

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL PREDICTOR OF PASSION FOR RELIGION: THE ROLE OF SENSATION SEEKING, DEVIANT ASSOCIATION AND NEED FOR CLOSURE

Hayat Muhammad ^{a*}, Maria Wali ^b, Syeda Bakhtawar Gilani ^b, Maliha Bukhari ^b, & Summiya Ahmad ^c

^aPhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

^bDepartment of Psychology, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

^cPhD, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

*Correspondence to: Dr. Hayat Muhammad, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan. E-hayat_bangash@hotmail.com.

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ABSTRACT

Religion can serve as a stabilizing and energizing factor in a world where people frequently cope with risks, uncertainty, and the pull of various social influences. With a primary focus on sensation seeking, the need for closure, and deviant association, this study examined how specific psychological characteristics and social settings affect religious dedication. 354 people participated in the study, including drug users (13.8%), university students (24.9%), inmates (33.1%), and internet respondents (28.2%). They filled out validated scales that assessed the variables under investigation. The analysis of the study indicated that while deviant association ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$) was a negative predictor of passion for religion, sensation seeking ($\beta = .431$, $p < .001$) and the need for closure ($\beta = .206$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors. Simply stated, it appears that religion may appeal to sensation seekers because of its captivating rituals and stimulating practices. It may also offer consolation to those in great need of closure by providing certainty and structure. However, members of deviant peer groups were less likely to be religiously passionate, perhaps as a result of their promotion of opposing worldviews that weaken religious commitment. Overall, the study findings indicate that people's adherence to religion is influenced by both psychological needs and social surroundings. Although religion can be viewed as a source of stability and meaning, external factors might minimize its impact.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most enduring and significant institutions in human history has always been religion. It influences moral behavior, shapes personal beliefs, and gives people purpose amid ambiguity or difficulty. Researchers in psychology, sociology, and anthropology have sought to understand why people become so passionate about religion over the years. While some have emphasized personality-based approaches, others have focused on structural theories of socialization. However, in recent years, the focus of research has shifted to examining how social settings and psychological characteristics interact to influence religious commitment. This study expands on this viewpoint by examining the relationship between passion for religion and three key factors: sensation seeking, deviant association, and need for closure. Sensation seeking, defined as the tendency to pursue novel, intricate, and intense experiences despite potential risks (Zuckerman, 1994), has primarily been examined in relation to risk-taking behaviors such as substance abuse, gambling, and delinquency. However, its relationship to religion is less obvious. In fact, one study at the European Psychiatric Conference examined this relationship using Allport's

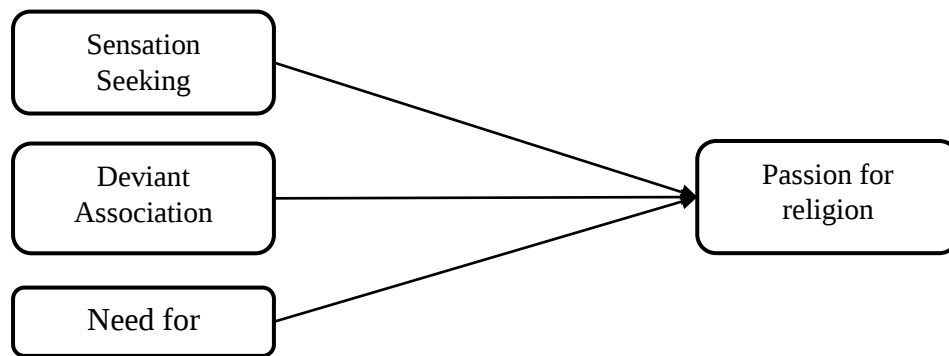
Religious Orientation Scale and Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (Hatam, Baranovich, & Fard, 2017). Although research in this area remains limited, some studies indicate that highly sensation-seeking individuals may not adhere closely to traditional or highly intrinsic forms of religiosity. However, other forms of religious expression, such as ritual activities or charismatic worship, can be very emotional and dramatic, which may actually attract sensation seekers (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Therefore, even though sensation seeking is frequently associated with dangerous actions, it may also contribute to religious passion when religion provides novelty, excitement, or even just a sense of belongingness.

Deviant association is a sociological term used that describe a person's affiliation with individuals or groups that are thought to violate social standards or expectations. The person may start exhibiting aberrant attitudes, behavior, and beliefs as a result of this relationship. Social learning theory suggests that individuals internalize behaviors, values, and beliefs through exposure to their social environment, whether close-knit or peripheral (Akers, 1998). People's thoughts and feelings about religion can be influenced by even remote or indirect ties to religious communities. However, deviant affiliations, such as belonging to stigmatized groups like addicts or convicts, might also encourage people to turn to religion as a means of coping with life, finding structure, or finding salvation. Research on people who are imprisoned, for example, has demonstrated that religious participation can provide purpose, aid in adjustment, and even lessen disciplinary issues (Clear & Sumter, 2002; Clear et al., 2000). Similarly, studies on desistance show that religion can give marginalized individuals an opportunity to reconstruct their identities and reestablish connections with society (Maruna, 2001). These findings indicate that, whether through distant or deviant associations, social exposure can cultivate passion for religion.

The concept extensively studied by Kruglanski and colleagues is the need for closure, which refers to an individual's motivation to reach a quick, definitive answer to a question, thereby avoiding ambiguity and uncertainty. It is not a weakness, but rather a proclivity to seek structure and closure in situations, especially when confronted with ambiguity or complexity. Research indicates that individuals with a high need for closure are more attracted to structured belief systems, including fundamentalist religious ideologies, because they offer definitive answers and reduce uncertainty (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). A recent study further demonstrated that the need for closure strengthens identity fusion with religious groups, mediated by religious ideology, thereby consolidating individuals' commitment to religion (Smeekes et al., 2025). According to empirical research, those who have a greater need for closure tend to be more authoritarian, dogmatic, and devoted to strict beliefs (Brandt et al., 2014). This essentially implies that for those who have a strong desire to overcome uncertainty in their lives, religion can serve as an emotional and cognitive anchor. Although the need for closure, social exposure, and sensation seeking have all been examined separately in connection with religion, there hasn't been much research that combines them into a single framework. Previous research has demonstrated that sensation seeking is typically associated with risky behaviors and, in certain situations, with religious orientation (Zuckerman, 1994; Hatam, Baranovich, & Fard, 2017).

Social associations are also important since religious identity can be shaped by social learning from both close and distant relationships (Akers, 1998). This is particularly true for marginalized populations like prisoners, for whom religion helps in rehabilitation and coping (Clear & Sumter, 2002). Conversely, the need for closure has been repeatedly associated with dogmatism and a greater inclination toward organized belief systems, such as religious fundamentalism (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). These three constructs need for closure, providing the cognitive anchor that keeps religious commitment in place; social relationships, providing the exposure; and sensation seeking, supplying the emotional drive- may actually work in concert. Despite the theoretical promise, empirical work combining these factors remains scarce. Existing studies tend to examine these constructs separately, focusing on sensation seeking in relation to risk and religiosity (Hatam et al., 2017), social association in the context of learning and prison religion (Clear et al., 2000), or need for closure in relation to ideological rigidity and dogmatism (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). The present study seeks to fill that gap by examining whether sensation seeking, deviant associations, and need for cognitive closure jointly predict religious passion.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Hypotheses

1. Sensation seeking, deviant association, and need for closure lead to passion for religion.
2. There is a significant correlation among sensation seeking, deviant association, need for closure, and passion for religion.

II. METHOD

Participants

The population of this study, where we collected data from different locations and different people, i-e, from prisoners, drug addicts, and college students. A total of 354 individuals were involved in the study, and data were collected from four different places. The data collected from people included 33.1% (n=117) prisoners, 13.8% (n=49) drug addicts, 24.9% (n=88) students, and 28.2% (n=100) online participants. Out of all the participants, 79.7% (n=282) were males and 20.3% (n=72) were females. Based on education, 23.4% (n=83) were bachelor's students, 70.6% (n=250) had done FSc, 5.1% (n=18) had done Matric, and 0.8% (n=3) were master's students. Of the participants, 34.7% (n=123) were married and 65.3% (n=231) were unmarried. Of the participants, 105 individuals were prisoners, and only 2.5% (n=9) of the participants mentioned that they had some type of mental illness. The treatment of participants, their anonymity, the acquisition of their free and informed consent, and the maintenance of complete confidentiality were all conducted in accordance with ethical principles. Purposive sampling was used in the study to collect data.

Measures

[I] Sensation Seeking: Sensation seeking was measured using a 6-item sensation-seeking scale developed by Zuckerman et al. (1964). The respondent needs to score on a Likert scale (1 = not agree at all, 7 = very strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha was .58. **[II]** Deviant Association: Deviant association was assessed using an 8-item scale developed by Moyano (2011), the deviant association scale. To check people's association with deviant groups. The scale assessed these substances on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's alpha was .78. **[III]** Need for Closure: The Need for Closure was assessed using a 5-item short version of the Need for Closure Scale developed by Roets and Van Hiel (2011). Respondents needed to answer on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1=not agree at all, 7=very strongly agree). The higher scores mean an extreme need for safe answers and little tolerance for hesitation. The value of Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory. **[IV]** Passion for Religion: Religious passion was measured using the 16-item passion scale developed by Vallerand et al. (2003). It is used to measure two magnitudes: 8 items assess harmonious passion, and 8 items assess obsessive passion. Participants must answer on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's alpha for harmonious passion and obsessive passion were .84 and .79, respectively.

Procedure

In the initial stage, permission was taken from the authorities of the concerned organization or institution. The purposive sampling technique was used to approach students, prisoners, and drug addicts in the second step. In the third step, individuals were provided with a comprehensive explanation, emphasizing the voluntary nature of

their participation and clarifying that no academic credit would be granted as an incentive to participate in the research survey. Questionnaires were distributed to participants and took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Following the conclusion of data collection, all questionnaire responses were collected, entered into SPSS, and subsequently analyzed. SPSS was used to conduct statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were computed based on the sample's characteristics. Regression analyses were used to determine whether sensation seeking, deviant association, and need for closure significantly predicted passion for religion. For this study, the reliability of the scales, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, was satisfactory. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and the participants were informed about the purpose of the current research. No such committee exists at our institute; therefore, all ethical procedures were taken into account throughout the process.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Regression Analysis between Sensation Seeking, Deviant Association, Need for Closure and Passion for Religion

Variables	B	95%CI		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LB	UB				
Constant	49.56	[38.88	60.24]	5.41		.414	.414***
Sensation Seeking	1.07***	[.794	1.35]	.141	.431***		
Deviant Association	-.47***	[-.63	-.32]	.079	-.34***		
Need for Closure	.533***	[.248	.817]	.144	.206***		

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

*** $p < .001$

Table 1 examined the influence of sensation seeking, deviant association, and need for closure on passion for religion. The overall model was significant with $R^2 = .414$, indicating that about 41.4% of the variance in passion for religion is explained by these predictors. Sensation seeking emerged as a strong positive predictor ($B = 1.07$, $\beta = .431$, $p < .001$), showing that individuals with higher sensation-seeking tendencies are significantly more likely to report greater passion for religion. In contrast, deviant association was a negative predictor ($B = -0.47$, $\beta = -0.34$, $p < .001$), suggesting that greater involvement in deviant associations is associated with lower levels of passion for religion. On the other hand, the need for closure ($\beta = .206$) showed a significant effect, indicating that it contributes meaningfully to explaining passion for religion. Overall, sensation seeking was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .431$), while deviant association was a negative predictor ($\beta = -.34$) of passion for religion.

Table II: Evaluation Table of Correlation among Variables of the Study Model (N=354)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Sensation Seeking	21.26	5.18	-	-	-	-	-
Deviant Association	33.14	9.46	-.206**	-	-	-	-
Need for Closure	22.01	4.98	.026	-.009	-	-	-
Passion for Religion	68.23	12.95	.507**	-.435**	.223**	-	-

** $p < .001$

Table 2 shows that sensation seeking ($M = 21.26$, $SD = 5.18$) has a strong positive correlation with passion for religion ($r = .507$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals who score higher on sensation seeking also report higher levels of religious passion. Deviant association ($M = 33.14$, $SD = 9.46$) was negatively associated with passion for religion ($r = -.435$, $p < .01$), suggesting that those with stronger peer influences demonstrated lower levels of religious passion. Need for closure was also positively associated with passion for religion, $r = .223$, $p < .001$, showing that individuals with a higher preference for certainty and structure were more likely to report strong passion for religion. Additionally, sensation seeking was negatively correlated with deviant association ($r = -0.206$, $p < .01$), while no significant correlations were found between sensation seeking and need for closure, or between deviant association and need for closure. Collectively, these findings indicate that passion for religion is most strongly influenced by sensation seeking and deviant association, with need for closure playing a smaller but significant role.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the impact of sensation seeking, deviant association, and need for closure on passion for religion among a diverse sample consisting of students, prisoners, drug addicts, and online participants. The findings demonstrated that whereas deviant association predicted religious passion negatively, sensation seeking and the need for closure both predicted it favorably. This helps us understand how social factors and individual characteristics affect religious passion. Sensation seeking and passion for religion are strongly positively correlated, suggesting that religion can be a way for many people to satisfy their desire for excitement and stimulation. Sensation seekers are drawn to novel, intense, and emotionally charged encounters, according to a prior study (Zuckerman, 2007). That type of stimulation is frequently offered by religious rituals, spiritual practices, and collective worship, which give people experiences that are emotionally captivating and even thrilling (Saroglou, 2011).

The need for closure has also been shown to be a significant predictor of religious passion. Those with high scores on this characteristic typically favor answers that are clear, orderly, and certain (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Religion appears to satisfy that desire by providing unambiguous guidance and lowering uncertainty through its structured doctrines and moral laws. According to prior research, those with a strong need for closure are more likely to turn to religion because it provides stability and helps them cope with ambiguity when making decisions (Saroglou, 2002; Neuberg et al., 2010). In this way, religion serves as a cognitive framework that gives people a sense of stability in the face of uncertainty. Conversely, deviant association was a poor predictor of passion for religion. This demonstrates the importance of social factors in determining religious participation. People can be exposed to different ideals and worldviews that go against traditional religious norms by hanging around with deviant peers. This is consistent with social learning theory, which holds that interacting with deviant groups often leads to the acquisition of deviant attitudes and behaviors (Akers, 2009). Taken together, these results imply that passion for religion encompasses more than just internal spirituality. Rather, it is influenced by social context and psychological demands. While deviant associations can draw people away by promoting conflicting values, those with a strong need for closure may utilize religion for structure and certainty, and sensation seekers may lean toward it because it stimulates them. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research demonstrating how religion satisfies social and personal needs and offers new perspectives on the causes of religious passion.

V. CONCLUSION

The present research highlights the mutual influence of psychological characteristics and social settings on passion for religion. Results specify that sensation seeking and need for closure absolutely predict religious passion, proposing that religion can work as both a basis of inspiration and an agenda for mental conviction. Equally, deviant associations negatively affect religious passion, highlighting the role of social networks in determining adherence to religious standards. By incorporating these predictors, the study advances by examining how personal characteristics and social stimuli interact to increase or decrease religious commitment. These understandings may inform future spiritual research, involvement plans, and community-based plans intended to improve positive religious participation and justify the effects of deviant associations.

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