



**STRATHCLYDE BUSINESS SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING**

Consuming Lourdes: An ethnographic investigation into the consumption of religious pilgrimage, with specific focus upon the Catholic Sanctuary of Lourdes, France.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the consumption of religious pilgrimage, with a specific focus upon the Catholic Sanctuary of Lourdes, France. In researching pilgrimage, consumer research to date has taken a commercial (O'Guinn and Belk, 1989), secular (Arnould and Price, 1993; Kozinets, 2002) or new age (Scott and Maclaren, 2013; Kedzior, 2013) perspective. However, this thesis follows Turley (2013) and Moufahim (2013) in investigating specifically consumption and religious pilgrimage.

The three-year interpretive ethnographic study, adopted a historical hermeneutic philosophy (Gadamer, 1977/2008), compiling eight weeks fieldwork at the Sanctuary of Lourdes. Onsite data collated 200 field-notes pages, approximately 3000 videos and photographs, and many informal and serendipitous interviews with pilgrims on site at Lourdes. Additionally, twenty-one semi-structured depth interviews were conducted with twenty-three informants, tallying over 1000 pages of transcription.

Contributions towards Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) within the areas of family, extraordinary experiential consumption, self, and sacred consumption are provided. One such contribution is consumer research to date finds experience aligned with hedonism, joy and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Goulding et al, 2009), however this study uncovered the experiencing and expression of upset, pain, anguish, hurt and vulnerability to be central, with time and space for expression of vulnerability highly sought after by consumers, thus extending consumer research understanding on emotion, experience and vulnerability.

However, such emotional intensity was found at times to be overpowering. Consequently consumers journey to the secular shops and marketplace as a means of gaining “light hearted relief” from such intensity. The back and forth between sacred sanctuary and secular shop creates for the consumer the “whole package” of the Lourdes pilgrimage experience – enabling a place where Catholic consumers can temporarily gain a “coherent sense of self” (Ahuvia, 2005) and harmoniously negotiate the contradictions between religious faith and consumer culture (Beruschavili and Arnould, 2005).

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The French say “*petit à petit, l’oiseux construit le nit (little by little the bird builds its nest)*”, and without the help and support of many key people I would never have been able to gradually build the PhD nest I offer today, thus to you all I am eternally grateful.

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LIST OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS & PUBLICATIONS

FROM THIS THESIS

Publications

Higgins, L. Hamilton, K. (2014 forthcoming). Faith, Hope and Love: Doing Family through Consuming Pilgrimage, *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Conference Proceedings

“Big Beads for Big Prayers: Investigating the Role the Lourdes Marketplace Plays in Creating the “Whole Package” Pilgrimage Experience”, Annual International Royal Geographical Society Conference, London, August 2014.

“Seeking Vulnerability: Consuming Pilgrimage and Emotional Release”, 39th Macromarketing Conference, Royal Holloway University, Surrey, UK, July 2014.

“The Human Rosary Bead: Heresy or Heralding? A Discussion into the Show Business of Religion at Lourdes”, Plenary Introduction Session at Miracles & Management, 3rd Conference of Management, Spirituality and Religion, Lourdes, May 2013.

“Should Respondents Have a Friend in Me? Discussion into the issue of developing friendships with respondents and its influence upon the in-depth interview”, 7th Workshop on Interpretive Consumer Research, Brussels, April 2013.

“The ‘I’ in Communitas: Pilgrimage, Consumption and the 21st Century”, Poster presented at the 7th CCT Conference, Oxford, August 2012.

For William Delaney

*My granddad, my friend,
One loves one two*