearity by grouping correlated statements.

The number of factors was determined based on the total variance explained, which was 74.06% for marketing tools and 73.29% for religious activities, which can be considered quite good (Bhargadiya, 2023). Although four factors might suggest the exclusion of one of the five stages, previous research by Finnegan et al. (2022) had already combined precontemplation and contemplation into a single factor. The current study followed the same approach, as the activities associated with these stages were found to be correlated.

The factors were derived using Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization. The KMO value of the factor analysis exceeded 0.8, confirming that the sample was suitable for this analysis. Additionally, Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated the test’s validity with a p-value of 0.000, suggesting a significant relationship among the variables. The reliability of the factors was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, with all factors showing reliability above 0.7, and most exceeding 0.9, indicating excellent reliability and suitability for further analysis (Malhotra & Simon, 2009).

The relationship between the two aspects was evaluated by the Pearson correlation coefficient, with the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the stages of changes and individual is in and the promotion tools they are exposed to.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change

During the data analysis, four factors were identified, as presented in Table 1. These factors accounted for 73.29% of the total variance. The activities included within these factors align with the dimensions of the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, corresponding to four stages: contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. This suggests that similar behavioral change patterns can be observed in the context of engaging in religious activities, as in the process of modifying health behaviors (Newcombe, 2017; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997; University of Maryland, 2020).

Table 1. The stages of change describing the actions of the respondents towards Krishna Consciousness

I follow/check the Facebook page of a Krishna-conscious village. I follow the national Hare Krishna site/Facebook page. I read the articles about the Hare Krishna community. I check the news of the Krishna-conscious community. I follow/check the YouTube channel of a Krishna-conscious village. I follow/check the Instagram posts of a Krishna-conscious village. I buy books/give donations to Krishna devotees on the streets. I visit a Krishna-conscious village. I attend festivals organized by Krishna-conscious communities. I buy products of a Krishna-conscious village. I give the 1% of my income tax to a Krishna-conscious community.	Precontemplation and Contemplation M=2.28 Std.=1.18 Var. exp.=59.50%
I eat vegetarian/vegan. I buy vegetarian/vegan products. I follow the guidance of the Bhagavad Gita. I use the Hare Krishna mantra. I read books related to Krishna consciousness. I cook from Indian recipes. I visit Govinda Restaurants. I talk to people devoted to Krishna Consciousness.	Preparation M=2.47 Std.=1.43 Var. exp.=6.73%
I visit Hare Krishna communities in different countries. I celebrate the festivities of Krishna Consciousness. I dress in traditional Indian dresses. I visit Hare Krishna temples. I attend workshops organized by Krishna-conscious groups.	Action M=2.00 Std.=1.21 Var. exp.=4.20%
I visit the Bhaktivedanta College. I attend yoga classes organized by Krishna-conscious groups.	Maintenance M=1.52 Std.=0.98 Var. exp.=2.86%

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Rotation converged in 6 iterations; KMO=0.966; Bartlett (Approx. Chi Sq.)=12779.11; Sig= 0.000; Total variance explained: 73.289; Cronbach's Alpha: F1=0.948; F2=0.961; F3=0.907; F4=0.779

Source: Own research

The first factor, contemplation, encompassed activities related to gathering information about the religion, with an emphasis on personal interactions, such as attending festivals and events, participating in tourism within farming communities, or making donations. The mean for this factor was 2.28 (Std.=1.18), indicating that most respondents engage in these activities occasionally or not at all. It is worth noting that all survey participants had visited a Krishna-conscious community at least once, which itself serves as a form of information gathering, even if it is not a regular occurrence.

The second factor, preparation, represented a higher level of engagement. At this stage, individuals go beyond basic information gathering and tourist activities. The key activities here included adopting dietary practices in line with the religion's requirements, reading religious texts, and chanting mantras and prayers. This factor had the highest mean, M=2.47 (Std.=1.43), indicating that these actions were the most commonly performed by those visiting Krishna-conscious communities. Although these actions demonstrate a certain level of commitment to the religion, many of them are not externally visible and can be practiced without becoming an active member of the religious community, such as adopting a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. Additionally, an interesting phenomenon can be observed here, as sometimes it is not the religion that leads people to change their dietary habits; rather, certain dietary preferences may attract individuals to Krishna Consciousness (e.g., cruelty-free nutrition).

The third factor, action, had an even lower mean of 2.00 (Std.=1.21). Since this phase involves activities that are visibly aligned with the religion, demonstrating clear dedication, the lower frequency of these actions among respondents is not unexpected. This factor included wearing traditional Indian attire, covering shoulders and legs as required by the religion, attending religious services, and celebrating religious festivals. The fourth factor, maintenance, had the lowest mean, 1.52 (Std.=0.98). In this stage, the behavior change is fully integrated, and the individual has become a member of the Krishna-conscious community, a status achieved by only a small percentage of respondents. Additionally, within this factor, levels of involvement may vary among individuals, though a certain degree of regularity is typical. Activities included in this factor were attending advanced courses, participating in the education system, and purchasing religious or community-produced goods.

The factor means exhibited a standard normal distribution, with the peak occurring during the preparation phase, but overall low means were observed, likely due to “1” being the most frequent response. The only exception was the nutrition aspect, where the mode was five.

4.2. Communication Tools Applied by Krishna-Conscious Communities

Four factors were identified among the communication tools, which could be distinguished based on the target group they aim at, ranging from those, who have not even heard of the religion, up till the active members of the community.

Table 2. The factors describing the exposure of the respondents to promotional activities

I see educational offers of Bhaktivedanta College. I see advertisements of Govinda Restaurants. I receive newsletter from a Krishna-conscious community.	Retaining existing audience – other institutions and long-term relationship M=1.90 Std.=1.24 Var. exp.=49.74%
I see Facebook advertisements about a Krishna-conscious village. I see posts of a Krishna-conscious village on Instagram. I see Facebook posts of a Krishna-conscious village in my news feed. I see YouTube videos of a Krishna-conscious village.	Confirming existing audience - Social media of the farming communities M=2.04 Std.=1.20 Var. exp.=10.71%
I meet people selling books about Krishna Consciousness on the streets. I see posters about the events organized by the Krishna-conscious community nearby. I see fliers about festivals of Krishna-conscious communities.	Attracting new, interested audience – Traditional promotion methods M=2.32 Std.=1.08 Var. exp.=7.09%
I see tourism agencies advertising a Krishna-conscious village. I see TV shows about Krishna-conscious communities. I see Krishna-products sold in shops or online.	Raising the attention of the new audience – Touristic and physical products M=1.72 Std.=0.85 Var.ex.=6.53%

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Rotation converged in 7 iterations; KMO=0.909; Bartlett (Approx. Chi Sq.)=4065.100; Sig=0.000; Total variance explained: 74.062; Cronbach's Alpha: F1=0.857; F2=0.865; F3=0.743; F4=0.717

Source: Own research

The identified factors can be characterized by the level of engagement of the target audience that the promotional tools are designed to reach. The first factor includes methods targeting individuals who have already encountered Krishna Consciousness and its associated lifestyle and have shown

interest in the religion. The second factor comprises elements intended to deepen the commitment of those who have had an initial encounter but are not yet fully engaged. The third factor's tools are aimed at attracting individuals who already display a certain level of openness towards religion. Finally, the fourth factor focuses on promotional activities directed at those who likely have no prior knowledge of Krishna Consciousness.

The distribution of promotional tools among these factors also illustrates how the tourism product is utilized to promote the religion. The activities in the fourth, third, and second factors center around the tourism offerings of farming communities, to capture attention, attracting interest, and solidifying engagement among the audiences. In contrast, the first factor is focused on retention, including activities associated with other Krishna Consciousness institutions, such as restaurants and universities.

The third factor has the highest mean ($M=2.32$; $Std.=1.08$), indicating that most people had already been exposed to these elements. This aligns with the observation that the majority of visitors to the farming communities are one-time guests, which also accounts for the decreasing means in the second and first factors ($M=2.04$; $Std.=1.20$ and $M=1.90$; $Std.=1.24$, respectively). The fourth factor, with the lowest mean of 1.72 ($Std.=0.85$), might seem unexpected at first, but this can be explained by the fact that it targets audiences who lack prior information or knowledge about religion. Although these tools may reach a broader audience, the research did not measure the frequency with which these tools reached people who ultimately did not visit. Additionally, as reported by tour guides, many visitors had already progressed to the third factor, possessing a certain level of openness before their visit, and were therefore exposed to elements of this factor as well.

4.3. The Relationship Between Promotion Tools Applied and Behavior Changes

After conducting a detailed analysis of the communication tools used by Krishna-conscious communities and the behaviors reported by respondents, it became evident that there are connections between the promotional tools individuals are exposed to and the stage of behavior change they are in.

People in the Precontemplation stage have not yet formed an intention to change their behavior – they either lack knowledge about the religion or are not motivated to learn more about it. At this stage, the goal is to capture their attention and encourage them to visit the touristic destination to expand their knowledge and increase their level of engagement. This can be achieved by introducing physical products and promoting the destination through various means, such as personal outreach, flyers, or posters, highlighting the most attractive events to entice them to visit. Once the devotees succeed in attracting people to the touristic destination, they have the chance to introduce the religion to them in person, which is significant, as many respondents emphasized the importance of personal relationships in becoming acquainted with the religion.

Following the initial visit, the focus begins to shift from promoting the touristic product to emphasizing the religious aspects, thereby aiming to reach the Contemplation stage, where the audience starts considering a deeper involvement with the religion. At this stage, the focus moves to tools that confirm the existing audience, which are still initiated by the farming communities but now emphasize not just the tourist attraction but also the religious community. Social media tools, particularly Facebook, play a crucial role in this phase, as they provide an effective platform to maintain contact with a broad audience from various demographic groups.

In addition to maintaining relationships, these tools aim to further introduce the religion to the audience and encourage them to move into the Preparation phase, where they begin taking certain actions to change their behavior, although these actions may not yet be highly visible to the public. In this phase, it is vital to reinforce and retain those who have already started taking steps, so social media efforts are supplemented with newsletters to ensure a continuous flow of information and communication from other Krishna-conscious community institutions, such as restaurants and universities, which may further support lifestyle changes.

If the efforts to confirm and retain individuals are successful, they may progress to the Action stage, where they adopt more publicly visible habits, such as wearing specific clothing and attending temples, while continuing to maintain previously adopted behaviors. At this stage, promotional tools become less influential, as the individual's integration into the community has already begun. However, despite the reduced impact of promotional efforts, retention tools can still play a role in helping individuals transition into the Maintenance stage. As both qualitative and quantitative research has shown, at this level, promotion has limited influence, except for emphasizing educational opportunities to deepen engagement. Nonetheless, there are many unofficial, less-promoted forms of support for maintenance that are harder to measure.

Table 3. The correlation between promotion tools and the stages of behavior change

Stage of behavior change	Promotion tools	Pearson correlation coefficient	Significance level	Confirmed?
Precontemplation	Raising the attention of new audiences – Tourists and physical products	<i>No data available</i>		×
	Attracting new, interested audiences – Traditional promotional methods	<i>No data available</i>		×
Contemplation	Confirming existing audience – Social media of the farming communities	0.764	0.000	✓
	<i>Retaining existing audience – other institutions and retention</i>	0.233	0.000	!
Preparation	Confirming existing audience – Social media of the farming communities	0.043	0.344	×
	Retaining existing audience – other institutions and retention	0.488	0.000	✓
Action	<i>Raising the attention of new audiences – Tourists and physical products</i>	0.204	0.000	!
	Retaining existing audience – other institutions and retention	0.281	0.000	✓
Maintenance	<i>Raising the attention of new audiences – Tourists and physical products</i>	0.347	0.000	!
	Retaining existing audience – other institutions and retention	0.373	0.000	✓

Source: Own research

This hypothesis was tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The hypothesis was confirmed for four of the behavior change phases, with one exception: the relationship between Preparation and Confirming existing audience. However, as seen in Table 3., correlations were found between Contemplation and Retaining existing audiences, as well as between Action and Maintenance, and tools for Raising the attention of new audiences. In the table, confirmed relationships are marked with a tick, while an “X” represents instances where no significant relationships were observed. Relationships marked with an exclamation point indicate cases where no initial relationship was hypothesized, yet significant correlations were discovered between the variables.

The relationship between the promotional tools and the stages of change was positive across all cases. The strongest correlation ($r=0.764$, $p=0.000$) was observed between the Contemplation stage and the tools for Confirming existing audiences, indicating a strong alignment between the platforms most used by respondents in the Contemplation stage and the promotional tools employed by the communities to target them. A moderately weak relationship ($r=0.233$, $p=0.000$) was also found with Retaining existing audiences, suggesting that individuals in the Contemplation stage may already be influenced by retention tools, which implies that communication about educational opportunities could also be effectively directed at this group.

Conversely, no significant relationship ($r=0.043$, $p=0.000$) was found between the promotional tools for Confirming existing audiences and those in the Preparation stage. Instead, these respondents may be more effectively reached through Retention tools, where a positive medium correlation ($r=0.488$, $p=0.000$) was observed.

As previously discussed, only a limited number of communication tools are aimed at audiences in the Action and Maintenance stages, as the influence of the group becomes more critical at these levels. Nevertheless, a medium but not particularly strong positive correlation was found for Retaining existing audiences in both stages ($r=0.281$, $p=0.000$ and $r=0.373$, $p=0.000$, respectively). Interestingly, in both the Action ($r=0.204$, $p=0.000$) and Maintenance ($r=0.347$, $p=0.000$) stages, a medium positive correlation was also discovered concerning the promotional tools designed to raise the attention of new audiences.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The topic is broad and continuously developing, there is yet a lot to discover in this area. Future research could explore the application of the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change in different religious contexts beyond Krishna Consciousness, examining its relevance to other new religious movements or established religions. Comparative studies could investigate how religious and cultural differences influence the stages of behavior change. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track individuals over time to assess the long-term impact of religious marketing strategies on behavior change. Finally, qualitative research could provide deeper insights into personal motivations and barriers to adopting religious practices, enriching the quantitative findings of this study.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the intersection between religious engagement and behavioral change, specifically examining how individuals' interactions with promotional tools influence their progression through the stages of the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change within the context of Krishna Consciousness communities in Europe. The findings demonstrate that religious behavior change, much like health-related behavior change, follows a structured and identifiable pattern. The identification of four key factors – contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance – underscores the model's applicability beyond its original context of addiction and health behaviors, extending it to the realm of religious conversion and commitment.

The results also reveal a significant correlation between the stages of behavior change and the types of promotional tools used by Krishna Consciousness communities. These communities effectively tailor their communication strategies to meet individuals at different points in their spiritual journey. For instance, tools aimed at retaining existing audiences were more strongly correlated with the contemplation and preparation stages, while tools designed to raise the attention

of new audiences had a moderate impact even in the action and maintenance stages. This suggests that promotional efforts not only attract new followers but also play a crucial role in deepening the commitment of those already engaged with the religion.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for religious movements and organizations that seek to grow and maintain their communities. It also provides valuable insights for scholars interested in the broader implications of religious engagement on behavior change. The study highlights the need for further research to explore how different religious contexts might influence the applicability of the Transtheoretical Model and how promotional strategies can be optimized to support individuals at various stages of their spiritual development.

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