

Modelling the Effect of Spiritual Tourism Motivators on Spiritual Tourism Consumption

Abstract

This paper aims to study the influence of spiritual tourism motivators on spiritual tourism consumption. A structured questionnaire was distributed to respondents in all regions of India who are either tourists, working in the tourism industry or academic experts. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were duly confirmed. Structural equation modelling (SEM) uses Smart PLS software to analyse the data. The findings suggest that a motivated tourist has an approximately ninety-one per cent chance of undertaking spiritual tourism. Thus, spiritual tourism consumption is a function of tourists' spiritual level, marketing of spiritual tourism, tourist role in planning, psychological state of tourist, stakeholder's behaviour, tourist demographics, and destination attractiveness. The stakeholders perceive that destination attractiveness is reflected in local community participation, affordability of destination, infrastructure, accessibility, and types of attractions present. The study proposes an extension of the scale to incorporate the impact of COVID-19 and explore possibilities for spiritual tourism development post-pandemic.

Keywords: socio-cognitive mindfulness, state of consciousness, recreation, parks, tourism

1. Introduction

Spiritual tourism is defined as “a journey to find the purpose of life, and it is a lively exploration that goes beyond the self. It contributes to the balance of the body-mind-spirit, which may or may not have a relationship with religion” (Halim et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2012). This form of tourism has been practised for centuries but has not received an in-depth exploration from academicians. There exist two schools of thought, one that considers religious tourism and spiritual tourism as one, while the second recognises the difference between the two based on the travel intention of the tourists (Nair & Dileep, 2021). In contrast, religious tourism focuses on outward looking and involves travelling due to religious affinity, beliefs, and practices. Spiritual tourism is inward-looking and focuses on identifying the purpose of visits and attaining mindfulness and peace (Cheer et al., 2017). Despite the academic conflict between these thoughts, spiritual tourism consumption has been prevalent for a long, and its consumption has increased over the years. This increase in consumption is fuelled by the lifestyle in the modern world that has distanced humans from themselves and their loved ones (Kumar et al., 2022; Sarkar et al., 2021). Increasing materialism has also enhanced the stress of people. These issues persuade people to escape isolation, seek peace and maintain emotional balance (Kujawa, 2017).

Spiritual Tourism offers several benefits to tourists, making it a popular choice across several age groups. It benefits industry practitioners as it does not require developing heavy infrastructure to attract tourists (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020a). Developing spiritual tourism has always been a win-win situation for the holistic development of the tourism industry. As several countries have started “rethinking tourism” in the post-pandemic era (Lusigi, 2022), it is essential to understand what different typologies offer regarding efforts required to serve customer expectations and resultant benefits. Spiritual tourism in India has been practised for decades, and the segment makes essential economic contributions. Thus, the study focused on spiritual tourism in India

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as a case and Indian tourists as the study subject. The industry must first focus on its strength to reignite the tourism industry. In addition, it is also essential for specific destinations to change their tourism image after a while. For both issues, there is a need to explore the behaviour of spiritual tourists. The literature seeking empirical investigation for spiritual tourist motivations is limited in the Indian context. In addition, the spread of COVID-19 and work-related stress has increased the spiritual component of the people, providing an opportunity for the development of the industry (Chemli et al., 2020; Albattat et al., 2020). Thus, industry development must understand tourist behaviour and make relevant strategies (Valeri, 2022a).

In light of the above-discussed gaps, the study seeks to answer two research questions: (1) Does motivation play a role in the consumption of spiritual tourism? (2) What factors motivate a spiritual tourist? The study conducts a literature review to identify the various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for spiritual tourists. Then it applies Path Least Squares- Structure Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to answer the research questions. The study aligns with the aim and scope of *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal* as it focuses on a contemporary global issue that the tourism industry is facing. In addition, the present study makes several critical contributions to the theory and practice of spiritual tourism development and consumption. First, it proves that a motivated spiritual tourist is likelier to consume spiritual tourism. Second, it establishes an empirical relationship between the different factors that motivate spiritual tourists in their journey. Third, it lays down the foundations for future research in developing spiritual tourism post-pandemic. For industry practitioners, the study identifies motivators that may be targeted through effective marketing to increase and manage the flow (Valeri, 2022b). Overall, the findings from the survey will help in the conducive development of the spiritual tourism industry in India. The study's results may be utilized by researchers across the globe for industry development in their research area.

2. Review of literature

There exists plenty of literature focusing on tourism motivation or travel intentions. However, literature focusing solely on spiritual tourism motivators is fragmented and limited. One of the gaps identified in the literature is an empirical investigation of why a spiritual tourist travels. The study makes use of literature review-based exploration to address this. Conducting a literature search using a search on a recognised database is one of the most used strategies for a literature review (Shekhar, 2022; Shekhar & Valeri, 2022). A search on the Scopus database using the search string: TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Spiritual”) AND (“travel intention” OR “tourism motivators”) resulted in studies that helped in identifying key factors that play a role in persuading tourists to consume spiritual tourism. Initially, we observed twenty factors prominently used in the literature as a critical travel intention for spiritual tourists. These identified factors were then studied in detail for addition and modification through literature support. After the analysis, seven elements, psychological state of the person (PSY), Spirituality level (SPIR), marketing of destination (MARK), tourist demographics (DEMO), stakeholder behaviour (STAKEB), the role of tourist in planning (ROLEP), and destination attractiveness (DAT) were finalised for the study. DAT component was measured through infrastructure, accessibility, costs, local community participation, and various attractions. Table 1 lists the identified factor and their studied dimensions.

Table 1
Variables influencing spiritual tourism motivation

Motivators	Items
Psychological state (PSY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The psychological stress influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (PSY1) The psychological condition (other than stress: Xenophobia, Anxiety, etc.) influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (PSY2) The socio-economic condition influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (PSY3)
Spirituality level (SPIR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The habit of praying influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (SPIR1) The habit of visiting religious monuments influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (SPIR2) Engaging in spiritual activities (meditation/ reading text) influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (SPIR3)

Table 1 (continued)

Marketing of spiritual tourism (MARK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The marketing of spiritual tourism will draw the attention of spiritual tourists. (MARK1) The marketing of spiritual tourism will increase the liking and preference for it. (MARK2) The marketing of spiritual tourism will influence the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (MARK3)
Demographics (DEMO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The age of the tourist influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DEMO1) The marital status of the tourist influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DEMO2) The income level of the tourist influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DEMO3)
Stakeholder's behavior (STAKEB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The attitude of religious monument management influences the motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (STAKE1) The attitude of tour guides/ hoteliers and other stakeholders influences the decision to undertake spiritual tourism. (STAKE2)
Role in planning (ROLEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pressure from family influences the decision to undertake spiritual tourism. (ROLE1) The pressure from social media and other reference groups influences the decision to undertake spiritual tourism. (ROLE2)
Destination attractiveness (DATT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The destination attractiveness in terms of accessibility influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DATT1) The destination attractiveness in terms of affordability (cost) influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DATT2) The destination attractiveness in terms of infrastructure influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DATT3) The destination attractiveness in terms of local community participation influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DATT4) The destination attractiveness in terms of the variety of attractions influences motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. (DATT5)
Infrastructure (INFRA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy access to transportation enhances destination attractiveness. (INFRA1) Well developed tourism market enhances destination attractiveness. (INFRA2) Well decorated and comfortable accommodation enhances destination attractiveness. (INFRA3)
Accessibility (ACCESS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessibility of attraction sites adds to destination attractiveness. (DAACC1) Traffic management adds to destination attractiveness. (DAACC2) Quality of road system add to destination attractiveness. (DAACC3)
Destination cost (COST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheap food availability adds to destination attractiveness. (DACOST1) A cheap lodging facility adds to destination attractiveness. (DACOST2) Cheap transportation facility adds to destination attractiveness. (DACOST3)
Local community participation (LOC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The friendliness of local people adds to destination attractiveness. (DALOC1) Your ability to communicate with local people adds to destination attractiveness. (DALOC2) The willingness of locals to help the tourist adds to destination attractiveness. (DALOC3)
Variety of attractions (ATTRAC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created (Human-made) attractions add to destination attractiveness (DATTAC1) Relaxation and recreational activities add to destination attractiveness (DATTRAC2) Natural attractions add to destination attractiveness (DATTRAC3) Unique attractions add to destination attractiveness (DATTRAC4)
Spiritual tourism consumption (STC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will undertake spiritual tourism if it gets my attention (ACT1) I will undertake spiritual tourism if I find it desirable (ACT2) I will undertake spiritual tourism if I find it interesting (ACT3)

Tourism motivation is essential in influencing a person to travel (Dann, 1981; Silva et al., 2020). They alter the tourists' behaviour and channel the desire or intent of tourism. The motivator aims to persuade tourists to undertake tourism by gaining attention, generating interest, or igniting a passion (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020a). Researchers have propounded theories to measure and define tourism motivators (Cohen, 1974; Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Pearce & Lee, 2005). Travel motivation could be intrinsic or external. These motivators attract (pull) or push tourists to undertake travel. Cohen (1974) suggests that most tourists are attracted by destination characteristics (infrastructure, accessibility, cost, community participation, and variety of attractions). Some tourists travel due to the pressure of their reference group (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020b), while some are attracted by the friendly behaviour of the stakeholders (Lal et al., 2020). Tourists' characteristics like age, income and education also influence their travelling choices (Crompton 1979). Also, Marketing has proven to be a tourist puller (Dann, 1981). Although spiritual tourism is one of the most

consumed tourism typologies (Gallagher, 2009), the research in the context of spiritual tourist motivators is limited. Psychological state and spiritual level are two predominantly researched motivators of spiritual tourists (Moal-Ulvoas, 2016; Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000). In the context of spiritual tourism development, acknowledging the role and interaction of these motivators is inevitable. Thus, after identifying the motivators, we wanted to test if they influenced the travel intentions of spiritual tourists in India. This study will enhance the robust relationship between these motivators and develop the model for spiritual tourism development post-pandemic, as the people have experienced tremendous psychological troubles and have improved spirituality levels (Rehman et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2020)

3. Research design

3.1. Hypotheses development

The objectives of the study are summarised in the form of two equations.

$$STC=f(STM).....(i)$$

Ho1: *The motivation level of a tourist will not have any influence on spiritual tourism consumption.*

$$STM=f(PSY,SPIR,MARK,DEMO,STAKEB,ROLEP,DATT).....(ii)$$

Ho2: *The psychological state of a person will not influence the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho3: *The spirituality level of a person will not influence the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho4: *Marketing of spiritual tourism will not have any influence on the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho5: *Demographics will not have any influence on the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho6: *The behaviour of stakeholders will not have any influence on the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho7: *The role of tourists in planning will not influence the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho8: *Destination attractiveness will not have any influence on the motivation to take spiritual tourism.*

Ho8a: *Infrastructure will not have any influence on destination attractiveness.*

Ho8b: *Accessibility will not have any influence on destination attractiveness.*

Ho8c: *Destination cost will not have any influence on destination attractiveness.*

Ho8d: *Local community participation will not have any influence on destination attractiveness.*

Ho8e: *A variety of attractions at a destination will not have any influence on destination attractiveness.*

Two additional hypotheses are framed to test the interrelationship between the motivators.

Ho9: *The spirituality level of a person will not have any influence on the psychological state.*

Ho10: *Demographics will not have any influence on the psychological state.*

3.2. Questionnaire design

A questionnaire survey was developed to evaluate the determinants of spiritual tourists' travel intentions. The framework and selected latent variables and the measurement variables were adopted from previous research

on the psychological state (Moal -Ulvoas, 2016; Valeri & Baggio, 2021a, 2021b), spiritual level (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Elmo et al., 2020), marketing of typology (Dann, 1981; Cheer et al., 2017; Kumar & Shekhar, 2020b), tourist's demographics (Crompton, 1979), stakeholder behaviour (Lal et al., 2019), tourists' role (Dann, 1981; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Kumar & Shekhar, 2020b), and destination attractiveness (Awaritefe, 2004; Dey et al., 2020). The respondents rated the statements on a five-Likert scale, indicating 1 for Totally oppose/ Strongly Disagree and 5 for Strongly agree/ Totally favour. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.912, indicating strong reliability and internal consistency. The final part of the questionnaire inquired about tourists' demographics.

3.3 Sampling and survey procedures

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to target respondents. The data was collected from September 2020 to November 2020. This study applies the 'ten times' rule for sample size determination (Kock & Hadaya, 2018; Wolf et al., 2013). Units of analysis comprise tourists, industry experts, and academicians of the tourism industry. The desired target audience was those who have consumed spiritual tourism or are planning to visit a spiritual destination within the next few months. A filter question was used to avoid any response from those who did not fit the above criteria. Travel restrictions made it impossible for a face-to-face interview, so the author mailed the questionnaire to 500 respondents detailing the purpose and requirements for the survey, of which 452 filled questionnaires were received. On removing the biases and incompletely filled questionnaires, 402 usable responses were used for analysis. The author guarantees that the ethical considerations were met in data collection.

3.4. Data analysis

This study applies descriptive statistics, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and PLS path modelling using Smart PLS, version 3. The descriptive statistics outlined the tourist demographics (e.g., age, gender, education). The descriptive statistics of respondents are given in Tab. 2. Before assessing the model fit, the reliability of each measurement variable and the construct were evaluated through CFA. The variables with unacceptable fits were eliminated, and model fitness was assessed. The structural relationship between the variables was done using PLS-SEM. The bootstrap and p-value statistic processes are used at the 95% confidence interval to determine a significant path coefficient.

Table 2
Measurement accuracy assessment

Research construct	PLS code item	Scale		Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance expected	Factor loadings	P-value
		Mean	SD					
PSY	PSY1	0.851	0.020	0.709	0.838	0.634	0.847	0.000
	PSY2	0.823	0.025				0.815	0.000
	PSY3	0.707	0.027				0.721	0.000
SPIR	SPIR1	0.900	0.011	0.827	0.897	0.743	0.901	0.000
	SPIR2	0.830	0.021				0.831	0.000
	SPIR3	0.852	0.017				0.853	0.000
MARK	MARK1	0.869	0.018	0.803	0.884	0.718	0.870	0.000
	MARK2	0.852	0.017				0.853	0.000
	MARK3	0.817	0.024				0.818	0.000
DEMO	DEMO1	0.821	0.019	0.729	0.845	0.645	0.820	0.000
	DEMO2	0.817	0.020				0.818	0.000
	DEMO3	0.769	0.033				0.771	0.000
STAKB	STAKE1	0.907	0.013	0.748	0.888	0.798	0.907	0.000
	STAKE2	0.878	0.017				0.879	0.000
ROLEP	ROLE1	0.696	0.050	0.697	0.805	0.678	0.699	0.000
	ROLE2	0.931	0.016				0.931	0.000

Table 2 (continued)

DATT	DATT1	0.749	0.035	0.864	0.902	0.648	0.744	0.000
	DATT2	0.829	0.020				0.825	0.000
	DATT3	0.840	0.018				0.850	0.000
	DATT4	0.816	0.019				0.817	0.000
	DATT5	0.782	0.022				0.785	0.000
INFRA	DAINFRA1	0.829	0.039	0.773	0.868	0.686	0.832	0.000
	DAINFRA2	0.788	0.039				0.792	0.000
	DAINFRA3	0.858	0.023				0.860	0.000
ACCESS	DAACC1	0.879	0.012	0.802	0.879	0.708	0.877	0.000
	DAACC2	0.826	0.025				0.830	0.000
	DAACC3	0.815	0.028				0.816	0.000
COST	DACOST1	0.911	0.023	0.776	0.856	0.668	0.910	0.000
	DACOST2	0.675	0.072				0.687	0.000
	DACOST3	0.838	0.034				0.839	0.000
LOC	DALOC1	0.739	0.042	0.744	0.850	0.654	0.741	0.000
	DALOC2	0.879	0.011				0.849	0.000
	DALOC3	0.797	0.033				0.800	0.000
ATTRAC	DAATTRAC1	0.734	0.038	0.740	0.833	0.558	0.737	0.000
	DAATTRAC2	0.803	0.029				0.807	0.000
	DAATTRAC3	0.610	0.071				0.679	0.000
	DAATTRAC4	0.808	0.037				0.813	0.000
STC	ACT1	0.910	0.006	0.831	0.896	0.742	0.910	0.000
	ACT2	0.867	0.019				0.868	0.000
	ACT3	0.800	0.033				0.802	0.000

Note. Bold values indicate values on border (although accepted).

4. Results and findings

4.1. Reliability and validity of constructs and items

The reliability and validity were estimated for each measurement variable (Tab. 3) through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Expected, and factor loadings measures. The benchmark values for the actions taken are 0.70, 0.70, 0.50, and 0.70, respectively. The results show that the constructs could clear the benchmark score; hence, they fit to be included in the study. The minimum score obtained by a construct was the role played in planning (0.697). Since the score is borderline and has proven to be an effective motivator in previous studies, it was included in the study. The factor loading for the statements is greater than or approximately equal to 0.70. it means that the statements are a true reflection of the constructs.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the respondents

Features	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Count of gender	Male	208	51.75
	Female	194	48.25
Age of respondents	under 25 years	152	37.80
	26-35 years	102	25.35
	36-45 years	78	19.40
	46-55 years	39	9.70
	above 55 years	31	7.75
Marital status	Single	193	48.02
	Cohabiting	45	11.19
	Married	124	30.84
	Separated or widowed	40	9.95

Table 3 (continued)

Average income		Below 5 lakhs per annum	76	18.93
		5- 10 lakhs per annum	76	18.93
		10-15 lakhs per annum	75	18.65
		15-20 lakhs per annum	111	27.62
		above 20 lakhs per annum	64	15.92
Occupation		Business person		9.70
		Govt. employee- essential services	19	4.72
		Govt. employee- non essential services	35	8.70
		Private sector employee	87	21.64
		Retired person	13	3.23
		Self-employed professional	25	6.22
		Semi- government employee	47	11.69
		Unemployed / Student / Homemaker	137	34.07
Engagement in spiritual practices	Attend services	Never	17	4.24
		Occasionally	66	16.42
		Sometimes	117	29.10
		Frequently	142	35.32
		Every time I get a chance	60	14.92
	Pray	Never	11	2.73
		Occasionally	40	9.96
		Sometimes	43	10.69
		Frequently	220	54.73
		Every time I get a chance	88	21.89
	Visit religious monuments	Never	15	3.74
		Occasionally	67	16.67
		Sometimes	95	23.63
		Frequently	133	33.08
		Every time I get a chance	92	22.88
	Read text/ meditate	Never	39	9.72
		Occasionally	53	13.18
		Sometimes	41	10.19
		Frequently	142	35.32
		Every time I get a chance	127	31.59

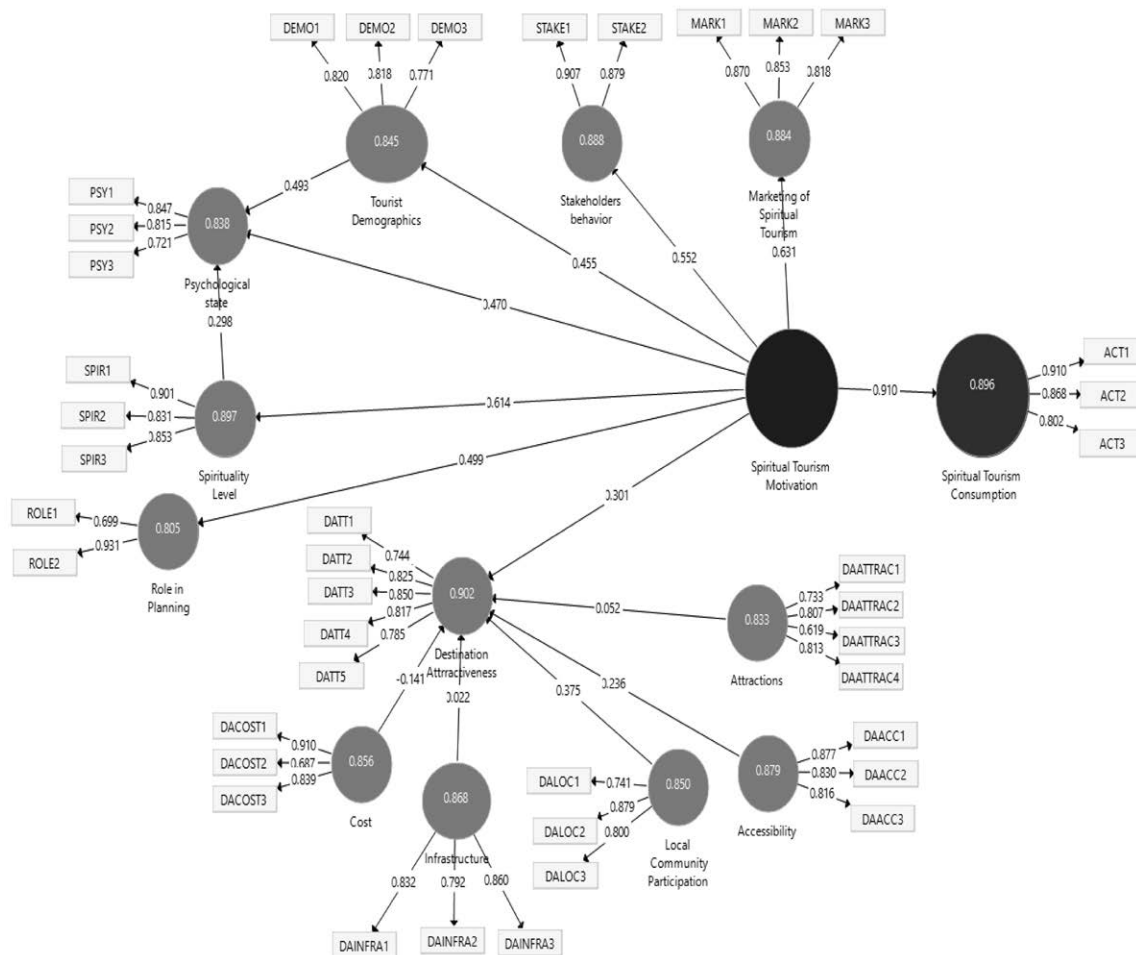
4.2. Path model and hypothesis testing

The PLS estimation results for the structural model and path coefficients are shown in Fig. 1. All the null hypotheses had a p-value less than 0.05 and hence are rejected (Tab.4). This exploratory shows that spiritual tourism motivation has a substantial direct and positive influence on spiritual tourism consumption ($\beta=0.910$). Also, spiritual tourism motivation is reflected in the seven identified motivators. A strong marketing campaign is needed to convert the reason (intention) into consumption (action), as there is a strong direct relationship between spiritual tourism marketing and its consumption ($\beta=0.631$). Stakeholder behaviour ($\beta=0.552$) must be regulated through participative policymaking to motivate spiritual tourists. Psychological state and spiritual level significantly influence spiritual tourists' travel intentions ($\beta=0.470$, 0.614 , respectively). The government must monitor the people's stress levels and tie up with organizations to promote spiritual tourism as a stress buster. Tourist demographics ($\beta=0.455$), a significant motivator, can be explored in-depth by including the religious aspect. For destination attractiveness, the cost negatively influences destination attractiveness ($\beta=-0.141$). Ensuring local community participation can make the destination attractive ($\beta=0.375$), providing good stakeholder behaviour. Thus, minimizing cost and making the price affordable should be a priority for practitioners as destination attractiveness positively influences motivation for spiritual tourism consumption ($\beta=0.301$). As the psychological state of a person, spiritual level, and demographics are interrelated ($\beta=0.298$, 0.493 respectively), a cross-analysis will yield more helpful insight for the practitioners.

Table 4
Outcome of structural equation model analysis

H.No	Path	p-Value	β	Decision
Ho1	Spiritual tourism motivation → Spiritual tourism consumption	0.000	0.910	Reject
Ho2	Spiritual tourism motivation → Psychological state	0.000	0.470	Reject
Ho3	Spiritual tourism motivation → Spirituality level	0.000	0.614	Reject
Ho4	Spiritual tourism motivation → Marketing of spiritual tourism	0.000	0.631	Reject
Ho5	Spiritual tourism motivation → Demographics	0.000	0.455	Reject
Ho6	Spiritual tourism motivation → Stakeholders behavior	0.000	0.552	Reject
Ho7	Spiritual T tourism motivation → Role in planning	0.000	0.499	Reject
Ho8	Spiritual tourism motivation → Destination attractiveness	0.000	0.301	Reject
Ho8a	Infrastructure → Destination attractiveness	0.049	0.022	Reject
Ho8b	Accessibility → Destination attractiveness	0.001	0.236	Reject
Ho8c	Cost → Destination attractiveness	0.044	-0.141	Reject
Ho8d	Local community participation → Destination attractiveness	0.000	0.375	Reject
Ho8e	Attractions → Destination attractiveness	0.045	0.052	Reject
Ho9	Spirituality level → Psychological state	0.000	0.298	Reject
Ho10	Demographics → Psychological state	0.000	0.493	Reject

Figure 1
Measurement and structural model results



Note. Author's calculation

5. Discussion and implications

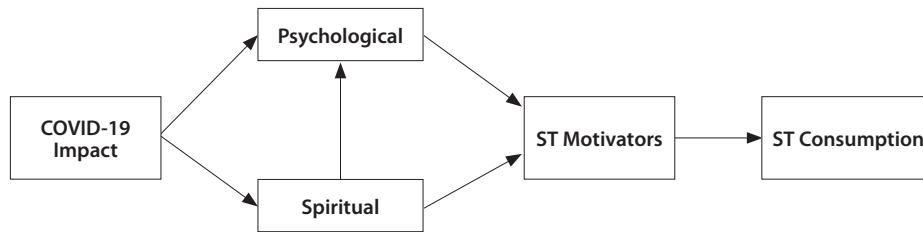
The study explored the possibility of spiritual tourism motivation resulting in spiritual tourism consumption. In the process, it also identified seven key factors that have been identified in the literature as the key factors influencing the travel intentions of spiritual tourists. The primary beneficiary of the study is the spiritual tourist, whose motives are rarely studied. The literature supports the findings of the study. A good marketing campaign has done wonders for the tourism industry worldwide and can further assist in recovering to a healthy state (Avraham, 2021). National tourism campaigns such as Incredible India and state campaigns have borne fruits for the industry and economy (Pravena & Rani, 2019). Spiritual tourism development can also be promoted through a solid and effective advertisement campaign. Promotional channels used should be based on the age of the target audience. Experience marketing could be an essential mode of the movement as it engages people's senses (Ketter, 2018) which would be beneficial in the case of spiritual tourism. Social media can provide valuable insights to destination operators (Senthil & Goswami, 2021), and television advertising is a must for reaching out to middle-aged and senior citizens.

Effective search engine optimization would further boost the chance of attracting tourists towards spiritual tourism (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020). Including the spiritual sites in theme-based tourism and circuit, development would also be a good initiative from a marketing perspective. Participative policymaking is a must for successful tourism development. Studies such as Simmons (1994) and Pongponrat and Pongquan (2007) have highlighted the importance of local community participation and the collective role of stakeholders in generating value for the tourism industry. Since the psychological level is often high in youngsters these days (Sunitha & Gururaj, 2014; Vaidya et al., 2021), promoting spiritual tourism destinations must be enabled in the offices of Multi-National Corporations. The human resource department could be communicated to inform employees of possible destinations to maintain a work-life balance in a stressful life. Since spiritual tourism has proven to be a stress relief measure, it could contribute to the general well-being of society and spread happiness. In addition, it would assist in improving the quality of life (Nicolaidis & Grobler, 2017) and help the country progress towards its sustainable development goals. Cost minimising should be one of the agendas at spiritual destinations. Instead of world-class infrastructure, the focus should be more on providing an authentic experience. Commercialising spiritual tourism and destination would hamper the industry's long-term survival, as it has done in the case of religious tourism (Hung et al., 2017).

5.1. Research implications

The study can be used as input, reference, and consideration in developing the Spiritual Tourism industry successfully by creating harmony between tourists' demands and industry offerings. The findings conclude that the higher the spiritual tourism motivation, the greater the possibility of spiritual tourism consumption. This study can be developed into a measurement tool to determine the success of the spiritual tourism industry. Using interpretive structure modelling (ISM), researchers can formulate hierarchical relationships between the factors. Kumar et al. (2022) did analyse by showing the interrelationship between the reasons for spiritual travel. However, the identified motives were not empirically tested. In addition, the reason for the desired impact and effect was not explained by the study. Besides, the researchers can consider the probable effects of COVID-19 on spiritual tourism motivators. Studies have identified the pandemic's psychological and spiritual effects (Liang et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2020). These impacts will alter the spiritual tourist motivators such as psychological state, spirit level, destination attractiveness, local community participation, and stakeholder behaviour. Including the COVID-19 impact in the developed model, such as the one in Fig. 2, could extend it to determine the possibilities for developing the spiritual tourism industry post-pandemic in future studies. One of the areas where more focus is required is identifying the heterogeneity in spiritual tourism consumption among the different religions, age groups and incomes. Since India is diverse, researchers could focus on identifying which segmentation would yield more economic surplus.

Figure 2
COVID-19 and spiritual tourism consumption (proposed model)



Note. Author's representation.

5.2. Managerial implications

This study gives tourism professionals evidence to coordinate and organize better with destination authorities and provide motivation and reason for spiritual tourists to travel. It also establishes the need to make tourism planning inclusive by recognizing that stakeholders' behaviour influences tourist travel intentions. The tie-up between tourism departments and organizations could lead to public-private partnerships. One of the areas where practitioners could work is the effective positioning of the spiritual tourism industry compared with other tourism products. The marketing plan and strategies must be crafted to target the spirituality level of the tourists. Communication strategies and advertisements must focus on the psychological benefits of travel while portraying the destination's attractiveness. A satisfied tourist has shown the desire to revisit the goal (Viet et al., 2020). Efforts must be made to enhance tourist satisfaction which converts to repeated revisits. It would ensure that the business survives long without much intervention from the policymakers. Infrastructure development should be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recently, the Government of Uttar Pradesh, a state in India, announced that the famous religious and spiritual destinations of Mathura and Vrindavan would become the model for reaching net zero emissions (Chakrabarty, 2022). Such interventions by policymakers will add to the destination's attractiveness and increase tourists' motivation.

6. Conclusion and limitations

Spiritual tourism can help spread peace and happiness and improve the country's overall quality of life. However, it is not known if the tourism typology is well-received by tourists. Practitioners' efforts in attracting tourists are incomplete as there is little empirical evidence on what motivates a spiritual tourist. The study was carried out to address two research gaps: whether motivation plays a role in spiritual tourism consumption and what factors motivate spiritual tourists. The study was carried out using Indian tourists as a subject. The factors influencing travel intentions or motivators were identified by reviewing the literature focusing on the Indian context. Once the factors were finalised, data was collected using the structured questionnaire, and PLS-SEM was applied to the collected data. The study empirically proved that motivation plays a vital role in the consumption of spiritual tourism. The results further highlight that factors such as the psychological condition of tourists, spiritual level, destination attractiveness, the part of tourists in tour planning, the behaviour of stakeholders, marketing of destinations, and tourists demographics significantly motivate tourists for spiritual tourism consumption. The study's results lay the foundation for incorporating the effect of COVID-19 on the tested motivational factors. Future studies could study how the spread of the pandemic could act as a silver lining for spiritual tourism study. The investigation also suffers from several limitations in sample size and analysis. The study results can further be improved by increasing the sample size and geographic location. This study was conducted only in India. A survey of respondents on a global level might yield more accurate results for the motivators. Future research will be interesting to complete the results with qualitative methods that explore the concept analysed more deeply. Despite the limitations, the study contributes to the theory of spiritual tourism and offers research and managerial implications.

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