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Community Support for Religious Tourism: The Role of Place Image, Community Attachment and Overall Quality of Life

Abstract

In recent years, tourism has increased significantly, especially in developing countries, due to the development of infrastructures like good roads, well-connected airports, and hygienic accommodation facilities. However, the host community's attitude is critical for a tourism destination's strategic growth, development, and sustainability. As such, this study analyses attitudes and perceptions of the local community in Thrissur, a famous cultural destination in Kerala, India. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was adopted to develop a model for perceived tourism support with community attachment and overall quality of life. This model uses seven constructs: temple place image, economic benefits, social benefits, physical benefits, community attachment, overall quality of life, and perceived tourism support with forty-four attributes. The result indicates that Temple place image, socioeconomic and physical benefits, community attachment, and overall quality of life are predominant determiners for perceived tourism support of the local community.

Keywords: religious tourism, temples, community perception, perceived tourism support, Kerala

1. Introduction

Religious tourism is a recurrent phenomenon throughout sacramental theology, referring to tourism associated with religious beliefs and practices (B. Kim et al., 2020). Tourism and religion have a long history together, beginning with the concept of pilgrimage, from which the phenomena of religious tourism evolve. Religious tourism attractions are relatively close to culture and heritage destinations, resulting in the crediting of religious tourism with enormous economic benefits and contributions to the growth of local communities worldwide. Likewise, the opinion of the local population plays an essential role in the sustainable development of tourist destinations (Almeida-García et al., 2016).

Community attitudes are critical for sustainable tourism development because understanding community attitudes and perceptions of tourist development and creating these views represent essential information for decision-makers. The community is the most vital stakeholder; the people are the ones whom tourist planning and development will most heavily impact, whether favourably or adversely (S. Kim et al., 2021). This is crucial for religious tourism development. The association between faith and tourism is not always synergic (Nguyen, 2018), creating concerns among followers. Developing tourism destinations is vital due to a lack of empirical studies in developing countries (Ganji et al., 2021). While previous studies (Almeida-García et al., 2016; S. Kim et al., 2021; Terzidou et al., 2008) investigate the effect of tourism on destinations and how local people perceive tourism, sparse research examines how religious tourism and visitors affect residents living in proximity

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to sacred places. Research on residents' attitudes toward tourism is a prosperous research space. Several proposed models measure and predict residents' attitudes towards tourism development (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). For India, one of the world's top religious/spiritual destinations, studies examining the relationships between such variables as perceptions of tourism development, attitudes, community attachment and quality of life are still in their infancy. Thus, to fill these gaps in the literature, this research aims to develop a theoretical model to examine the structural relationships between residents' support for sustainable tourism development and the variables of community attachment, place image and overall quality of life. The study's findings yield valuable insight into conceptualizing a place as a tourist destination and sustainable tourism development. This is vital for the social sustainability of the place; religious tourism is comparatively seasonal and involves mass movements. Based on the current theoretical background present study focuses on three major research questions:

- a) Does Temple Place Image influence Overall Quality of Life?
- b) Is Community Attachment influence Perceived Tourism Support?
- c) Does Overall Quality of Life influence Perceived Tourism Support?

To this end, this study examines residents' attitudes and perceptions about religious-tourism development, focusing on Thrissur, a famous religious-tourism destination in southern India.

2. Literature review

Religious tourism (RT) is a primogenial and continuous tourism phenomenon in the contemporary era (Scaffidi Abbate & Di Nuovob, 2013). RT comprises three key elements: motivation, journey and destination. Based on this structure, a visitor is considered a pilgrim when a trip is exclusively religious, involving motivation towards spiritual or religious fulfilment. Therefore, that sphere includes greater intensity and frequency of behaviours, including overnight stays in religious structures and participation in religious services, celebrations and rituals (Árvavölgyi, 2019). RT refers to contemporary visitation patterns in places of religious importance or pilgrimage sites where visitors aim to fulfil spiritual and recreational needs (Shinde, 2007). Each religious tourism study focuses on sites affiliated with a particular religion. However, ((Bulatović & Stranjančević, 2019) confirms that sacred objects, attractions, and events are essential travel motives throughout history and now.

The local community represents one of the critical stakeholders of the tourism industry (Ling et al., 2011), and sustainable tourism development is challenging without the participation of the residents. In recent decades, their attitudes towards supporting tourism development (STD) and its predictors have prompted investigations with contradictory findings that cannot apply to all destinations (Almeida García et al., 2015). However, researchers highlight those factors influencing residents' perceptions that are dissimilar in developed and developing countries (Dodds, 2010; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011)

The social exchange theory is considered to be the most appropriate framework for current research, and it helps explain why some residents are aware of the impact of tourism. This study uses social exchange theory to explain why there are different levels of support for tourism within the same community. Furthermore, it is the most popular theory to explain the antecedents of residents' support for tourism (Nunkoo et al., 2013). Social Exchange Theory (SET) in tourism only focuses on resident's and tourist's perceptions toward tourism, and some studies indicate the ambiguous explanation and interpretation on SET in understanding community's perceptions toward tourists and tourism. Therefore, it is a need to understand local leaders' and policymakers' perceptions toward sustainable tourism development, as they act as the initiators or facilitators in sustainable tourism development (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2018). Based on their perception of the value of tourism, neighbourhoods may or may not support further tourism development. However, their support is a vital precondition for a destination's tourism development (Nunkoo et al., 2013; Ribeiro et al., 2017; Shen

et al., 2019; Sinclair-Maraghet al., 2015). Two other concepts that affect perceived tourism development and residents' support for tourism development are place image (PI) and place or community attachment (PA), which are fundamental components of the sustainability of a tourist destination.

3. Theoretical model and research hypotheses

In tourism studies, place image (PI) refers to expectations and ideas about the specific destination (Assaker, 2014), usually assessed using destination image (Tasci & Gartner, 2007) (Gallarza et al., 2002). Additionally, recognition of the distinctiveness of destinations results in emphasizing the function of place attachment in influencing perceptions of the effects of tourism development and supporting it (Lee, 2013). Another element to consider when determining how locals respond to tourism is PI (place image). If tourism growth helps the local community, the locals' perception of the destination, rather than the visitors', deserves consideration.

Furthermore, place attachment (PA) is a relatively stable psychological trait (Govers et al., 2007). In contrast, the place image is a dynamic construct built upon perceived place attributes that change and evolve with time. As such, the image may better suit capturing residents' reactions to the changes that tourism development inflicts on the place (Stylidis et al., 2014). Finally, as stated above, some studies assert that people's perceptions of their environment influence their behaviour and attitudes, including their perceptions of tourism's effects and support for its growth (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011). The model that this research presents contributes to the literature by examining perceived tourist effects as a latent variable, using three variables—namely, economic, sociocultural, and physical impacts—and the use of place-image dimensions covering various facets of a place, including temple rituals and customs, for residents. The present work focuses on temples and the RT associated with each, considering its image to identify community perception. Each temple is unique in its customs, rituals and spiritual dynamism, so place image was considered the precedent determinant for the tourism impacts on the region. Based on the gap in the literature that this study intends to fill, the first hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Place image positively influences economic, sociocultural and physical impacts.

The concept of place attachment has become an essential topic in recent research on tourism marketing (Tsai, 2012). Community attachment includes relationships between people and their surroundings, reflected in positive, negative or mixed feelings. This can play a crucial role in influencing residents' perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism development in their community (Kil et al., 2012). The research continues to debate the affiliation variable as a predictor of perceived costs and benefits of tourist development (Lee, 2013). Researchers have found conflicting results on community attachment's effect on views of tourism and subsequent levels of support for tourist growth (Rutherford, 2004). This demonstrates the critical need for further research on these connections. The authors confirm the direct positive impact of community attachment on perceptions of social and economic benefits, suggesting that people firmly attached to their community are more inclined to recognize tourism's positive effects.

Lee, 2013 shows a link between attachment and the perceived benefits of tourism development. (Merrilees et al., 2009) state that city image and place branding studies reinforce the necessity for residents' image studies to capture how people engage with and perceive their place. Environmental psychology, geography, location and product marketing have proved the importance of place image in influencing people's attitudes and behaviours (Elliot et al., 2011). (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011) examine the structural connections between residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood, their views about tourism's effects, and their support for urban tourist growth. The results suggest that the more favourable locals' perceptions are of their community, the more likely they are to see tourism's effects favourably. Research in environmental psychology and urban design, which indicates that residents' perceptions of their surroundings influence their assessment of the impact of development initiatives, also back this suggestion (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Accordingly, the second hypothesis was developed:

H2: *Place image positively influences residents' community attachment.*

While most research addresses residents' happiness with their quality of life as a dependent variable affected by tourism, only a recent study examines residents' quality of life as a predictor of their support for tourism development. Thus, if tourism's benefits enhance people's quality of life, they are more inclined to support further tourism growth (Liang & Hui, 2016; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). The research demonstrates that quality of life influences people's views regarding future tourist growth in their town. Furthermore, studies have analyzed tourism's impacts as a component of tourism development and found proof that perceptions of tourism's economic, sociocultural and environmental effects influence tourism development (Stylidis et al., 2014). Similarly, Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012); Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) establish a link between people's views about tourist development. However, the results of these authors distinguish locals' views about tourism's positive and negative effects. Other studies also have expressed interest in this relationship (Dyer et al., 2007; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). In light of these previous studies, the following hypothesis for the current study was proposed:

H3: *Socioeconomic and physical impacts positively influence the overall quality of life of the local community.*

Community attachment is a positive or negative connection, relationship or bonding between an individual and a particular place or location (Lee, 2013; Scannell & Gifford, 2013). However, the concept of community attachment is a complex and multidimensional construct measured through several approaches and instruments (Lee, 2013; Wang & Chen, 2015; Wang & Xu, 2015). Some research considers community attachment a multidimensional component (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Su et al., 2018). Researchers show that place identity and dependence can measure community attachment (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Shen et al., 2019) and have strived to distinguish between these two dimensions. They define place dependence as a functional and behavioural commitment to a specific place and associate place identity with symbolic meanings and place-specific beliefs (Shen et al., 2019). However, some studies show that people's feelings of attachment towards the places where they live tend to affect their perceptions (Ganji et al., 2021). Community attachment has not been analyzed often as an antecedent of locals' perceptions of the value of tourism development (Gu & Ryan, 2008) due to the complexity of this construct in definition and operation (Shen et al., 2019).

Physical constructs, knowledge, and commitment associated with a specific place impact community attachment (Wang & Chen, 2015). The more outstanding residents attach to a place, the more positively they view tourism development (Stylidis, 2018). Researchers (Stylidis et al., 2014) have found that community attachment correlates positively with the perceived impact of tourism development and the supportive behaviour of residents towards tourism development (Ganji et al., 2021). Based on these results, the fourth hypothesis of the present research was developed:

H4: *Community attachment positively influences perceived tourism support*

Residents' views of the effects of tourist growth and its support have produced a sizable body of research, particularly in recent years. A study by (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017) analyses community attachment and perceived quality of life as factors to consider in the relationship between residents' perceptions and support for tourism development. Jeon, Kang and Desmarais (2016) analyze the impacts of tourism and their relationship with residents' quality of life. The authors find that economic benefits and environmental sustainability exert positive effects, while social costs inversely affect the quality of life. Residents who find the exchange beneficial for their well-being are keen to support tourism development and react positively to tourists.

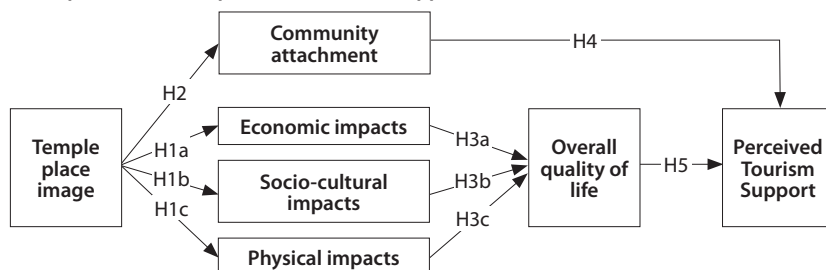
While most research addresses residents' happiness with their quality of life as a dependent variable that tourism affects, one recent study examines residents' quality of life as a predictor of their support for tourist development. Thus, if tourism's benefits enhance the quality of life, residents are more inclined to support

further tourist growth (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). The research demonstrates that their quality of life influences people's views regarding future tourist growth in their town. While this connection appears in informal research, it has not been experimentally established (Liang & Hui, 2016). As a result, a deeper explanation of this connection is required, which is suggested in the final hypothesis of this study:

H5: *Overall quality of life of the local community influences perceived tourism support.*

This study aimed to develop a model that integrates place image, tourism impacts, community attachment and overall quality of life as antecedents to perceived tourism support. Place image has a direct positive influence on the socioeconomic and physical effects of the destination. Therefore, the present study proposed a hybrid model developed by several authors (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Styliadis et al., 2014), keeping the antecedents of tourism support as place image and perceived tourism impacts from the findings of (Styliadis et al., 2014) and the other latent variables of community attachment and overall quality of life from (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017).

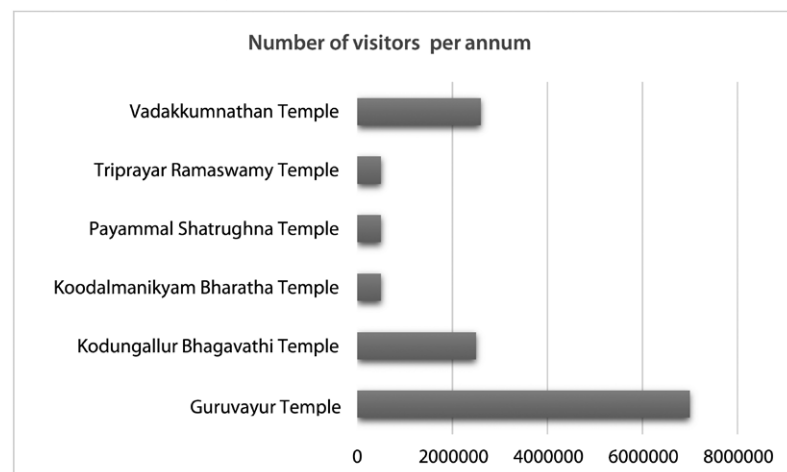
Figure 1
Conceptual model on perceived tourism support



4. Study area

The area chosen for the study is the Thrissur district, known as the cultural capital of Kerala and home to over 10 per cent of Kerala's population. Four districts border the Thrissur district: Palakkad and Malappuram to the north and Ernakulam and Idukki to the south. Not much study has been done on the community perception of temples in the Thrissur district. The unique temple architecture makes it the 'Cultural Capital' of Kerala. Thrissur is in the central part of Kerala, and well connected with the rest of the state. The district celebrates Pooram annually in April or May, attracting many tourists from India and foreign countries.

Figure 2
Number of visitors per year



Source: Temple administrative records – Devaswom Board (2019).

5. Methodology

This study utilized quantitative techniques (Terzidou et al., 2008) to identify particular hypotheses and evaluate specific correlations from the data collected, and the results were then quantitatively examined. Residents participated by completing a questionnaire survey. Seven famous temples (Vadakkumnathan, Guruvayur, Tripprayar, Iringnalakkuda, Payammal, Kodungallur, and Pazhayannur) were selected, based on the number of visitations to each (see Figure 3). People living in the locality (within a 10 km radius) for ten years and above were eligible to participate. Following the characteristics of the respondents, a non probability sampling approach was combined with a judgemental sampling methodology (Zhang & Zhang, 2012). Data were collected from September 2018 to December 2019. Most respondents, particularly senior citizens, had language constraints, which took much time per respondent. A total of 700 questionnaires (i.e., 100 samples from each temple) were distributed, and the researchers received 540 back. This method is primarily adopted when a restricted number of respondents have the attribute of importance.

The questionnaire used in this study followed work by Styliadis et al. (2014) and Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010), modified to serve the research objectives and comprising five sections. The first part included a Likert scale technique from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) and focused on the Temple place image. The number of devotees had increased over five years, as had the income of the temple, which is known for its ethnicity, good accessibility/transport facilities, the practice of distinguished customs and rituals, integrity, authenticity and for inspiring worship (preaching, music and festivals are available) and spiritual dynamics (bold faith, commitment, passionate spirituality, spiritual disciplines and obedient lifestyle). This study used past studies on destination images to discover the facilities for the local community and tourists.

The next section of the questionnaire was on economic benefits and attributes. It was designed to collect information regarding how religious tourism favours the sale of local products, creates many jobs for locals and increases the demand for local products. Furthermore, how it creates new business investment opportunities, diversifies rural economies and ensures local business and long-term profitability. These were measured and adopted from Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010). Six items appeared under the rubric of sociocultural impacts which includes the following: 'improves the local standard of living', 'upsurges consciousness of the importance of tourism through connections between residents and visitors', 'enhances respect for local culture and customs', 'enhances residents' participation in local activities', 'develops a sense of belonging to the surrounding region', and 'creates new learning opportunities for residents' (Styliadis et al., 2014). The physical impacts included 'increases the value of property owned by locals', 'increases investment in tourism infrastructure', and 'increases investment in rural infrastructure'.

The third section deals with the overall quality of life in religious tourism and conditions that describe enhancing the quality of life (Styliadis et al., 2014). The fourth section deals with community attachment in religious tourism, with factors like the preference for living in this community over other places. The following items are included: [I enjoy living in this community more than other places, I identify personally with the life of this community, I feel that this community is a part of me, Living in this community says a lot about me, Living in this community means a lot about me, My friends and relatives prefer this community over other places, I have a strong sense of belonging to this community, and I am very attached to this community due to this temple (Styliadis et al., 2014).

Finally, the fifth section deals with perceived tourism support, including factors such as 'see the impacts of tourism expansion in my community as positive', 'I would support further tourism development in my community', 'I would support further tourism development based on religious tourism in my community' and 'tourism development would affect my community's quality of life', gathered from previous studies (Terzidou et al., 2008).

The data analysis included several aspects. The dimensionality of the key builds in the model was evaluated. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used (Stylidis, 2018). The measurement model was appraised for its reliability and validity. In addition, the structural relationships between Temple place's image, economic, sociocultural, physical, community attachment and perceived tourism support were tested.

6. Results

6.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Following the two-step model analysis, before testing the structural model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to estimate the fit of the measurement model (Stylidis, 2018). CFA is commonly used for testing the validity (convergent, discriminant) and reliability (construct) of the variables, providing validation of the scales used for the measurement of specific constructs (Stylidis et al., 2014). The software programme used was AMOS v22.

The measurement model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data, with the chi-square value of 1813.10 with $df = 675$ and $p = 0.000$. Both the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = .930) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .910) suggest a good fit (Kline, 2010), while the value of the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA = .056) is under the fit indices, lending credence to the measurement model. A tenable explanation is that the Thrissur district scores significantly on the impacts of tourism.

The revised measurement model was then re-estimated, demonstrating a good fit for the data. The chi-square value is statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. This measurement model has yielded a chi-square value of 1991.35 with $df = 687$ and $p = 0.000$. The fit of the measurement model is evaluated through the Goodness of Fit Indices, which indicates acceptable fit: GFI=.830; RMSEA=.60 and CFI= .906.

A necessary condition for convergent validity is that each construct's indicator should share a high proportion of shared variance, indicated by the magnitude and significance of the paths between a latent variable and its indicators (Hair et al.), positing a minimum level of .5 and significant ($t > 2.576$, $p\text{-value} < .05$). In sum, all indicators were significantly and strongly related to specified constructs, verifying posited relationships. Additionally, the construct reliability values were higher than .70, indicating that the items consistently represent the same latent construct in each case.

6.2. Structural model

The fit of the baseline structural model was chi-square 1991.35 ($p < .001$). Although the model is significant, its ratio to the degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF) is 687, which is acceptable. The GFI (.830) and CFI (.906) values signify a good-fitting model, and RMSEA is more than .051. In total, all fit indices are within the accepted ranges. All path estimates were substantial and in the expected direction. More precisely, the perception of the impacts of tourism had a strong path estimate = .582 on the Temple place image; the path estimate between the Temple place image and Social Benefits was also optimistic (.468). Temple place image had a robust positive effect on Physical Benefits (path estimate = .544), and the path estimate between the Temple place image and Community Attachment was also positive (.626).

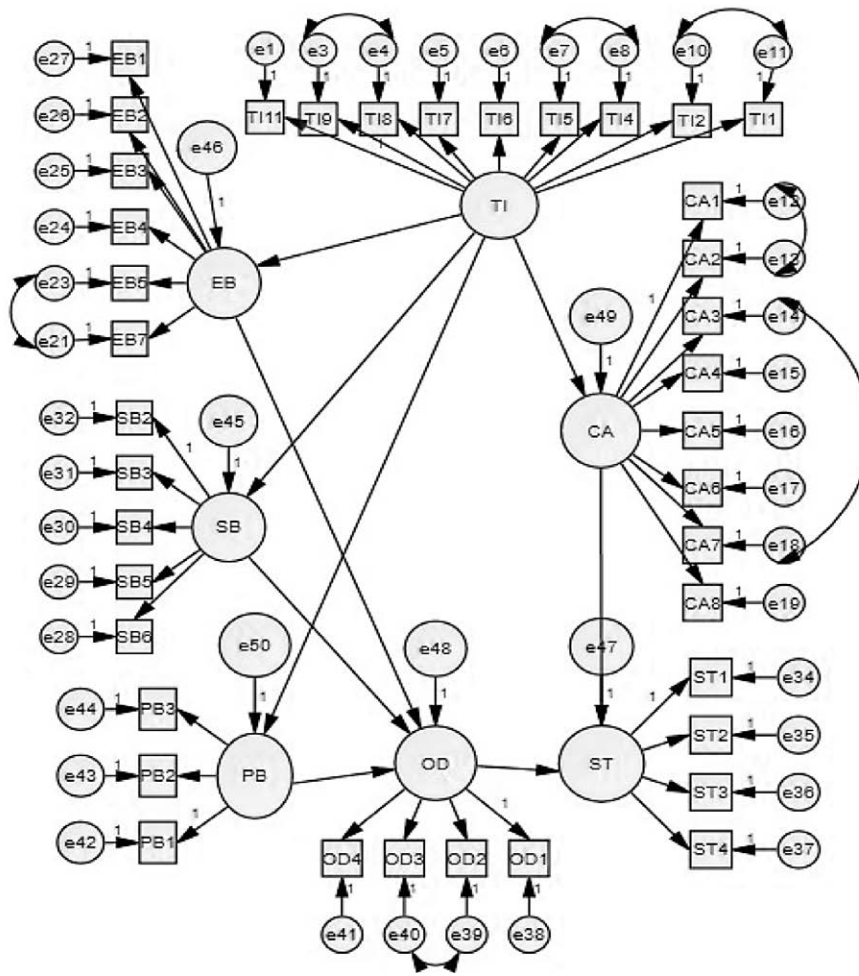
Table 1
Standardised regression weights of latent variables

Structural relationships	Estimate	P value
Economic benefits ← Temple place image	.582	.001
Social benefits ← Temple place image	.468	.001
Physical benefits ← Temple place image	.544	.001
Community attachment ← Temple place image	.626	.001

Table 1 (continued)

Overall quality of life	← Economic benefits	.294	.001
Overall quality of life	← Social benefits	.046	.001
Overall quality of life	← Physical benefits	.214	.001
Perceived tourism support	← Community attachment	.171	.001
Perceived tourism support	← Overall quality of life	.144	.001

Figure 3
Structural model on perceived tourism support



Note. TI-Temple place image, EB-Economic benefits, SB-Social benefits, PB-Physical benefits, OD- Overall quality of life, CA- Community attachment, S T- Perceived tourism support.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The main aim of this study was to develop a model that includes the temple place image, tourism impacts, community attachment and overall quality of life as the background for perceived tourism support. Since then, numerous ideas have been used to explain people's relations to places, including, among others, place attachment, sense of place, community attachment and sense of community. Though each includes a somewhat different meaning, the terms typically overlap conceptually and methodologically (Lewicka, 2010). The temple place image has a direct positive influence on the economic (H1a), socio cultural (H2a) and physical impacts (H3a) of the destination. The more favourable the perception of the place by residents, the more

positively they will perceive the effects of tourism (Stylidis, 2018). The results show that the temple place image positively influences community attachment and that the socioeconomic and physical impacts influence the overall quality of life of the community. The overall quality of life has a direct effect on perceived tourism support; Community attachment also has a direct impact on perceived tourism support of the community.

The current results reinforce the proposition of SEM and previous studies (for example, Gursoy et al., 2010) that the local community tend to support tourism development. The hypothesis (H1) was supported, which suggests that the Temple place image leads to the perception of economic (H1a), sociocultural (H2a) and physical impacts (H3a). The unique image of the temple attracts tourists who spend on the distinctive local products of the area as souvenirs. The tourists also get attracted to the exclusive culture embedded in that society leading to community development by exchanging knowledge about different cultures. The physical impact is the creation of large-scale employment and wealth creation for society as a whole. The temple place image also positively influences the community attachment of the residents (H2). The local community members feel proud of the rare nature of the temple. Hypothesis (H3) is supported because economic (H3a), sociocultural (H3b) and physical impacts(H3c) positively influence the overall quality of life of the local community.

More tourists mean more requirements for basic needs like food and increased standards of beverages, accommodation facilities, and local transportation. This results in a revenue increase for the local community, leading to employment opportunities and wealth creation, which leads to notable living, but with a flip side of the cost of living increase. (Ko & Stewart, 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). We also found that community attachment positively influences the perceived tourism support Hypothesis (H4). When the income of the local community increases due to more visitors, it will positively impact the local community's income. It creates more keenness and support by the local community, and H5 supports the hypothesis that the overall quality of life of the local community positively influences perceived tourism support. When income increases, community support to attract more tourists increases, so society becomes more polite to tourists. The structural relationships between place image, their attitudes toward tourism impacts and perceived tourism support (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011)

The results underscore the importance of examining the place's image with the host community, as it is often done in tourism literature, in the background of the visitors. This research immediately responds to (Ramkissoon and Nunkoo (2011) and Schroeder (1996) for a more complete and theoretically informed study on the character of the local community and its role in influencing attitudes and behaviour towards the tourism sector. Therefore, a comprehensive model was developed and tested to explain the structural connections between the temple place image, tourism impacts, overall quality of life, community attachment, and perceived tourism support. Unlike previous research (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011), this model considers the many areas of the tourism attributes, community attachment, temple place image and perceived tourism support. This study confirms that Temple place's image positively influences the local communities' economic, sociocultural and physical impacts. It employs local people and encourages tourism leading to the overall development of the country's economy. The economics of religious tourism gives impetus to the economy, which is very important for the overall quality of life.

The article focuses on the perception of religious tourism by the community. Indicators such as the temple place image, economic benefits, social benefits, physical benefits, community attachment, and overall quality of life lead to perceived tourism support (Abdollazadeh et al., 2014). The temple place image was extracted into three factors: traditions and customs, devotee's faith and worship dynamics, which strongly impact the local community. The economic, social, and physical benefits significantly affect the frequency of temple visits. Community attachment positively influences people's length of stay in the locality. The proposed model explains that the temple place image positively impacts the economic, social and physical benefits (Terzidou et al., 2008). The temple place image influences community attachment, which controls the overall quality of life and further influences the perceived tourist support. This leads the community to recognize its roots

and incorporate mythology into its cultural practices. Earlier studies also found significant socioeconomic and physical benefits of RT (Shinde, 2003). The temple place image also plays an essential role in community attachment. RT conveys a secure attachment with the region and the community and proves that Temple place's image, socioeconomic and physical benefits, community attachment, and overall quality of life are predominant antecedents for perceived tourism support. The study helps to understand the role of the local community in perceived tourism support through economic, social and physical impacts on temple place image, community attachment and overall quality of life since they are essential for the sustainable development of tourism based on the study of Gursoy et al., (2010).

8. Implications of the study

This study provides fundamental insights into tourism's growth, planning and political practice. To positively influence the local population's perception of the impact of tourism and to gain support for future growth, tourism development plans should aim to take into account or even improve the perception of the region. The research examines how religious tourism affects the perception and livelihoods of local communities. To ensure long-term support, local governments can also engage in the region's temple image and cultural extravaganza to potentially contribute to tourism growth. Furthermore, since the circumstances of the destination may change over time, the perception and impact of tourism by residents and its influence on supporting future growth must be continually evaluated and monitored.

This study emphasizes on following implications and recommendations for regional tourism development. First, the temple place image positively influences the local community's economic, social and physical benefits. Hence, religious ceremonies and functions should enhance the Temple place image. Second, festivals are a tool for Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism, family reunion and community pride events. Third, performances of traditional folklore can be organized with festivals and rituals. Fourth, many art forms of Kerala are unknown to the world visit Theyyam, Koodiyattam, Thullal, KalamEzhuthupattu, Tholpavakoothu, and Padayani. These art forms are strongly associated with Hindu mythology and could be revived and preserved from extinction. Particular sects or communities of the region perform each of these arts, which helps to conserve and preserve the traditional art forms.

The current study also emphasizes that RT leads to community attachment and development. The sustainable development of RT should be practised to ensure the overall quality of life of the community. Hence, temple authorities and local administrators should plan and execute collective measures for the preservation, maintenance and cleanliness of temples. The present study indicates that the number of devotees may increase in the next five years; hence, the necessary infrastructure must be improved to accommodate more devotees without compromising the carrying capacity of the temples and the region. Ethnic and local products should be promoted to enhance the local economy through linkage with boards like khadi, Village industries Ltd. and coir board, to trade antique and local products. The study's model shows that the socioeconomic and physical benefits positively influence the Temple place image. The Temple place image influences community attachment and the overall quality of life of the local community. With this background, the local community shows perceived tourism support proving that Temple place image, socioeconomic and physical benefits, community attachment and overall quality of life are predominant determiners for perceived tourism support.

9. Limitations and future research

The proposed model was tested at a single destination, limiting the results' generalizability. Additional validation is required in several areas; Destinations differ in image quality, tourism growth, and impact. Second, this study was conducted at a specific time. Third, the Temple place image and the perception of the effects of tourism are dynamic and can change at different stages of the destination's life cycle.

Furthermore, the study's results contribute to further developing religious tourism, an intangible sector that indirectly supports Kerala's cultural heritage tourism. The study helps industry and academics with theoretical and practical knowledge and applies it to interdisciplinary research. This study proposes a model for the religious tourism industry by developing perceived tourism support indicators of the community.

The proposed model primarily focuses on Temple place's image with economic, socio-cultural and physical impacts, overall quality of life, community attachment, and tourism development support. The present study focuses on the community's perception of religious tourism and can be applied to similar religious destinations with appropriate changes. Future studies could be done on community perception with other dynamic attributes moderated with other variables. Also, religious tourism model could be created for the relationship between visitor perceptions and satisfaction with its underlying dimensions.

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