



Pilgrimage Tourism in Tamil Nadu: A Research on Tourist Attitudes and Motivations for Revisit Intention

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ABSTRACT

Finding the motivational factors and examining their influence on pilgrims' behavioural intentions at Heritage temples, one of the most well-known Buddhist holy places in India, is the aim of this study. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify religious motivational items based on prior research in order to accomplish this goal. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the three-component model that the EFA produced. Religious belief, service quality, and the history, architecture, and cultural features of religious institutions were the religious motivational variables that were found. Structural equation modelling was used to further explore the role of these motivating elements and their impact on behavioural intention. According to the study's findings, religious belief is the second most important motivating element influencing religious tourists' behavioural intentions at Heritage temples, after service quality. However, tourists' behavioural intentions were not significantly impacted by the heritage temples' history, architecture, or cultural features. According to the report, service providers at this location should focus more on improving the quality of their offerings.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism, Tourist Attitudes, Religious Belief, Service Quality

JEL Classifications: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

Millions of people participate in pilgrimages worldwide (Blackwell, 2007; Swatos and Tomasi, 2002), which are the fundamental forms of human migration and are found in all major world religions (Collins, 2018). People who travel to holy locations are called pilgrims, and their trip is called a pilgrimage. The epic Mahabharata (350 BC), which lists over 300 sacred locations in this subcontinent, describes pilgrimage events in India dating back to the Vedic era (Verma and Sarangi 2019). The majority of India's pilgrimage sites are found on hills or along riverbanks. The Himalayan pilgrimage sites see a significant number of pilgrims and tourists each year. In India, religious pilgrimages are a long-standing tradition (Mishra and Pal, 2009). Examples of popular pilgrimage sites in the Indian subcontinent include the temples of Vaishno Devi, Konark Sun, Golden, Puri Jagannath, Tirumala

Tirupati, Ajmer Sharif, Sabarimala, Velankanni, Amarnath cave, Varanasi, and Palani (Singh, 2014).

The practice of pilgrimage has a long history and is present in most major world religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. "A journey to a distant sacred goal" is its definition (Barber, 1993). There is also a lengthy history of travel. The word "traveler," derived from the Latin "tornus," describes a person who embarks on a circumlocutory journey, typically for leisure, and then heads back home. As a socially constructed dichotomy that considers the mental processes of the travellers, the term's current usage recognises the "visitor" as a vacationer and the "pilgrim" as a religious traveler (Smith, 1992).

In the 1990s, interested scholars from a variety of disciplines started studying pilgrimage and other forms of spiritual trips, even though

medievalists and experts in the history of the travel business have long identified pilgrimage and travel as a viable subject of study (Smith, 1992). This was due in part to the fact that pilgrimages, whether traditional and religious or modern and secular, were and now are seeing a comeback worldwide, with individuals seeking meaning travelling to both religious and secular locations (Digance, 2003). There is currently a growing body of research on pilgrimage and religious tourism, with academics examining a number of political, social, behavioural, financial, and geographic topics through the prism of pilgrimage travel. The oldest type of tourism is thought to be religious travel. According to Božić et al. (2016), people go to sacred places for a variety of reasons, from entertainment and travel to seeking supernatural power, healing, and blessings. The number of publications, book chapters, and journal articles about the connections between pilgrimage and tourism has significantly increased (Digance, 2003; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Pilgrimage as a research topic was rare before the 1990s, and the practice was viewed as a small commercial niche. But the roots of its research can be found in ideas and theories that were mostly created by anthropologists and sociologists. The “visitor experience” and the psychosocial dynamics that support different types of tourism, including pilgrimage, were the main topics of the 1970s and 1980s tourism literature. Smith’s continuum of travel from “pilgrim” as a religious traveler to “tourist” as a vacationer (Smith, 1992), the heterogeneity of pilgrimage and pilgrimage as a forum for competing for religious and secular discourses (Eade and Sallnow, 2000), the two different types of pilgrimage centers—formal and informal (Cohen, 1998), and the intricate relationship between tourism and pilgrimage are just a few of the new ideas and concepts that were introduced into pilgrimage research in the 1990s.

Nowadays, the word “pilgrimage” only denotes a religious journey. The term “pilgrimage” is sometimes used in a variety of secular contexts, such as visits to war graves or the homes and tombs of well-known individuals. Elvis Presley’s Memphis mansion and tomb (Alderman, 2012) or visits to cemeteries, churchyards, and funerary sites both religious and secular are a couple of examples. The growing business sector for “New Age” spiritual travel for pilgrimages, self-awareness, and unconventional spiritual activities has begun to be examined by researchers. The search for the miraculous is a feature shared by contemporary secular pilgrimages, and this alludes to the expanding measures of exploration dedicated to modern secular pilgrimages (Digance, 2003).

The current study defined three motivational factors—religious belief, service quality, and destination culture—and examined their impact on the behavioural intention of Buddhist visitors at Heritage temples in order to accomplish the aforementioned goal. In general, the behaviour of tourists relates to the conduct that people display while they use any kind of product or service. There are probably a number of variables influencing this behaviour. It also includes the consumer’s search, assessment, purchase, and further purchases of goods or services. Studying the motivations and actions of tourists from the perspective of destination marketing is therefore crucial. Understanding how tourists act as individuals or in groups, as well as how they choose, pay for, and

tell their peers about their experiences, is essential. The research study’s findings will assist travel industry marketers in targeting a certain demographic with their goods and services. In order to comprehend the role of motivational factors for tourists in Tamil Nadu, this study adopts the behavioural intention of tourists as a dependent variable.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is necessary to distinguish pilgrimage from other leisure activities in order to understand its connection to tourism. The phrase “pilgrimage tourist” is frequently used to describe individuals who combine pilgrimage with tourism. In places where they may discover, experience, participate in, learn about, and integrate into everyday life, visitors are becoming more and more engaged in these activities. Pilgrimage tourists become fully involved in the daily life and culture of the nations they visit. The majority of pilgrims experience a brief (or occasionally long-lasting) change in perspective on life and their relationship with God and the sacred. (Pavicic et al., 2007). Customers’ interests have become a new focal point with the introduction and growing use of the World Wide Web, particularly in the tourism and hospitality services sector, where customers or tourists trust websites with reviews more than expert guides, travel agencies, and even blogs (Choe et al., 2017).

These reviews, also known as UGC (User Generated Contents), are a source of digital word-of-mouth that may influence travel decisions. UGC is a type of big data and physical footprint that can be used to synthesise temporal effects in tourist mobility via a static network scanning and spatial interaction model at the accumulative level (Gretzel, 2020). By including high frequency online review data into a typical time series model, tourism demand forecasting utilising visitor-generated online review data can significantly improve forecasting performance, outperforming other completing models (Hu et al., 2022).

A group of researchers claims that the more established literacy studies (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011) are distinct from the literacy studies for online content, which again introduce a digital turn (Mills, 2010). Additionally, research is increasingly examining language online and the associated “digital literacies”. The current UGC research, according to Lu and Stepchenkova (2015), is mostly focused on applications that highlight the different facets of service quality, destination image and reputation, experiences and behaviour, the persuasive power of UGC as eWOM, and visitor mobility patterns.

The use of user-generated content (UGC) to understand the tourist experience has a number of difficulties, including the fact that users’ reasons for contributing data are unclear and that they only account for a small portion of all visitors. One of the few studies that looks into how consumers utilise websites with user-generated content (UGC) and how they affect their information search and travel behaviour. However, they discovered that different websites have variable levels of credibility. Four elements make up a tourist destination. Attractions, accessibility, amenities, and auxiliary services (tourism-related institutions and human resources) (Han et al., 2018).

Internet access, self-check-in kiosks, light and sound facilities, shows, the effect of niche tourism on genuine cultural heritage and also on all stakeholders, the level of resident participation, etc., are all areas of services and development issues that Skinner and Soomers (2019) further advocates for in order to provide visitors with a high-quality cultural, transformative, and spiritual experience. Furthermore, management is crucial in pilgrimage tourism due to the large potential of pilgrims and visitors motivated by religious convictions (Raj and Griffin, 2015). A safe and comfortable pilgrimage that includes adequate food, lodging, and other important amenities requires competent management in this sector.

Although pilgrimage sites are linked to significant heritage values in fostering a sense of national and shared cultural identity, the enormously destructive tourism phenomenon over pilgrimage sites is another reason to manage pilgrimage tourism (Zulzilah et al., 2019). With all of these management and development concerns in mind, one of the important measurements is service quality measurement, which analyses customer happiness and experience, frequently using a multifaceted approach (Ghotbabadi et al., 2015).

Previous Buddhist tourism literature has focused on temple management awareness. However, there has been little to no attention paid to the relationship between motivational factors and tourist behavioural intention at heritage temples (Moulin and Boniface 2001). Therefore, this case study aims to bridge this gap by combining case study techniques with a quantitative survey. This approach is used in sociological study to understand the behaviour of individuals, organisations, events, and groups. Case studies that employ cross-level inference have grown in significance in research across a range of fields due to the epistemological shift in recent decades. Case studies can be qualitative or quantitative (Gerring, 2007).

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The Figure 1 gives the conceptual framework for the study.

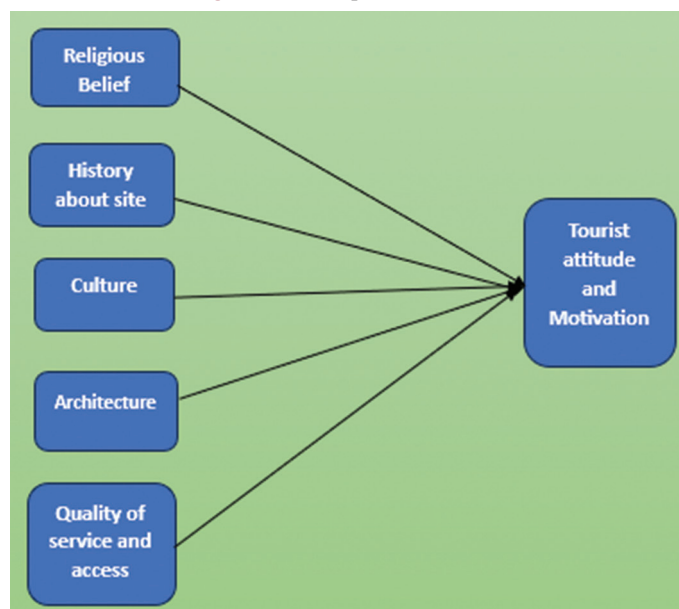
2.2. Hypothesis

1. Religious belief of the tourists has positive relationship with tourist attitude and motivation to revisit the place
2. Culture of the place has positive relationship with tourist attitude and motivation to revisit the place
3. History about site has positive relationship with tourist attitude and motivation to revisit the place
4. Architecture of the place has positive relationship with tourist attitude and motivation to revisit the place
5. Quality of service and access of the place has positive relationship with tourist attitude and motivation to revisit the place

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Despite disagreements over the concept of tourism motivation, Dann's 1977 push-pull theory is frequently utilised and highly recognised in the field of tourism studies. Push factors, also known as intrinsic motivators, are forces that lead travellers to look for activities that satisfy their requirements, such as the need to get

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



away, rest, and relax, to gain prestige, to be healthy and fit, or to satisfy religious beliefs. Pull factors, sometimes known as extrinsic reasons, include contextual elements including the destination's allure (beaches, mountains, rivers, etc.), the temple's architecture, and the holy site's cultural legacy. Push elements are typically thought to be significant in generating travel desires, but pull factors are thought to be more significant when choosing a place (Nalley et al., 2019).

Based on earlier research, the researchers of this study identified 24 motivational items under four constructs to determine the underlying push-pull motivating aspects of religious tourists visiting Heritage temples (Wang et al., 2016). Religious belief, service quality, the temple's cultural legacy, and socialisation are among the elements that have been identified. Five questions taken from the study were used to measure behavioural intention, the dependent variable (Patwardhan et al., 2020). There were two components to the measuring device.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Assessing the validity and hypotheses, as well as frequency analysis and reliability, was the aim of the study of "AMOS structural equation modelling (SEM)" using SPSS-20 and AMOS 24 software.

4.1. Demographic Information

Table 1 displays the demographic features. Of the respondents in the poll that was evaluated, 60% were men and 39.1% were women. The majority of respondents (34.2%) were between the ages of 41 to 50 years, and the majority (34.5%) had postgraduate degrees as their highest level of study.

4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 2 above explains the values of reliability and factor loadings. The alpha value for the construct Intention to revisit is 1 and for

Table 1: Descriptive data

Demo graphs	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)	Valid %	Cumulative %
Education				
Mid school level	90	19.7	19.7	19.7
High school level	79	17.2	17.2	36.9
UG	158	34.2	34.2	71.4
PG	131	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	458	100.0	100.0	
Gender				
Male	279	60.9	60.9	60.9
Female	179	39.1	39.1	100.0
Total	458	100.0	100.0	
Age				
20 to 30 years	90	19.7	19.7	19.7
31 to 40 years	79	17.2	17.2	36.9
41 to 50 years	158	34.2	34.2	71.4
Above 50 years	131	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	458	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Reliability and validity

Constructs	Items	Cronbach Alpha	Factor matrix loading
Religious belief	RB1	0.735	0.752
	RB2		0.814
	RB3		0.802
Heritage	HS1	0.912	0.859
	HS2		0.871
	HS3		0.834
Culture	C1	0.809	0.798
	C2		0.871
	C3		
Architecture	A1	0.844	0.850
	A2		0.902
	A3		0.857
Quality and satisfaction	QSA1	0.800	0.840
	QSA2		0.853
	QSA3		0.779
Intention to revisit and motivation	TAM1	1.00	1.00
	TAM2		

Quality is 0.840, architecture is 0.850 and for culture is 0.798 and heritage is 0.859 and finally for religious belief is 0.752. The factor loadings for all the items are above 0.750 and thus the items are valid and data collected is reliable.

As the Table 3 shows, the obtained value of KMO is 0.909 which is very closed to '1' i.e. the variables can be considered significant and the P = 0.000 (<0.05).

The SEM (Figure 2) diagram refers to the connection among the variables which are all showing positive.

The degree-of-freedom (dof) is computed (Table 4) and the obtained dof value is 239.

The estimated Chi-square value is 567.121, with dof of 239 and probability as 0.000, (Table 5) which shows that the proposed model is a good-fit.

Table 9-8 shows the modal fit of the study data. RMR (root-mean-square) value is 0.40 and the Chi-square (CMIN/DF) value is

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.909
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	Df
	Sig.
	6756.554
	276
	0.000

Table 4: Computation of degrees of freedom (Default model)

Number of distinct sample moments:	300
Number of distinct parameters to be estimated:	61
Degrees of freedom (595-83):	239

Table 5: Default model's result: Achieved the minimum

Chi-square	567.121
Degrees of freedom =	239
Probability level =	0.000

Table 6: CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	61	567.121	239	0.000	2.373
Saturated model	300	0.000	0		
Independence model	24	6897.260	276	0.000	24.990

Table 7: RMR, GFI

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	0.040	0.900	0.875	0.717
Saturated model	0.000	1.000		
Independence model	0.221	0.256	0.192	0.236

2.373, with a significance P = 0.000. Table below shows that the goodness-fit-index (GFI) value is 0.900, with all of the values falling within the permissible range. NFI (0.918), IFI (0.951), and CFI (0.950) values are displayed in the following Tables.

The results of parsimony adjustment are generally expressed as PNFI in accordance with the normalised fixed index (NFI) value. The obtained PNFI value is 0.795, as indicated in Table 9 above.

Table 11 makes it clear that the model fits well when the index values fall within a reasonable range. The FMIN value is 1.310, as

Figure 2: CFA using SEM

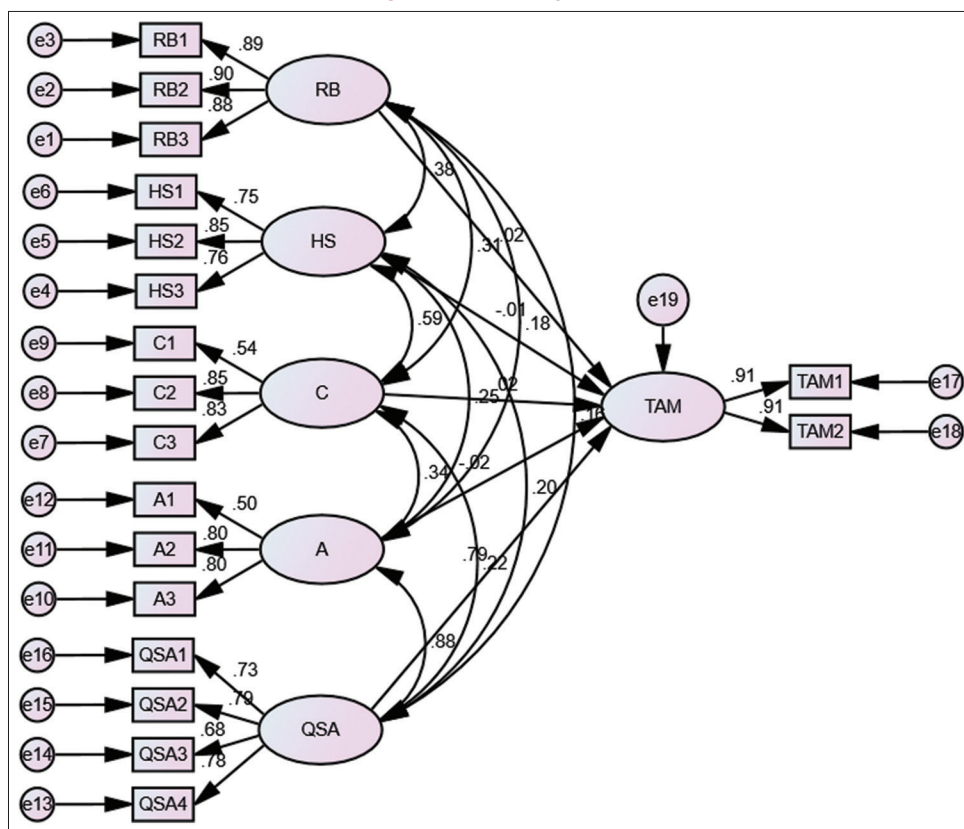


Table 8: Baseline comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	0.918	0.905	0.951	0.943	0.950
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 9: Parsimony-adjusted measures

Model	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI
Default model	0.866	0.795	0.823
Saturated model	0.000	0.000	0.000
Independence model	1.000	0.000	0.000

Table 10: FMIN

Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	1.310	0.758	0.606	0.928
Saturated model	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Independence model	15.929	15.292	14.674	15.924

Table 11: RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	0.056	0.050	0.062	0.041
Independence model	0.235	0.231	0.240	0.000

the table above illustrates. With an RMSEA of 0.056 and a P-close value of 0.000, Table 10 indicates that the model is perfectly fitted.

458 samples were subjected to CFA in order to verify and assess the model fit. CFA was used since it is an essential analytical technique

for many social and behavioural science domains. A researcher can investigate the causal relationship between the latent and observable variables using theory-based models such as this motivation-behavioural intention model. CFA has the advantage of being able to bridge the gap between theory and observation. Furthermore, CFA provides the researcher with valuable insights into how well the data aligns with a theory-driven model. Based on the CFA results, each item was placed onto the relevant concept. Items with factor loading values < 0.6 were removed, including destination management.

A multivariate statistical analytic method called structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to examine the structural relationships between latent constructs and measurable variables. Because it estimates several and connected dependences in a single analysis, the researcher prefers this technique, which combines factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. Endogenous and exogenous variables are the two categories of variables employed in this analysis. The independent variable and dependent variables are equal to endogenous variables.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

India is one of the most visited and pilgrimaged countries in the world and is home to some of the best collections of history, culture, philosophy, tradition, and religion. The Buddhist Circuit is one of the most important religious circuits in India, including stops at Lumbini (birth), Heritage sites (enlightenment), Sarnath (first sermon), and Kushinagar (death). It visits the most significant and beloved pilgrimage locations for both Buddhists and visitors

from other countries. There have been continuous attempts to develop and expand the Buddhist circuit since the introduction of the Action Plan for the Development of Buddhist Circuit in 1986 (Richards 2021).

The goal of investing in the Buddhist Circuit is to enhance the experience of tourists visiting these locations, provide inclusive and sustainable growth, produce revenue and jobs, and provide doors for micro and small businesses. It is clear that the advantages of tourism extend to the local populace, improving their standard of living. Access to these benefits is essential for growth, particularly in states with the highest populations in India, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Religious and spiritual salvation is the main reason pilgrims visit to this location, however other groups of tourists are also drawn to the historical landmarks, monuments, temple architecture, and landscapes that are connected to the religious places (Samarathunga et al., 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the religious and nonreligious motivating elements that affect visitors' behavioural intentions at heritage temples. The twenty-four motivational factors were found in earlier research in order to accomplish this goal. First, EFA was used to examine all 24 items. A three-dimensional model that included religious belief, historical appeal and culture, and service excellence was produced as a consequence of the EFA. The factor structure of the constructs was tested using confirmatory factor analysis. The findings point to a good model fit. Therefore, in order to test the suggested hypotheses, structural equation modelling was done (Santana and Botelho 2019).

Service quality is suggested by the results. The findings imply that the behaviour intention of visitors to heritage temples is significantly predicted by the quality of the services provided. This result is consistent with a study by Canny (2013) that indicates one of the key indicators of religious visitors' behavioural intention is service quality. Tourists anticipate certain services from a holy site, such as parking, accommodations, and accessibility, regardless of their religious reason. In order to improve service quality in Heritage temples, temple authorities must take this fact into account and focus on allocating human resources. The five aspects of service quality that have been defined must also be taken into consideration by the temple officials by Parasuraman et al. (1991). The physical attributes of the buildings, staff, and other items at places of worship are referred to as tangibles. The correctness and dependability of the information supplied by the service staff on the ground are referred to as reliability.

The willingness and promptness of temple officials to assist the devotees is referred to as responsiveness. Assurances pertain to the expertise and civility of temple staff. Lastly, empathy is concerned with showing devotees care and tailored attention. The infrastructure, including parking spaces, lodging, transit, and the calibre of services provided by temple employees, should be the primary focus of the temple administration (Shinde 2020; Medhat et al., 2014). Other attractions at each location, such shopping, religious souvenirs, and the availability of books on the history and culture of the Buddhist circuits, should also be taken into

consideration by authorities. A second important predictor of religious tourism at Heritage temples is religious belief. According to a study by Wang, et al. (2016), Buddhists in China were most motivated by their religious beliefs. In India, religious conviction has become one of the main draws for Buddhist pilgrimages. This result is consistent with a study by Wibowo and Masitoh (2018) that shows visitors' behavioural intentions are significantly shaped by their religious beliefs. In other words, a greater desire to visit a Buddhist location is associated with a higher level of religious belief. The temple officials will benefit from this significant discovery.

Religious leaders from Southeast Asian nations can be invited to a permanent yearly festival, like Buddha Jayanti, that is organised by the concerned temple officials. Additionally, the government can encourage travel agencies to host religious conferences in heritage temples, which are sacred sites for both Buddhism and Hinduism. Both the villagers' quality of life and the site's popularity would increase as a result (Bhonsale, 2019).

Whether a preoccupied spiritual belief and faith have a significant contribution, often exhibit a compromising attitude, and minimise negative perceptions, or whether temple service qualities are responsible for future pilgrimages in Kashi Vishwanath and similar other temples in the circuit, was the topic of this paper. This research used a mixed methodology. Temple service qualities (TEMP SERVQUAL), an extension of the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1991), is used to examine user-generated content (UGC) and reviews based on the total number of reviews obtained from tripadvisors.com for popular pilgrimage sites in the Asian Subcontinent. This study sought to determine whether the majority of negative reviews accurately depicted the Kashi Vishwanath temple and whether the quality of temple services is what drives future pilgrimages to this and other temples in the area, or if a preoccupied spiritual belief and faith play a major role, frequently display a compromising attitude, and minimise negative perceptions. A mixed method was used in this investigation. The reviews and user-generated content (UGC) are examined using a modification of the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1991) called Temple service qualities (TEMP SERVQUAL) for active pilgrim sites in the Asian Subcontinent, based on the total number of reviews obtained from tripadvisors.com.

Previous research has shown that pilgrims and accompanying tourists have a compromise attitude and that their spiritual beliefs and faith outweigh often seen service inadequacies (Medhekar and Haque, 2012; Yanata, 2023). Future pilgrimages are seen as a way for people to interact with the gods in a temple, church, or mosque that had a big impact on their lives in order to heal from a past event or grief.

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