Antecedents and Perceived Benefits of Religious Conversion—An Exploratory Study within a Protestant Congregation

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Abstract: Religious conversion is a multifaceted phenomenon that has captivated scholars, theologians, and social scientists alike. With the aim of delineating and comprehending the variables associated with personal and social transformation, this paper employed an exploratory quantitative inquiry within a sample of participants affiliated with a Protestant church, chosen for its relevance to analogous experiences within worldwide congregations. The findings present antecedent factors that exert a favorable influence on the conversion process of parishioners, establishing a pronounced correlation between overall satisfaction and perceived benefits observed among regular church attendants. Antecedents to religious conversion are deeply rooted in a complex interplay of personal and social factors. Conversion paths are shaped by existential questioning, crises, or a search for meaning, with key roles played by social factors such as family, peers, and exposure to belief systems through preacher pressure. The benefits of religious conversion are equally multifaceted and can encompass various dimensions of an individual’s life. Spirituality often becomes a source of solace and resilience, helping individuals navigate adversity. On the emotional level, conversion may provide a sense of belonging, inner peace, and a framework for understanding the world and life’s challenges. Adopting a new faith enhances community support and is influenced by cultural and entertainment experiences, contributing to the decision to convert. However, understanding the antecedents and benefits of religious conversion offers valuable insights into the dynamics of faith and human transformation under the global challenges and guidance for religious marketing in the religious postmodern pluralism era. Further research is essential to examine the diverse experiences of religious conversion and their long-term impacts on well-being and societal cohesion, ultimately concluding that it is a multifaceted process influenced by numerous antecedents.

Keywords: religious conversion; antecedents; perceived benefits

1. Introduction

Religious conversion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has intrigued scholars and theologians for centuries. While religious beliefs and practices are often viewed through an individual lens (Graham Rossiter 2010; Nancy T. Ammerman 2020), it is imperative to recognize that religion is fundamentally a social construct (Mugambi 1996; Lynch 2017). In their seminal work “The Social Construction of Reality,” published in 1973 by Petropolis: Voices, Berger and Luckmann articulate the concept of religion as a “social construct of reality,” where, during the social construction of reality, the significance of social roles becomes ingrained in society as cultural knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 2023). An individual’s religious journey is not solely a product of personal choice, but is profoundly shaped by various external influences, such as upbringing, cultural surroundings, and social institutions (McGuire 2008; Sam and Berry 2010; Hjarvard 2011).

Religious conversion represents a significant life-altering event for individuals, often motivated by a profound quest for spiritual connection, a search for life’s meaning, or a...
response to personal crises (Gallup and Jones 2000). It can be triggered by personal revelations (Lund 2002), intellectual exploration (Rambo and Farhadian 1999), or discontentment with existing beliefs (Norris 2003). Family dynamics and upbringing play a pivotal role in shaping one’s initial religious identity, and the support or opposition of the family can either facilitate or impede the conversion process (Carlson et al. 2002; Copen and Silverstein 2008). Friends and religious communities offer a sense of belonging, and a previous paper delved into the antecedents of religious co-community, influencing individuals’ exploration of new religious paths (Todd et al. 2020). Additionally, pastors and preachers serve as guides, mentors, and influential figures in inspiring religious transformation (Carrell 2013).

This paper posits a series of hypotheses that examine the relationships between various factors and religious conversion, including individual experiences (H1), family dynamics (H2), friendships (H3), and pastoral influence (H4). Furthermore, it explores the perceived benefits of religious conversion, ranging from spiritual and emotional fulfillment to developing a sense of community, interfaith understanding, and cultural enrichment. These benefits are crucial in understanding why individuals choose to embrace religious convictions (Py and Pedlowski 2020). In the mentioned work, the authors refer to the Brazilian rural environment and they highlight a nuanced process of conversion to Pentecostalism influenced by factors such as religious proximity among farmers and an understanding of the everyday leadership roles of workers in that environment. The article delves into both the pre-discussion process and the discourse of individuals who have “converted” to rural Pentecostalism.

This paper delves into the antecedents of religious conversion, exploring the intricate interplay of personal, familial, social, and religious factors that lead individuals to embrace new beliefs or affiliations. This study utilized a quantitative research approach, employing a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from members and participants of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania. The choice of this context was strategic, as it aligns with broader Protestant Christian principles, facilitating the generalizability of the findings. This study encompassed a diverse sample of age, gender, educational background, and religious affiliation, offering insights into the factors influencing religious conversion and the perceived benefits of church participation. Data collection from March to September 2022 resulted in 400 complete and valid questionnaires according to the literature specifications.

Thus, religious conversion is a profoundly personal journey influenced by interconnected factors. This research endeavored to unravel the complexities of religious conversion by examining the antecedents and perceived benefits, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of this transformative process.

2. Antecedents of Religious Conversion

While religious beliefs are often discussed individually, it is essential to recognize that religion is fundamentally a social phenomenon. Individuals’ religious beliefs and practices are not solely a result of personal choice but are deeply influenced by their upbringing, cultural surroundings, and the social institutions they are exposed to (Sherkat 2003; Davie 2006; Button et al. 2011). Factors such as self-person, family, friends, and the new church preacher shape and transmit religious values and traditions, ultimately contributing to an individual’s religious identity and worldview (Dudley and Dudley 1986; Héliot et al. 2020).

Sherkat discusses the factors that shape an individual’s religious beliefs and choices, highlighting the importance of religious preferences and their interactions with external social influences in religious decision-making. He emphasizes the distinction between religious preferences and choices of religious affiliation. He underlines that religious socialization is how individuals develop their religious preferences. This process involves various factors and influences contributing to the formation and evolution of an individual’s religious beliefs. Elements such as personal faith regarding the meaning of life, individual perspectives, and the process of religious socialization within family, community, and peer circles collectively contribute to the intricate and multifaceted dynamics involved.
in shaping and developing an individual’s religious beliefs. Religious preferences are subjective beliefs about life’s meaning, purpose, and origins, not empirically provable, correlated with the personal view. They are vital to one’s religious understanding. On the other side, one’s beliefs influence one’s level of religious engagement (Sherkat 2003).

Sociologists have long understood that religion serves social functions and is shaped and reinforced by social interactions (Furseth and Repstad 2017). For example, Simmel argued that faith, which is considered the essence of religion, originates as a relationship between individuals (Simmel 1955). In the paper titled “The Friendship Dynamics of Religion: A Social Network Analysis of Adolescents in Small Schools,” Cheadle and Schwadel depict religion as a catalyst for both group and interpersonal responses, identifying religion as a product of groups. Throughout history, religion has been seen as a product of groups and a source of group and interpersonal connections (Cheadle and Schwadel 2012). This observation is supported by highlighting the role of religious interactions in creating symbols that uphold a sense of group unity, where there is a transformative effect on individuals as their thoughts and emotions are influenced. This process also sparks a yearning for additional religious experiences (Stroope 2011; Cheadle and Schwadel 2012). Furthermore, our prior work, titled “Exploring the influence of religious service characteristic on parishioners’ overall satisfaction in protestant church” delineates a range of factors within religious organizations, encompassing ambiance, the preacher, the message, and the entourage, that impact the participation of members. In this context, we can contemplate competition as a catalyst for delivering high-quality services aimed at satisfying existing members and facilitating the religious conversion of new believers (Pop and Pop 2023).

It is worth mentioning that religious preferences are not static but can change over time. This does not equate religious preferences with the choice of religious affiliation, indicating that someone may have particular beliefs without identifying with a specific religious group (Dudley and Dudley 1986; Sherkat 2003; Petts 2009).

Confronted with heightened competition, churches typically react by enhancing the quality of their services and adeptly addressing specific needs within the religious context. The increasingly competitive environment compels them to pursue excellence and adjust to fulfill the demands and preferences of their congregants and potential members. This dynamic illustrates a market-driven approach to religion, wherein churches strive to become more attractive and pertinent to individuals considering a shift in their religious affiliation or belief (Zaleski and Zech 1995).

Thus, while religious preferences are crucial in religious decision-making, they are not the sole determinants (Figure 1). Social factors are separate from personal beliefs but impact religious decisions (Sherkat 2003).

Personal factors, experiences, or circumstances can influence an individual’s choice to embrace religious convictions or undergo a religious conversion (Chana Ullman 2013). Many individuals embark on a spiritual journey to establish a profound spiritual connection with the Divine, seeking a deeper understanding of life’s purpose and meaning (Krok 2015; Moser 2019). Conversely, others turn to religion during personal crises, seeking solace, comfort, and profound answers to life’s challenges. In certain instances, individuals may recount personal revelations or encounters with the Divine as compelling catalysts for their conversion (Mahoney and Pargament 2004).

Throughout one’s life, personal growth and transformation can be propelled by intellectual curiosity (Siegel 2010). People immerse themselves in religious studies, engage in religious contexts, and participate in philosophical discussions that challenge their pre-existing beliefs. This internal exploration can, over time, prompt individuals to investigate different religious beliefs and practices, ultimately leading to conversion (Stromberg 2008; Ullman 2013; Langston et al. 2019).

In religious conversion involving a transition to a new religious organization, discontent with current beliefs can be a major trigger (Joseph Langston et al. 2019). Experiencing dissatisfaction or a sense of unfulfillment can ignite a quest for alternative spiritual paths. Such
dissatisfaction may arise from a perceived lack of alignment with the teachings, practices, or community of their existing faith (Kahn and Greene 2004; Perez and Vallières 2019).

![Determinants of religious conversion](image)

**Figure 1.** Determinants of religious conversion.

The family can substantially influence or be a prominent precursor in an individual’s religious conversion (Ullman 2013). Factors such as family dynamics, upbringing, and the religious beliefs and practices instilled within the family unit can wield considerable sway over a person’s spiritual voyage and their choice to embrace religious convictions or transition to a different faith (Rambo 1999; Rambo and Farhadian 1999). The individual’s initial religious beliefs often find their roots in the family’s religious background, practices, and traditions, deeply shaping their connection to a particular faith from an early age. Parents and other family members function as exemplars and sources of guidance in matters of faith (Roberto 2007; Roberto 2012). A parent’s unwavering commitment to a specific religion can significantly mold an individual’s religious identity and beliefs (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018).

The family’s response can be decisive regarding an individual’s inclination to convert to a new religion. Supportive families can ease the conversion process, whereas opposition or disapproval may present formidable barriers. In cases where individuals from distinct religious backgrounds enter into matrimony, they may contemplate converting to their partner’s faith or exploring interfaith practices (Carlson et al. 2002; Roberto 2007; Copen and Silverstein 2008; Roberto 2012).

A religious group’s sense of belonging and community can significantly influence religious conversion (Zhang et al. 2019). The desire to become part of a supportive and like-minded community can motivate individuals considering conversion (Levitt 2007). Building relationships with friends who are members of a specific religious community or hold firm religious convictions can profoundly influence an individual’s spiritual journey (Tavares 2013; Ullman 2013). Interactions within such a community can lead to discussions about faith, provoke introspection and questioning, expose individuals to religious customs and practices, and create a sense of inclusion within that religious group. Establishing close friendships with individuals deeply committed to their faith can spark curiosity and encourage exploration of their religious beliefs, offering valuable insights and emotional support (Myers 2000; Pargament 2001). Communities that encourage critical thinking...
may indirectly contribute to an individual’s exploration of various religious alternatives (Davie 2012). Sometimes, friends may actively encourage or extend invitations to participate in religious activities, attend religious services, or engage in religious rituals, further nurturing a person’s interest in the faith (Cheadle and Schwadel 2012).

Pastors and preachers can act as precursors to religious conversion. These spiritual leaders are crucial in guiding individuals on their religious paths and motivating them to explore or strengthen their religious convictions (Troeltsch 1992).

Spiritual leaders, such as pastors and preachers, have the potential to pave the way for religious conversion. They hold pivotal positions in shepherding individuals along their spiritual quests and inspiring them to contemplate adopting or deepening their religious faith (Ogne and Roehl 2008; Sanders 2017). Through their compelling messages, preachers elucidate the principles and beliefs that can kindle a deeper exploration of faith and the consideration of embracing it. Pastors offer individualized spiritual guidance, counseling, and ongoing support to those grappling with questions about faith or experiencing a spiritual awakening (Clements and Clinebell 2013). Spiritual ceremonies, ranging from prayer meetings to evangelism initiatives overseen by pastors, can usher individuals into transformative spiritual encounters that lead to conversion.

As authoritative figures within their congregations, pastors wield significant influence when individuals contemplate embracing the beliefs and practices these spiritual leaders advocate (Anderson 2009; Williams and Cousin 2021). They often serve as living embodiments of their faith’s values and customs and exemplary figures for their congregants (Gill et al. 2018).

In alignment with existing literature, we assert that the decision to convert is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon influenced by a complex interplay of various factors. In the current study, we have considered the following hypotheses:

**H1.** A highly personalized and individualized experience positively impacts religious conversion.

**H2.** The family can exert significant influence in religious conversion.

**H3.** Friendships play a positive role in influencing the religious conversion process.

**H4.** Pastors and preachers, by assuming roles as educators, guides, mentors, and leaders within their religious communities, have a positive influence on religious conversion.

The influence of these antecedents can be profound, assisting individuals in navigating their spiritual journeys and ultimately guiding them in deciding to embrace a specific faith.

### 3. Perceived Benefits of Religious Conversion and Church Participation

The decision to accept or change one’s religious affiliation or belief system is a deeply personal and often profound choice (Pellegrino 2002). People embark on this transformative journey for various reasons, and the perceived benefits can impact their lives on multiple levels, as shown in Figure 2. We explored the perceived benefits of embracing religion, focusing on personal and social dimensions.

Many individuals comprehending a religious conversion report a heightened sense of personal fulfillment. They may find that their beliefs resonate deeply with their values and provide a strong sense of purpose in life (Morgan and Farsides 2009). Accepting or changing religion can lead to a closer emotional connection with the Divine (Clarke 2004). Individuals often describe a sense of spiritual awakening and a deeper, more profound faith experience, resulting in increased emotional well-being. The religious conversion path can offer solace and emotional comfort during challenging times. Believers often turn to their faith for guidance, strength, and inner peace (Hjarvard 2011; Kusmawati and Hadi 2020).
The present research proposed to incorporate the emotional benefits embedded in searches for meaning and belonging (Furseth and Repstad 2017) as an outcome of religious conversion and church participation. 

Aligned with the literature, we plead for “perceived spiritual and emotional benefits” as outcomes of religious conversion and church participation. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

**H5.** Perceived spiritual benefits are positively associated with the overall satisfaction of parishioners determined by religious conversion and church participation.

**H6.** Perceived emotional benefits are positively associated with the overall satisfaction of parishioners determined by religious conversion and church participation.

Religious conversion can provide a sense of belonging (social benefits) to the community of like-minded individuals who share similar beliefs, leading to friendships, collaborations, and camaraderie among fellow believers (Wouter Van der Brug et al. 2009). This sense of belonging can lead to stronger social connections and a support system in need (Knut Lundby 2011). To a large extent, faith is developed through involvement with a community of faith and nurtured within a network of relationships with other believers. Past studies have found that the ability to make friends within a church is an attractive feature of church services (Olson 1989) and that recruitment of new church members is based on the friendship networks of the church’s current members (Stark and Bainbridge 2020).
Religious conversion’s cultural benefits lead individuals to seek cultural and entertainment activities. On this basis, faith can provide a moral and ethical framework for decision-making and a principled life. The sense of belonging to a particular cultural group’s cultural identity can be tied to religious conversion. The examination of religion should take into account that both individual faith and the collective religious imagination are shaped and sustained by a sequence of experiences and representations that might not necessarily have a strong connection, or may have only a limited connection, with established institutional religions (Hjarvard 2008). Religious conversion often involves exposure to cultural practices, rituals, and traditions. This diversity can enrich one’s life with new experiences, broadening their cultural and intellectual horizons (Hoover 2006). Exploring religious paths can stimulate intellectual curiosity and encourage lifelong learning. Believers may engage in theological studies, discussions, and philosophical debates within their new faith community. Many religious traditions involve cultural celebrations, festivals, and events. Conversion can provide opportunities to participate in these enriching cultural experiences and celebrations (Wardekker and Miedema 2001).

Consistent with the literature, this study proposes that perceived social and cultural benefits are positively associated with religious conversion and church participation, leading to the hypothesis:

**H7.** Perceived social benefits are positively associated with the overall satisfaction of parishioners determined by religious conversion and church participation.

**H8.** Perceived cultural benefits are positively associated with the overall satisfaction of parishioners determined by religious conversion and church participation.

The decision to embrace religious beliefs and faith can bring about various perceived benefits. From spiritual resonance and emotional fulfillment to a sense of community, interfaith understanding, and cultural enrichment, individuals who embark on this transformative journey often find their lives enriched in numerous ways (Hertog 2010; Lartey 2013; Race 2013). Ultimately, the perceived benefits of religious conversion reflect this profound choice’s deeply personal and multifaceted nature.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Antecedents of Religious Conversion to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania

During the study, participants were allowed to elucidate the impact of response choices on their determination to engage in the religious community of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Essentially, this encompassed their deliberations regarding membership in the aforementioned religious institution. This research examined the influences emanating from the self, their familial ties, social network (comprising friends), and the pastoral guidance received. Respondents were tasked with assessing and quantifying the relative strength of influence attributed to these four factors, employing a numerical scale ranging from 0 to 100.

The maximum self-influence quota was 50 (16%), and a high level of self-influence was observed with quotas of 30 (12%), 70 (13%), and 80 (12%) (Figure 3). Positive experiences and a good understanding of the doctrine can highly influence the self-decision, according to Lund 2002 (Lund 2002). Approximately 9% of participants reported being uninfluenced by external factors, as can be seen in Figure 3. Notably, the majority, constituting 52.6% of the sample, fell within the influence range of 0 to 50, suggesting that religious conversion is primarily determined by an interplay of individuals’ personal beliefs alongside other contributing factors. An in-depth examination of the participants’ backgrounds, particularly those who underwent the conversion process, revealed a substantial impact of personal
factors. Specifically, a quota of 30 (50%), quota of 50 (37%), and quota of 100 (75%) were reported among individuals originating from the Orthodox Church. This underscores the authenticity of personal experiences that drive religious and communal transformations within this subgroup, a fact sustained by the literature (Kahn and Greene 2004; Stromberg 2008; Ullman 2013).

![Figure 3](image_url)

**Figure 3.** Self-influence on religious conversion.

A quota of 30 (17%) denoted the highest level of familial influence. Notably, a substantial family influence was also evident, with quotas of 0 (16%), 20 (16%), and 50 (14%) being reported (Figure 4). Only 16% of participants indicated no influence from their families in their religious conversion process. Within the sample, the predominant influence range was between 0 to 50, encompassing 92.8% of respondents, suggesting a moderate level of family influence on individuals’ decisions regarding religious conversion. However, a distinctive pattern emerged among individuals who did not have prior religious affiliations before embracing Seventh-day Adventism. In this subgroup, education and family influence played a pivotal role, with a quota of 40 (73%) and 50 (65%), signifying their maximum implication in the conversion process. Specifically, a quota of 10 (45%) was reported among individuals originating from the Orthodox Church.

![Figure 4](image_url)

**Figure 4.** Family influence on religious conversion.
Sustaining the enduring influence of parents and the family on nurturing conversion and faith adherence remains a pivotal aspect of spiritual upbringing in the younger generations (Roberto 2012). This ongoing guidance and support provided by parents and the family unit play a fundamental role in shaping an individual’s religious beliefs, values, and practices. It involves instilling moral values, introducing them to religious teachings, and fostering a sense of community within certain beliefs (Thornton 1985). The family serves as a foundational source of inspiration, guidance, and spiritual growth, ensuring that the faith continues to thrive in the hearts and minds of the youth (Roberto 2007, 2012). Because of the psycho-social processes involved in the development of conversion, it is important to recognize that religious beliefs and practices originating from unstable family backgrounds may significantly differ from those nurtured within stable catechesis (Wiramuda 2018).

The utmost degree of influence originating from friends was represented by a quota of 0 (37%). A substantial level of influence from friends was also observed, with quotas of 5 (14%) and 10 (26%), as seen in Figure 5. Notably, the influence exerted by friends remained below the threshold of quota 70. The prevalence of responses falling within the range of 0 to 20, encompassing 90.7% of the sample, underscores that the influence of friends does not wield a determinative impact on an individual’s process of religious conversion. Specifically, a quota of 5 (23%) and a quota of 10 (25%) were reported among individuals originating from the Orthodox Church. In the realm of Smilde’s (2005) work, the influence of friends on individual religious conversion is substantial when contrasted with the impact of social pressure to conform to family members’ beliefs (David Smilde 2005). Lim and Putnam’s (2010) study on religious conversion emphasizes that individuals who regularly attend religious services and establish social networks within their congregations experience heightened life satisfaction, particularly among those with a strong religious identity (Lim and Putnam 2010). Furthermore, Cheadle and Schwadel’s (2012) perspective underscores the interconnectedness of religion and social relationships, highlighting the role of friends and social networks in shaping an individual’s religious journey and decisions related to beliefs and religious conversion. This perspective emphasizes the imperative nature of considering the social dimension in the examination of religious conversion (Cheadle and Schwadel 2012). In conclusion, the collective evidence suggests that, amidst the diverse influences deliberated upon, friends contribute to the conversion process but do not hold a definitive role in shaping the process.

![Figure 5. Friends’ influence on religious conversion.](image)

The pastor’s maximum influence is indicated by a quota of 0 (40%). Notably, there are substantial levels of influence from the pastor, as reflected in quotas of 5 (13%) and 10 (27%),
as seen in Figure 6. However, it is important to note that the pastor’s influence remains below the threshold of quota 30. The entire spectrum of responses, ranging from 0 to 30, encompassing 100% of the sample, underscores the near-insignificant impact of the pastor on an individual’s decision-making process regarding religious conversion. However, a quota of 30 (70%) was reported among individuals originating from the Orthodox Church. For individuals undergoing religious conversion from the traditional Orthodox environment to a Protestant congregation, affiliation and the relationship with the new church’s pastor become significant (Gallagher and Newton 2009; Slagle 2011). Consequently, these elements become a source of information and the doctrinal link supporting the parishioners’ journey (Sargeant 2000).

Figure 6. Preacher influence on religious conversion.

Upon conducting a concurrent analysis of the four variables, a prevailing trend emerged wherein the influence of the individual significantly outweighed that of other factors. Within this hierarchy, familial impact, notably among individuals from Adventist backgrounds, registered as moderately impactful, similar to other religions (Thornton 1985; Roberto 2012). Conversely, for most respondents, the decision regarding religious engagement appeared to be minimally swayed by the influence of friends, pastors, or priests. Consequently, the overarching inference gleaned from this graphical examination underscores the selection of religious affiliation and alterations in consumption patterns, with limited external influence from family and friends. Individuals play a crucial role in shaping their religious identity and overall pattern of choices and behaviors, implying a sense of independence and self-determination. The overarching implication is that, according to the literature, personal autonomy appears to be a significant factor in the dynamics of religious choice and consumption patterns, with individual decisions taking precedence over external influences (Stromberg 2008; Ullman 2013). To empirically substantiate the unidimensional interpretations derived from this analysis, this study further examined the correlations between the scrutinized variables and an individual’s choice to undergo adult baptism and attain membership within the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Table 1).
Table 1. The demographic composition of the interviewed sample.

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<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0.1932</td>
<td>Preacher</td>
<td>0.2330</td>
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Analysis 1—“Self” Variable:
Model Fitness: The multiple R (correlation coefficient) value of 0.4838 indicates a robust and positive relationship between the independent variable “Self” and the dependent variable (individual decision to become a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church), signifying a substantial and meaningful connection.
Statistical Significance: The coefficient for “Self” is 0.4838, with a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating the high statistical significance of the “Self” variable in predicting the dependent variable.

Analysis 2—“Family” Variable:
Model Fitness: The multiple R value of 0.3483 signifies a moderate and positive relationship between the independent variable “Family” and the dependent variable (individual decision to become a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church), indicating a meaningful connection.
Statistical Significance: The coefficient for “Family” is 0.3483, with a p-value of 0.000, highlighting the high statistical significance of the “Family” variable in predicting the dependent variable.

Analysis 3—“Friends” Variable:
Model Fitness: The multiple R value of 0.1932 suggests a relatively weak positive relationship between the independent variable “Friends” and the dependent variable (parishioner’s decision to baptize in the church), indicating a modest connection.
Statistical Significance: The coefficient for “Friends” is 0.1932, with a p-value of 0.001, confirming the statistical significance of the “Friends” variable in predicting the dependent variable.

Analysis 4—“Preacher” Variable:
Model Fitness: The multiple R value of 0.2330 indicates a relatively weak positive relationship between the independent variable “Preacher” and the dependent variable (parishioner’s decision to baptize in the church), suggesting a modest connection.
Statistical Significance: The coefficient for “Preacher” is 0.2330, with a p-value of 0.000, emphasizing the high statistical significance of the “Preacher” variable in predicting the dependent variable.

Sample Size: Each model is based on a sample of 400 observations, providing a substantial dataset for analysis.

Each analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The level of significance and the strength of the relationships
varied. Still, in each case, the independent variable was highly significant in predicting the dependent variable, and the model established a meaningful association between them.

As per the scholarly literature, time assumes a pivotal role as a fundamental and interdependent variable in an individual’s deliberation of religious conversion, organizational transition within their religious affiliation, and the acceptance of a new belief system (Dégremont 2010; van Benthem and Smets 2015). Consequently, this research sought to ascertain the associations between the determinants influencing the choice of religious conversion and the temporal duration leading to the culmination of this conversion, manifested through the act of baptism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The primary objective underlying this conceptual framework was to temporally restrict the extent of influence exerted by the antecedent factors under scrutiny on the spiritual journey undertaken by congregants.

A noteworthy observation is that a quarter of the individuals who underwent religious conversion (25%) accomplished their commitment through baptism in under one year. The factors influencing the decision to undergo baptism within the initial six months of participation, as opposed to a more protracted period for others, are discernible through the analysis depicted in the accompanying graph. This scrutiny of the correlation between the duration of participation leading to religious conversion and the antecedent factors yielded a hierarchy of influences. Notably, decisions grounded in the human–divine relationship exhibited a marked prevalence across all time intervals on the X-axis of Figure 7. This trend escalated notably within the 1–3 years timeframe, culminating at its zenith (65) in the third year of participation. Additionally, a direct correlation existed between the influences stemming from the individual’s own volition and those stemming from familial influence. Both exhibited a decline during the initial year, followed by a gradual ascent, with familial influence reaching its zenith at ten years.

![Figure 7](image_url)

**Figure 7.** The antecedents of religious conversation correlated with the time gap leading to the baptism decision (* low intensity (p-value 0.0–0.3), **—medium intensity (p-value 0.3–0.7)).

Conversely, the influence exerted by pastors and friends intensified within the first year of participation but subsequently stabilized at a consistently low level. The ultimate inference drawn from this analysis is that individuals predominantly opt for religious conversion or affiliation with a specific religious denomination driven by their volition. It is
worth noting that friends and pastors do wield influence, particularly among those who undergo baptism within the initial year of participation. Baptism involves an institutional transition and may show changes in a person if the religious conversion already occurred. The impact on personal functioning during conversion is contingent upon the novelty of the new religion to the individual and their adaptation to it (van Benthem and Smets 2015).

4.2. Perceived Benefits of Religious Conversion and Church Participation in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania

In delineating perceived benefits, the respondents characterized their religious life as an interplay between their relationship with divinity and the church as an institution, encompassing the activities conducted within this religious framework. An analysis performed on a 100-point scale as part of this study revealed that 26% of respondents attributed a sense of purpose to their participation in their divine relationship. In comparison, in 74% of instances, individuals reported experiencing emotions such as love, a sense of belonging, and devotion. Moreover, more than half of the surveyed members associated the church with fostering friendships and camaraderie among fellow parishioners. Lastly, only 34% acknowledged the cultural advantages stemming from their engagement in liturgical services. By drawing comparisons across these four categories, it becomes evident that the prevailing perception among most of the sampled population is that the church primarily embodies a realm of interpersonal emotions and relationships.

As per the scholarly literature, time assumes a pivotal role as a fundamental and interdependent variable in an individual’s deliberation of religious conversion, organizational transition within their religious affiliation, and the acceptance of a new belief system (Dégremont 2010). The bidirectional analysis of the perceived benefits and the actual duration of participation in religious services within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church offers a unique perspective on the process of individuals joining and integrating into this religious community (Figure 8).

![Figure 8. The perceived advantages experienced by adherents relative to their tenure within the religious congregation. (M—month; Y—year).](image-url)

Through a comprehensive examination of Table 2, it becomes evident that the primary motivation for the individuals interviewed to attend the religious services of the church in their initial six months was their perception of the Divine presence in this setting. Remarkably, church activities exerted no discernible influence on the participation of these individuals during this timeframe. In the subsequent phase (6 months–1 year) of their spiritual journey, emotions significantly shaped the behavior and attitudes of the participants.
They were influenced by a sense of belonging, the imperative of formalizing a covenant through baptism, and the desire to propagate the evangelical message actively. Concurrently, during the first three years of participation, relationships with more established participants were developed. The latter group plays a pivotal role in intensifying newcomers’ camaraderie, belonging, and wholehearted dedication. Following the accumulation of emotions, educational experiences, and increased fellowship during the initial three years of participation, the respondents reverted to a sense of affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They formalized a covenant to solidify this commitment.

Table 2. Perceived benefits over lifetime church participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Benefits</th>
<th>&lt;6 Months</th>
<th>6 M–1 Year</th>
<th>1–3 Years</th>
<th>&gt;3 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The complete analysis was further contextualized by considering its correlation with the overall satisfaction level of the respondents, which was measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (Pop and Pop 2023). As described in our previous study, the research framework was developed through an exhaustive literature review, with hypotheses formulated by adapting the ServQual conceptual model to the unique context of religious congregations, focusing on the Five Pillars (Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Empathy). The investigation sought to evaluate the impact of religious services on member satisfaction within the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania, Europe, selected for its shared expectations with other global Protestant churches. The study’s findings revealed sixteen factors that significantly and positively influenced the overall satisfaction of churchgoers, with notable differences in overall satisfaction among parishioners based on controlling factors related to dimensions of religious services (Pop and Pop 2023). Notably, more than 90% of the respondents expressed high satisfaction.

Model Fitness: The multiple R (correlation coefficient) values indicate the degree of association between each model’s independent and dependent variables (Table 3). In the first two models, the multiple R values of 0.3965 and 0.3174 signify a moderate positive relationship between the “Spiritual benefits” and “Emotional benefits” and the overall satisfaction of churchgoers, suggesting a meaningful connection between these variables. In the third and fourth models, the multiple R values of 0.1664 and 0.1869 show a weaker positive relationship between the “Social benefits” and “Cultural benefits” and the overall satisfaction, indicating a modest connection.

Standard Error: The standard error reflects the degree to which observed values deviate from the model’s predictions. In all models, lower standard errors (0.5774, 0.6169, 0.6202, and 0.6277) suggest more accurate predictions.

Sample Size: Each model is based on a sample of 400 observations, providing a substantial dataset for analysis.

Statistical Significance: The statistical significance of the model’s components was assessed through the coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. The intercepts were highly statistically significant in all models, with p-values of 0.0000–1.

In the first model, the “Spiritual benefits” coefficient is 0.5429, with a highly significant t-statistic of 8.6170 and a p-value of 0.000. This reveals a strong positive relationship between “Spiritual benefits” and overall satisfaction. In the second model, the coefficient for “Emotional benefits” is 0.2830, with a t-statistic of 3.9589 and a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a positive but light relationship with the churchgoer’s satisfaction. The third model reveals that the coefficient for “Social benefits” is 0.2162, with a statistically significant t-statistic of 6.67679 and a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a positive relationship between “Social benefits”
and overall satisfaction. Finally, in the fourth model, the coefficient for “Cultural benefits” is 0.0849, with a t-statistic of 3.7950 and a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a positive undersized relationship with overall satisfaction. The regression analysis confirmed the statistical significance of the relationships between the independent variables (Spiritual, Emotional, Social and Cultural benefits) and the dependent variable (Overall satisfaction) in their respective models.

### Table 3. The perceived benefits of religious conversion and church participation—regression statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Statistics</th>
<th>Regression Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple R</td>
<td>0.3965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
<td>0.1572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>0.5774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance F</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>t Stat</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.2143</td>
<td>13.9834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual benefits</td>
<td>0.5429</td>
<td>8.6170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Statistics</th>
<th>Regression Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple R</td>
<td>0.1664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
<td>0.0277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>0.6202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance F</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>t Stat</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.5676</td>
<td>14.3569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Benefits</td>
<td>0.2162</td>
<td>6.6769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the family influence on religious change, individuals often perceive their church as an extension of their family, drawing from personal histories and the familial bonds forged within the church community. This sentiment is not solely rooted in attending services with biological family members but is also shaped by forming deep connections with fellow congregants (Carlson et al. 2002; Copen and Silverstein 2008; Roberto 2012). The alignment of family and church practices, including aspects related to gender dynamics, reinforces this sense of kinship (Copen and Silverstein 2008). Members, irrespective of gender, narrate their experiences of belonging through the lens of ‘church as a family,’ fostering a profound sense of community within the church context. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these experiences can be influenced by race and class, revealing the intricate interplay of identities (Sharma 2012). This underscores the fluidity of family practices and spaces, extending beyond conventional boundaries and impacting individuals’ religious affiliations. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the connection between ‘doing family’ and ‘doing church’ in the dynamics of religious change (Thornton 1985; Sharma 2012).

### 5. Research Methodology

The general hypothesis for the present study is centered around factors that influence religious conversion and the benefits associated with church attendance and member participation. H1–H4 reflects variables such as self, family, friends, and pastor that have a positive and significant impact on the religious conversion of individuals. H5–H8 indicates the perceived benefits strongly and positively associated with churchgoers’ participation and overall satisfaction (Figure 9).
Upon examining factors that may impact the selection of a sampling method, our conclusion is that conducting an immediate inquiry is the most favorable solution (Rose L. Johnson et al. 1995). We designed a questionnaire aimed at gathering information to address the proposed hypothesis. Utilizing face-to-face surveys, we engaged with interviewees to acquire high-quality data. The structured questionnaire was derived from previous research that employed the ServQual model as a fundamental framework, as described in our previous work (Pop and Pop 2023). Briefly, the document comprises 28 questions, including three filters, five identification questions, and the remaining questions focused on assessing the impact of various factors on religious conversion, parishioner satisfaction with religious services, consumption behavior, and the perceived benefits for churchgoers. The survey employs a 5-point scale for importance and satisfaction, with 1 indicating the most important or most satisfied and 5 indicating the least important or satisfied (Mulyanegara 2011).

To assess the impact of various factors on spiritual conversion and the perceived benefits related to satisfaction, the authors conducted an explorative quantitative study among members and participants of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania. The selection criteria for this study were strategically aligned with the church’s aspirations and mirrored those of Protestant Churches worldwide. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania shares fundamental theological and doctrinal foundations with Protestant Churches globally, providing a cohesive belief system that creates an ideal research context. This coherence allows for the potential generalization of the findings of this study to a broader Protestant context (Saunders 1999; Wrenn et al. 1995).

This study employed an investigative approach utilizing a self-administered questionnaire as the primary research instrument. Invitations to participate were directly distributed by the authors within various church settings and the survey was completed by Romanian residents attending a Seventh-Day Adventist Church service at the time of the investigation. Data collection from March to September 2022 resulted in 400 complete and valid questionnaires according to literature specifications. From nearly 500 collected questionnaires, those with missing data were excluded. As outlined in Table 4, the sampled participants included members and attendees of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania, encompassing individuals with diverse religious and doctrinal backgrounds. Most respondents were Seventh-Day Adventist Church members (92%), with a significant portion coming from Adventist families (64%) and an average conversion time to Adventism exceeding 10 years for 48% of the respondents.
Table 4. The demographic composition of the interviewed sample (Pop and Pop 2023).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Up to 30 years</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 to 40 years</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41 to 60 years</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master and above</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-members</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members status background</td>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-members status background</td>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members’ average conversion time</td>
<td>less than 6 months</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 to 12 months</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 to 10 years</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more than 10 years</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately one-third of the respondents were former Orthodox Christians, a result aligned with expectations given that nearly 74% of Romania’s population identifies as Orthodox based on the 2021 census data [Statistica, I.N.S., Rezultate definitive ale Recensământului Populației și al Locuințelor—2021 (caracteristici etno-culturale demografice ale populației), 2021]. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Romania operates within an Orthodox environment, reflecting the broader religious landscape of the country. This study focused on larger congregations to ensure a sample representative of the distribution of Seventh-Day Adventist Church members by age and gender, with 59% female and 41% male respondents, and an average age between 40 and 50. Furthermore, 41% of participants reported having an intermediate level of education, while the remainder declared a high university level (Pop and Pop 2023).

6. Conclusions

Religious conversion represents a multifaceted and personalized journey shaped by many factors. While the family, friends, and pastor can wield substantial or limited influences in religious conversion, individuals possess autonomy and personal experiences that also contribute to their decision-making process.

The examination of self-influence revealed its significance in religious conversion, notably among those from Orthodox backgrounds joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, highlighting the substantial impact of personal beliefs and experiences. Family influence, initially moderate for those without religious affiliations, gained significance with longer participation, suggesting growing importance in the religious community. In contrast, friends and pastors exerted low and generally insignificant influences on conversion decisions. Overall, personal beliefs (self-influence) were the primary determinant, followed by family influence for some individuals, with friends and pastors having limited impact. Regression analysis confirmed the statistical significance of self and family influences in predicting conversion decisions.

Choosing to adopt religious beliefs and faith yielded various perceived benefits, including spiritual resonance, emotional fulfillment, community, interfaith understanding,
and cultural enrichment. In the early stages of church participation, spiritual benefits, driven by the sense of the Divine presence, primarily motivated parishioners. Emotional benefits, such as belonging and devotion, became significant within the first year, influencing behavior. Social benefits, like relationships and camaraderie, grew in importance over the initial three years, while cultural benefits, though acknowledged, were less prominent than emotional and social aspects.

Regression analysis validated the high statistical significance of spiritual and emotional benefits (H5/H6) in predicting overall churchgoer satisfaction. Social and cultural benefits (H7/H8) also showed significance, though to a lesser extent. Most respondents expressed high satisfaction with their church experience, positively associated with spiritual and emotional benefits. This study underscores the central role of individual beliefs and experiences (self-influence) in Romanian Seventh-day Adventist Church conversion, emphasizing the importance of spiritual and emotional benefits in shaping perceptions and overall satisfaction. Additionally, family influence and relationships with other church members gained prominence with increased time in the religious community, offering valuable insights into the dynamics and perceived benefits of religious conversion in this context.


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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The research data are available from the first author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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