Quantifying The Benefits of a Cultural Festival: Social Cohesion and Personal Well-Being from The Wellington Diwali

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Photo Credits: The photos for the Wellington Diwali Study were taken by Ron Fischer, School of Psychology, Victoria University
Outline

• What might rituals do? (10 mins)
  • Evolutionary theories
  • Previous evidence
  • Background Diwali

• The VUW, NZIRI 2014 Wellington Diwali Study (10 mins)
  • Hypotheses
  • Methods
  • Findings

• Implications of Findings (10 mins)
  • Methods/Theories
  • Applied
  • Future Directions
Outline

• What might rituals do? (10 mins)
  • Evolutionary Theories
  • Previous evidence
  • Context of Wellington 2014 Diwali

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Problem: rituals seem useless (or worse) yet endure

-----------------------------History of Ritual-----------------------------

now

Christianity

Clottes
30-40

Blombos
70-100tya

Qafzeh
90tya

Herto
150tya

200tya
"...the [ritual] group regularly produces an intellectual and moral uniformity ... Everything is common to everyone. The movements are stereotyped. Everyone executes the same ones in the same circumstances; and this conformity of conduct only translates that of thought. Every mind being drawn into the same eddy, the individual type nearly confounds itself with that of the general type."

—Emile Durkheim (1912).
Archaeology suggests economic benefits

Our group quantifies social/affective responses
Diwali: Background

Diwali or Deepavali (row of lamps) celebrated globally.

Called The Festival of Lights, Diwali signifies the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil and the renewal of life.

Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama, his wife and brother from their 14-year exile and their defeat of the ten-headed demon-king Ravana.

We find the story The Ramayana - epic Sanskrit poem

NOTE: many different interpretations given to the meaning/ stories vary. However most of the history: ritual is accorded a sacred value.
Key question:
how do sacred rituals travel?

(new country: secular context)
New Zealand Indian Population 1961-2013

Source: NZstats

New Zealand Hindu Population 1991-2013

Source: NZstats

Prime Minister HELEN CLARK 2004:

"The Indian community is of long standing in New Zealand and it is wonderful to see the celebration of Diwali becoming a significant event in New Zealand's cultural calendar."

"I have just returned from a very exciting visit to India - the first New Zealand prime minister to go there in almost 20 years," she said.

"New Zealand and India have traditionally had a close relationship, and I want to see these ties grow even stronger. I acknowledge the efforts and dedication of Indians to making a new life and contributing to New Zealand society,"
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What was our study?
Social/Personal Effects of Diwali

Hypotheses

1. Enhanced personal well-being

2. Enhanced connection outside Indian community
   (family/friends/workers)


4. Enhanced connection with Indian community in New Zealand.
Recruitment

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
... and be in to
WIN 1 of 3 $50 AMAZON VOUCHERS TODAY

WHAT TO DO: SHORT REPEATED SURVEYS

HOW LONG: 10 MINUTES

RECEIVE: $20 SHOPPING VOUCHER
### E.g. of measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People who celebrate Diwali think like me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who celebrate Diwali share my values.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who celebrate Diwali have a lot in common with me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I think people who celebrate Diwali could be friends of mine.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like to have a friendly chat with people who celebrate Diwali.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to spend time socializing with people who celebrate Diwali.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could become close friends with people who celebrate Diwali.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How respected do you feel by people who celebrate Diwali?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How accepted do you feel by people who celebrate Diwali?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How liked do you feel by people who celebrate Diwali?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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Using the relevant scales below, please indicate how you are feeling today where 1 indicates 'very poor/not at all' and 7 indicates 'very good/a great deal':

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health/State/Level</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today, how would you describe your physical health?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Today, how would you describe your state of mind?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Today, how would you describe your energy level?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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E.g. of measures
E.g. of measures

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUE SELF</td>
<td>ACTUAL SELF</td>
<td>TRUE SELF</td>
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<th>D</th>
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<td>TRUE SELF</td>
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What did we observe?
24
Reasons people gave for attending

- “Never been before”
- “Love India and anything Indian”
- “Great food! Want a hena tattoo”
- “Being an Indian it makes me feel proud to attend our home country festival”
- “I was invited”
- “I always go wherever I am in the world.”
- “Flat tradition”
- “Because I used to celebrate Diwali in India with family. It is a fun, vibrant and family festival. But I am just here to see Bhangra (dance group)”
- “Diwali is in my DNA.”
- “Usher”
- “I'm attending because it's a festival I use to celebrate in Fiji”
- “To meet fellow Indians and enjoy the lights”
- “I enjoy attending cultural and religious events of all cultures, religions, and ethnicities”
- “I was attracted by the Indian culture and wanted to know what Diwali Festival is about.”
- “For food.”
- “For cultural significance and introducing Diwali celebration in NZ to kids of Indian origin”
- “I am an Indian and have been celebrating Diwali since birth. So, it is natural for me to attend it.”
- “Diwali is part of my Pakeha culture now”
Descriptive Results

- **Participants**: $N = 324$
- **All five surveys**, $n = 163$ (101 female, 60 male)
- **avg Age** = 33 (SD = 12.19)
- **Gender**: 60% female (195 female, 125 male, 1 n/a)
- **Ethnicity**: 24% report Indian Ethnicity
- **Hindu**: 14% report being Hindu
- **Came to specifically to celebrate Diwali**: 43%
- **Reported celebrating Diwali at home**: 22% of sample (n = 195 who reported)
  - 78% of Hindus celebrate at home,
  - Of those who were not-Hindu, 13% celebrate Diwali at home
  - Of those who celebrate at home, 48% were not Hindu.
Descriptive Results: IoS

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

TRUE SELF
ACTUAL SELF

Soc. Dynamics: IdealSelf

Rated Emotions (1 = Lowest, 7 = Highest)

Five Waves of the Wellington 2014 Diwali Study
Descriptive Results: Happy
Descriptive Results: Social Connections
Descriptive Results: Connect with Indians
Misleading?
Happiness: more informative graph
Social connections
Connections to Indians
Can we do better?
Affective Dynamics by Hindu: Happy

Five Waves of the Wellington 2014 Diwali Study

Rated Emotions (1 = Lowest, 7 = Highest)
Soc. Dynamics:Connect_IndianWell

Rated Emotions (1 = Lowest, 7 = Highest)

factor(Hindu)

Five Waves of the Wellington 2014 Diwali Study
Key point:
religion commitments
look to be important
Formal model results (necessary)
Summary of findings

• Diwali associated with an increase in happiness for everyone (Hindus probably start higher)
• Diwali is associated with an increase in a sense of being in touch with your true self, (Hindus might probably higher)
• Diwali is associated with an increase in connection to workers (Hindus start higher).
• Diwali is associated with an increase in connection to family (Hindus start higher).
• Indians, Hindus, and older people feel greater connection to Indians in Wellington, New Zealand, and Globally. Diwali is only associated with putting Hindus more in touch with Global Indians than they might otherwise feel.
Implications: theories about what rituals do

• Diwali in NZ affects participants’ sense of well-being, whether or not a participant is religious.

• Diwali in NZ affects participants’ sense of connection to co-workers, whether or not a participant is religious.

• Diwali in NZ affects participants’ sense of connection to co-workers, whether or not a participant is religious.

• Diwali increases a sense of connection to the global Indian community, but we see this only in people who are Hindu.
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Implications: applying knowledge

• Some preliminary evidence of multi-cultural social capital
• BUT, it looks as though Religious Affiliation matters. Having a sacred meaning is associated with bigger effects.
Future Directions

• Immediate
  • Publish studies with Indian collaborators using measures of religious identification.
  • Present results to stakeholders.

• Longer term:
  • Further studies with Indian communities in NZ
  • Better health, well-being, and work measures
  • Extend scope: secular rituals in NZ
  • Integration of ritual studies with longer term studies (NZAVS)
  • Comparative projects (involving historians)
Special Thanks

- NZRI [http://www.victoria.ac.nz/hppi/centres/india-research](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/hppi/centres/india-research)

A collaborative effort
The end