

# UNDERSTANDING BRAND TRUST AND VISITOR EXPERIENCES IN RELIGIOUS TOURISM: INSIGHTS FROM PILGRIMS PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Purpose: This research investigates the dynamics of tourist behavior in the context of religious tourism, with a specific focus on pilgrims visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study aims to examine the relationships between key variables such as visit motivation, religious tourism experiences, visitor perception, brand trust, and re-tourism intention among pilgrims, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of destination loyalty and repeat visitation in religious tourism contexts. Method: The study utilized a sample of 256 pilgrims visiting various pilgrimage sites across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires containing items related to key constructs, with scales adopted from past research works in the field of tourism. Structural equation modeling techniques, implemented using Adanco software, were employed to analyze the data and test the hypothesized relationships between variables. Findings: The empirical findings reveal significant relationships between visit motivation, religious tourism experiences, visitor perception, brand trust, and re-tourism intention among pilgrims in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Visit motivation was found to significantly influence re-tourism intention, with religious tourism experiences mediating this relationship. Additionally, visitor perception and brand trust were found to significantly moderate the relationship between visit motivation and re-tourism intention. Originality/Implications: This study promotes religious tourism theory and helps Saudi Arabian tourist industry professionals and destination stakeholders. By identifying destination loyalty and repeat visits, the study

can inform strategic destination management and marketing initiatives to improve tourist experiences and sustain religious tourism in the area.

**Keywords:** Visit Motivation, Visitors' Religious Tourism Experience, Visitor Perception, Brand Trust, Re-Tourism Intention.

## INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism refers to traveling to locations of religious importance for spiritual or cultural purposes (Liutikas, 2023). It has emerged as a crucial component of the global tourism industry. There has been a surge in academic interest in this topic because of the significant influence that religious tourism has on destination economies, cultures, and civilizations (Zhou et al., 2023). Religious tourism has become a substantial component of the global tourism economy, attracting millions of visitors to spiritually important sites worldwide each year (Wilson-Mah, 2023). Prior research has highlighted various factors that influence passengers' motivations for traveling, their experiences throughout the journey, and their conduct (Boz et al., 2021; Keenan, 2022). The factors include personal growth, cultural integration, and spiritual satisfaction (Liao et al., 2021). The importance of destination branding and marketing strategies in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards religious sites has been acknowledged, since it impacts tourists' likelihood to revisit and their degree of loyalty (Alkhalwaleh, 2022). However, there are still significant gaps in the literature (Purnamawati et al., 2022). These requirements consist of more comprehensive theoretical frameworks applicable across various contexts and a deeper understanding of the impacts of religious tourism on the environment and sociocultural aspects (Wahyuni & Darmawati, 2024).

Past empirical research is intrigued by religious tourism due to its complicated nature and socio-cultural implications (Zhou et al., 2023). Moreover, the research has investigated various aspects of religious tourism (Liutikas, 2023). These studies have analyzed the impact of religious tourism on destinations and communities, as well as the viewpoints and motivations of travelers (Zhou et al., 2023). Lee and Hallak (2020) finds that cultural curiosity, spiritual fulfillment, and pilgrimage customs impact tourists' choices to visit sacred locations. Haberstroh (2023) explored that religious travel experiences enhance tourist satisfaction and increase the probability of their coming back. These past studies elucidate the behavior of religious tourism passengers. Past research has shed light on the socio-cultural and

economic impacts of religious tourism on many destinations (Yan et al., 2024). An example is a study by Xiong and Chia (2024) on the economic advantages of religious tourism. Research indicates that religious tourism stimulates local economies through the growth of souvenir, transportation, and housing transactions (Jiang et al., 2024). Researchers (Wahyuni et al., 2024) suggest that religious tourism can lead to disputes, cultural commercialization, and environmental deterioration. Religious tourism contributes to the growth of tourism in various regions, although facing obstacles. This highlights the importance of sustainable management and community involvement (Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Religious tourism has been thoroughly researched (Abror et al., 2023), although there are still unexplored regions.

There is a lack of research on how visitor perspectives and brand trust influence behavior in religious tourism (Caber et al., 2023; Wisker et al., 2023). Previous studies have focused on visit motives and religious tourist experiences in relation to re-tourism intention, but there has been limited research on visitor perceptions and brand trust (Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023). The perception of tourists towards a destination and their level of trust in destination brands can impact their probability of revisiting religious sites (Mirfakhradini, 2023). Politicians and destination marketers need to understand this concept. The relationships between religious tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism lack sufficient documentation (Parthenis et al., 2023). Religious tourism may intersect with other forms of tourism, although there is limited understanding of how visitors manage and reconcile their experiences and objectives in various settings (Shi & Pande, 2023). Examining religious tourism and other types of tourism, along with their conflicts, can uncover tourists' preferences and actions, ultimately fostering the development of a sustainable tourism sector (Ly & Tan, 2023). Long-term research is necessary to ascertain the impact of religious tourism on vacation spots and local communities. Research has examined both the financial advantages and difficulties associated with religious tourism (Rahman et al., 2022a; Tao-Ing, 2022). Future research can assist stakeholders and governments in predicting and managing religious tourism challenges through monitoring tourist behavior and destination management strategies (Shirmohammadi & Ghanbari, 2022). Completing these gaps will enhance theoretical knowledge and offer direction for the growth of ethical and sustainable religious tourism on a global scale.

This study constructs a comprehensive theoretical framework to elucidate the connections among tourists' motives, experiences, perceptions, brand trust,

and intention to revisit Saudi Arabia's religious tourism industry. It broadens the existing theoretical and empirical literature on religious tourism. This study investigates how cognitive processes and socio-cultural factors influence the behavioral intentions and decision-making of religious tourism visitors, utilizing theories such as the elaboration likelihood model and the expectancy-value theory. This study examines the involvement of Saudi Arabian tourists in religious tourism, the impact of religious tourism experiences on tourists' attitudes and intentions to revisit religious sites, the influence of destination branding and marketing strategies on authenticity, trust, and loyalty, and proposed solutions for destination stakeholders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

"Religious tourism" refers to adventurous travel that includes visits to places of worship (Nisar et al., 2022). According to Purnamawati et al. (2022) there exists a relationship between sociological, historical, and cultural elements. Research on religious tourism has looked at a number of topics, such as why individuals visit religious sites and the effects it has on the community (Alkhaldeh, 2022). This study's primary focus is on the variety of motivations for religious travel. Numerous factors have been identified by researchers as the causes of religious tourism (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022). These include one's own spirituality, customs surrounding pilgrimages, the desire to cure or regenerate, exposure to various cultures, and group prayer (Rahman et al., 2022b). To address the demands of religious travelers, governments and destination marketers must comprehend their reasons. The socio-cultural and economic effects of religious tourism on locations have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies (Liao et al., 2021). Religious tourism can strengthen the economy of host towns by generating revenue from lodging, travel, and souvenir purchases, but it also raises questions about cultural commodification and authenticity (Hung Lee et al., 2021). Religious site visits by tourists have the potential to harm the environment, increase population density, and incite disputes with locals over resource distribution and cultural preservation (García-del Junco et al., 2021). Scholars prioritize sustainable management practices and community engagement as means of mitigating adverse impacts and optimizing the positive aspects of religious tourism (Agarwal et al., 2021). Religious tourism literature explores the intricate connections among faith, culture, tourism, and

sustainability (Muaidy, 2019). This highlights the importance of interdisciplinary research and management of this distinct mode of transportation.

Research on visitor motivation and destination return should identify crucial aspects (Dabphet, 2021). A "visit motive" is the purpose for traveling. Rejikumar et al. (2021) identified spiritual enlightenment, cultural exploration, relaxation, and exciting encounters as travel objectives. The intention of a visitor to return is referred to as "re-tourism intention." Shirmohammadi and Abyaran (2020) discovered that tourists enjoyed their previous trips and expressed a desire to revisit. Comprehending these components aids in elucidating user behavior and fostering site loyalty (Choe & O'Regan, 2020). The goal and intention to return to the study site are empirically connected. Various research have demonstrated a correlation between these two elements, indicating that individuals with more profound reasons for visiting a location are more inclined to revisit (Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020). Navajas-Romero et al. (2020) reported that leisure tourists and cultural researchers had a higher rate of return compared to other types of travelers. Internal motivation fuels the pursuit of goals. Said et al. (2020) revealed that visitors who had distinctive and captivating experiences were more likely to return. Meeting travel expectations influences future behavior. The likelihood of return is influenced by the aim of the visit (Yan et al., 2024). Empirical study provides evidence for this. As per Jiang et al. (2024), a visitor's motivation significantly impacts their probability of revisiting a site. The purpose of the visit frequently impacts the likelihood of returning (Kusumastuti et al., 2024; Wisker et al., 2023). The association corroborates the claim. According to Genc et al. (2023), recurrent visits are encouraged by adventure, novelty, delight, and cultural inquiry. This hypothesis integrates theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence regarding visit motivation to elucidate visitor behavior and place loyalty.

*H1. Visit motivation significantly influences the re-tourism intention of tourists.*

Previous empirical research have examined the complex interaction between a visitor's travel goal, religious tourism experiences, and future interest in comparable activities (Mirfakhradini, 2023). Parthenis et al. (2023) discovered that religious tourism experiences influence visitors' behavior and enjoyment of a destination. Shi et al. (2023) found that the contentment of religious tourism passengers positively influenced their probability of making a return visit. Religious visitors who had transformative experiences were more likely to recommend and revisit the same destination (Ly et al., 2023). Research

demonstrates that religious tourism experiences impact an individual's inclination to revisit a certain area and align a visitor's primary objective with their devotion to the destination (Tao-Ing, 2022). Research indicates that religious tourism acts as a mediator. The notion was prompted by results obtained from practical research experiments (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Studies suggest that religious tourism experiences can influence the connection between the purpose of a journey and the intention to revisit. Purnamawati et al. (2022) stated that religious tourism experiences influence travelers' behavioral intentions and allegiance to the destination. Individuals who are religious or spiritual are more inclined to pursue profound and transformative experiences at sacred locations. These interactions impact the likelihood of tourists coming back (Sodawan et al., 2022). This hypothesis uses religious tourism as a mediator to analyze tourist behavior in religious tourism settings. It also sheds light on the loyalty of religious visitors to their destinations. It aligns with the cognitive-affective-conative paradigm and planned behavior theory (Liao et al., 2021). The concepts presented by García-del Junco et al. (2021) demonstrate the influence of subjective experiences and perceptions on behavioral intentions. According to these ideas, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control affect intentions and motivations. Evidence that tourist quality affects future behaviour (Rejikumar et al., 2021). The mediation model shows how visit objective, religious tourism experience, and intention to return are interconnected.

*H2. Visitors' religious tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.*

Research shows that visitors' opinions affect their visit purpose and chance of returning (Choe et al., 2020). Perceptions of experience, atmosphere, and services affect visitor behavior (Navajas-Romero et al., 2020). Positive reviews of a destination's reputation and service quality promote visitor return, according to Said et al. (2020). According to Ramírez & Fernández Portillo (2020), tourists' perceptions of a site's authenticity and cultural history affect their incentive to visit and chance of returning. Tourist behaviour and destination loyalty are affected by visitor perceptions (Dabphet, 2021). Studies show visitor perception management is crucial. A recent study found that visitors' opinions affect their purpose for visiting and their chance of returning. According to Shirmohammadi et al. (2020), how a place is regarded affects passenger behavior and loyalty. Data support the prior idea (Hung Lee et al., 2021). Visitors who appreciate a

destination's culture, amenities, and overall experience are more likely to revisit, regardless of their original motivation (Agarwal et al., 2021). Religious tourists' preferences for a destination are impacted by their opinions. We can have a deeper comprehension of these components through this concept. The approach aligns with the elaboration likelihood model and expectancy-value theory. Rahman et al. (2022b) and Alkhawaldeh (2022) theories elucidate the impact of subjective perceptions and cognitive processes on behavior. An individual's perceptions about the likelihood and desirability of an outcome influence the connection between motivation and intention (Nisar et al., 2022). Tourists' conduct can be influenced by their perceptions (Mirfakhradini, 2023; Shi et al., 2023). The proposed moderation model elucidates the intricate relationship among visit motive, visitor perception, and tourist return. Integrate tourism data with these theoretical concepts to establish this framework.

*H3. Visitor perception significantly moderates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.*

Brand trust influenced visitors' incentive to visit and the probability of returning in a prior empirical study (Caber et al., 2023). Brand trust in a place or tourist service provider has a growing impact on tourists' loyalty and behavior towards that destination (Abror et al., 2023). Wahyuni et al. (2024) found that tourists' trust in a place's brands greatly affects the likelihood of tourists revisiting to that destination. It was found by Xiong et al. (2024) that vacationers who experienced a sense of comfort were more likely to choose to return to a resort that had a positive reputation. Yoo and Kim (2014) discovered that brand trust increased venue visits. Brand trust affects destination and customer loyalty. Research suggests brand trust may alter (Liutikas, 2023). Recent research show that brand trust affects the relationship between reasons for visiting and likelihood of returning (Zhou et al., 2023). Wilson-Mah (2023) found that brand confidence affects tourists' behavior and loyalty. The results support this theory. No matter their rationale, visitors who trust a destination's brand are more inclined to return (Keenan, 2022). This hypothesis examines how brand confidence affects religious tourism guests' decisions and loyalty. This fits relationship marketing and commitment-trust theory. Trust is necessary for long-term relationships and loyalty, according to Zhou et al. (2023). These beliefs argue that trust is essential to consumer-brand relationships. This shows how brand trust affects visitor behavior (Haberstroh, 2023; Liutikas, 2023). The

proposed moderation model explains the complex link between visit motive, brand trust, and travel intention. Integrate tourism data with these theoretical concepts to establish this framework.

H4. Brand trust significantly moderates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.

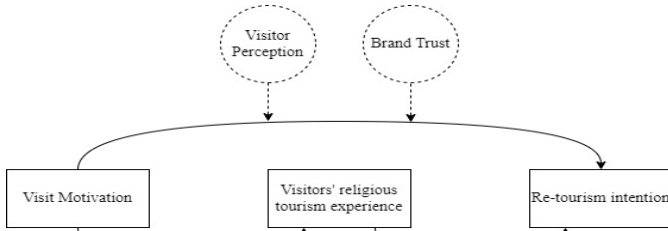


Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research participants were pilgrims who had traveled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for leisure. Convenience sampling methods were utilized to select 256 pilgrims from various pilgrimage sites around the country. The pilgrims were provided with questionnaires to self-report in order to collect data. The questionnaire covered essential factors such the visit's objective, experiences with religious tourism, visitor's impression, brand trust, and intention to return. Validated metrics from previous research in tourism and destination management were utilized to develop the scales included in the questionnaire. This research uses following measure in this research (see Table 1).

Table 1: Scales Detail.

Variable	Number of Items	Reference
Visit Motivation	Four items scale	(Wang, 2022)
Re-tourism intention	Four items scale	(Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003)
Visitor perception	Four items scale	(Wang, 2022)
Brand trust	Six items scale	(Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003)
Visitors' religious tourism experience	Thirteen items scale	(Rebuya et al., 2020)

Statistical software was employed to input and analyze the outcomes following data collection. Trial data were analyzed by researchers utilizing ADANCO, a robust statistical instrument. ADANCO's route analysis and



structural equation modeling (SEM) tools make it ideal for component interactions and idea testing. To determine the relationships between visit reasons, religious tourism experiences, tourist perceptions, brand trust, and intention to return, structural equation modeling was used. This activity showed their relationships. Path analysis determined variables' direct and indirect effects on tourism revisitation. Moderation and mediation experiments examined how visitors' views affected the study. To assure instrument quality and durability, rigorous methods were applied. Previous Saudi religious tourism research were examined in this study. Protocol analysis and revision were important. A pilot test assessed the questionnaire's clarity and comprehensibility. Improvements were made based on comments. Internal consistency of each concept was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The experiment was evaluated for discriminant and convergent validity using Dijkstra-Henseler's rho ( $\rho_A$ ), Joreskog's rho ( $\rho_c$ ), and average variance extracted (AVE).

## RESULTS

Table 2 shows the study's key constructs' reliability and validity. A measurement's reliability is its consistency and stability, whereas validity is how well it represents the concept being examined. The reliability and validity indicators used in this context are Dijkstra-Henseler's rho ( $\rho_A$ ), Joreskog's rho ( $\rho_c$ ), Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), and average variance extracted (AVE). Religious tourism reliability statistics show strong internal consistency. Results: Dijkstra-Henseler's rho ( $\rho_A$ ) = 0.902, Joreskog's rho ( $\rho_c$ ) = 0.891, and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.893. Average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.525, above 0.5, confirms convergence. The Visit Motivation has strong reliability and validity, with  $\rho_A$ ,  $\rho_c$ , and  $\alpha$  above 0.86 and AVE 0.644. These facts confirm the constancy and precision of measuring religious site users' reasons.

Table 2: Variables Reliability and Validity Statistics.

Construct	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho ( $\rho_A$ )	Jöreskog's rho ( $\rho_c$ )	Cronbach's alpha( $\alpha$ )	AVE
Visitors' religious tourism experience	0.902	0.891	0.893	0.525
Visit Motivation	0.874	0.861	0.863	0.644
Re-tourism intention	0.860	0.839	0.841	0.568
Brand trust	0.881	0.879	0.880	0.543
Visitor perception	0.768	0.885	0.886	0.592

Re-tourism intention is reliable and valid, with coefficients  $\rho_A$ ,  $\rho_c$ , and  $\alpha$  surpassing 0.84 and an AVE of 0.568. This implies the instrument correctly represents travelers' desire to return to hallowed sites. Internal consistency and convergent validity help Brand Trust, with reliability coefficients 0.88 and AVE 0.543. Results show that religious tourists' destination brand trust is effectively assessed. In conclusion, Visitor Perception is reliable and valid, with  $\rho_A$ ,  $\rho_c$ , and  $\alpha$  above 0.76 and AVE 0.592. These numbers demonstrate the instrument's accuracy in religious visitors' destination ratings. Table 2 shows that religious tourism experience, visit purpose, re-tourism intention, brand trust, and visitor perception tools are reliable and valid.

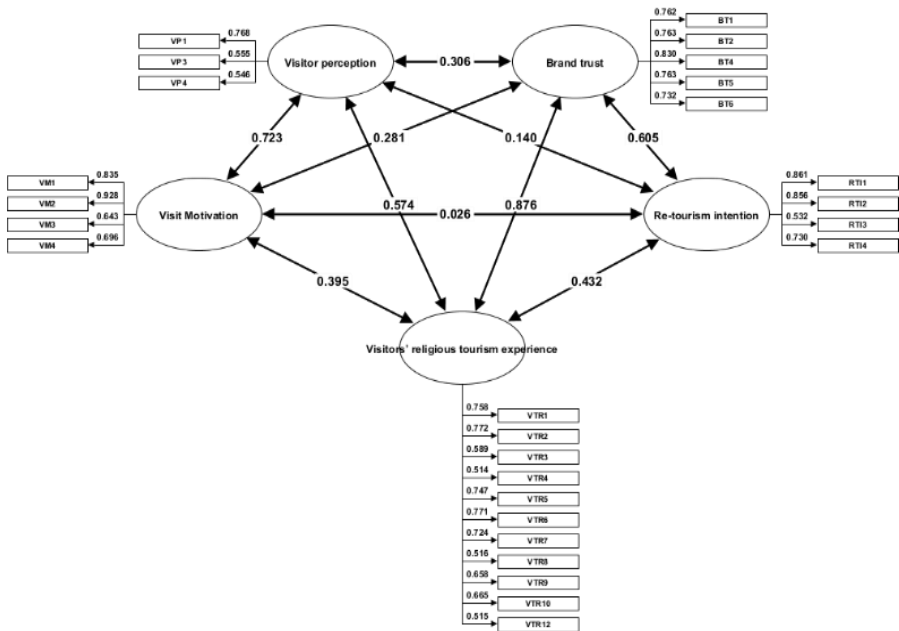


Figure 2: Estimated Model.

Table 3 displays fitness statistics for religious tourist experience, Visit Motivation, Re-tourism intention, Brand trust, and Visitor impression. Indicator values measure measurement item alignment with constructs in fitness statistics. VTR1–VTR10 indicate fitness statistics for characteristics related to religious tourism, ranging from 0.5216 to 0.8551. Fitness statistics for Visit Motivation, Visitor perception, Brand trust, and Re-tourism intention are VM1-VM4, VP1-VP4, BT1-BT6, and RT11-RT14. These statistics demonstrate the research instrument's validity and reliability by showing how well the measuring items capture the constructs.

Table 3: Measurement Items Fitness Statistics.

Indicator	Visitors' Religious Tourism Experience	Visit Motivation	Re-tourism Intention	Brand Trust	Visitor Perception
VTR1	0.6581				
VTR2	0.8551				
VTR3	0.7062				
VTR4	0.5216				
VTR5	0.6410				
VTR6	0.8370				
VTR7	0.6342				
VTR8	0.6203				
VTR9	0.5396				
VTR10	0.5996				
VTR12	0.5360				
VM1		0.8229			
VM2		0.8958			
VM3		0.6268			
VM4		0.7577			
VP1					0.5903
VP3					0.5482
VP4					0.8950
BT1				0.7607	
BT2				0.8006	
BT4				0.7931	
BT5				0.8000	
BT6				0.6867	
RTI1			0.8365		
RTI2			0.8622		
RTI3			0.5438		
RTI4			0.7435		

Table 4 shows the discriminant validity of Visitors' religious tourism experience, Visit Motivation, Re-tourism intention, Brand trust, and Visitor impression using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) technique. When heterotrait correlations are less than monotrait correlations between construct elements, HTMT scores imply discriminant validity. HTMT values below 0.85 indicate discriminant validity between Visitors' religious tourism experience, Visit Motivation, Re-tourism intention, Brand trust, and Visitor perception. HTMT scores between additional pairs of constructs also meet discriminant validity requirements, proving that each construct is distinct and that the assessment instrument captures the desired components without overlap.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT).

Construct	Visitors' Religious Tourism Experience	Visit Motivation	Re-tourism Intention	Brand Trust	Visitor Perception
Visitors' religious tourism experience					
Visit Motivation	0.4060				
Re-tourism intention	0.4261	0.0275			
Brand trust	0.8633	0.2809	0.5909		
Visitor perception	0.5939	0.6760	0.1553	0.3021	

The Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis, shown in Table 5, compares the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct to the correlation coefficients between constructs to establish discriminant validity. Row and column correlations are shown in each table cell. The diagonal elements represent each construct's square root AVE, whereas the off-diagonal elements represent construct correlations. The square root of the AVE for each concept must be greater than the correlation coefficients with other components to establish discriminant validity. Diagonal components are consistently greater than off-diagonal elements, indicating that each build is distinct and that the measurement equipment records its constructs without overlap.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Construct	Visitors' Religious Tourism Experience	Visit Motivation	Re-tourism Intention	Brand Trust	Visitor Perception
Visitors' religious tourism experience	0.4337				
Visit Motivation	0.1609	0.6117			
Re-tourism intention	0.1954	0.6115	0.5729		
Brand trust	0.7546	0.0788	0.3663	0.5920	
Visitor perception	0.2834	0.3775	0.0209	0.0829	0.4414

Table 6 displays model fitness statistics, such as  $Q^2_{predict}$ , RMSE, and MAE. The  $Q^2_{predict}$  score of 0.450 suggests that the structural model explains a significant part of variation in the dependent variables, indicating its predictive importance. Better model fit is shown by lower RMSE and MAE values. The RMSE of 0.0696 and MAE of 0.0776 indicate that the model's predictions match the observed data, demonstrating good predictive accuracy. The model fitness

data show that the structural model accurately predicts dependent variable variance and provides useful insights into the study's construct linkages.

Table 6: Model Fitness.

Q <sup>2</sup> predict	RMSE	MAE
0.450	0.0696	0.0776

In Table 7, R-square statistics reveal how much the structural model's independent factors explain dependent variable variance. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for Visitors' religious tourism experience is 0.1609, indicating that independent factors account for 16.09% of variation. The modified  $R^2$ , which considers model complexity and predictor count, is slightly lower at 0.1582. The  $R^2$  for re-tourism intention is 0.4306, indicating that independent variables explain 43.06% of the variation, with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.4234. These data show the structural model's explanatory power and how much independent factors explain dependent variable variability.

Table 7: R-Square Statistics.

R-Squared		
Construct	Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ )	Adjusted $R^2$
Visitors' religious tourism experience	0.1609	0.1582
Re-tourism intention	0.4306	0.4234

Table 8 presents the connection strength of main variables in the structural model, such as beta coefficients, indirect effects, moderating effects, total effects, and Cohen's  $f^2$ . Religious tourism experience and re-tourism intention are positively correlated with a beta value of 0.5762. Direct and indirect effects total 0.7948, demonstrating that religious tourism experience highly influences re-tourism intention. Additionally, Cohen's  $f^2$  value of 0.2567 indicates a moderate impact. Visit Motivation and Religious Tourism Experience are positively correlated with a beta coefficient of 0.8538 and a total effect of 2.6891. This reveals that Visit Motivation strongly impacts religious tourism. Visit Motivation substantially predicts Re-tourism intention with a beta coefficient of 0.941 and total effect of 7.7325. Brand trust affects re-tourism intention with a beta coefficient of 0.7479 and an indirect effect of 0.6763. Trust in brands boosts re-tourism intentions. Visitor impression and re-tourism intention are positively correlated with a beta coefficient of 0.8034. Table 7 shows the degree and importance of the interactions between major variables in the structural model, demonstrating religious tourism's main Re-tourism intention drivers.

Table 8: Variables Relationship Strength.

Effect	Beta	Indirect Effects	Moderating Effects	Total Effect	Cohen's f <sup>2</sup>
Visitors' religious tourism experience -> Re-tourism intention	0.5762	0.2186		0.7948	0.2567
Visit Motivation -> Visitors' religious tourism experience	0.8538			0.8538	2.6891
Visit Motivation -> Re-tourism intention	0.941			0.941	7.7325
Brand trust -> Re-tourism intention		0.7479	0.6763	0.7479	
Visitor perception -> Re-tourism intention		0.8034		0.8034	

The results of the route analysis are displayed in Table 9, which provide details on the significance and strength of the relationships between the key variables in the structural model. The first path analysis shows a highly significant correlation between visit motivation and visitors' intention to return, with a T statistic of 3.191 and a p-value of 0.000. This study highlights the critical role that both internal and external factors play in promoting repeat visits, highlighting how vital it is for visitors' motivations to determine whether or not they plan to return to religious places.



Figure 3: Structural Model for Direct and Mediated Path Analysis.

With a T statistic of 14.149 and a p-value of 0.000, suggesting a very significant mediation effect, the path analysis also shows that visitors' religious

tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between tourists' visit motive and re-tourism intention. This suggests that religious tourism experiences help people turn their reasons for visiting into plans to return. Mediation analysis, which influences destination loyalty and behavior, emphasizes religious travel experiences' transformative power. Path analysis also shows that visitor perception and brand trust affect the relationship between visitors' visit motive and re-tourism intention. These results demonstrate very substantial moderating effects, with T statistics of 3.171 and 3.632 and p-values of 0.000 and 0.002. This reveals that tourists' views of destination attributes and faith in destination brands strongly influence the relationship between visit motivation and re-tourism intention. The moderation study stresses the role of destination branding, marketing, and service delivery in religious tourism's behavioral intentions and loyalty.

Table 9: Path Analysis.

	Original Sample	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values
Visit motivation significantly influences the re-tourism intention of tourists.	0.445	0.147	3.191	<b>0.000</b>
Visitors' religious tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.	0.875	0.028	14.149	<b>0.000</b>
Visitor perception significantly moderates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.	0.411	0.136	3.171	<b>0.000</b>
Brand trust significantly moderates the relationship of tourists visit motivation and re-tourism intention.	0.471	0.156	3.632	<b>0.002</b>

## DISCUSSION

From a theoretical perspective, the discussion chapter delves into the results of applying concepts relevant to the study's framework and the dynamics of visitor behavior in places associated with religious tourism. This study explores the intricate connections that support destination loyalty and repeat visits by analyzing the interactions among passengers' travel reasons, experiences in religious tourism, visitor perceptions, brand trust, and intention to return. The presentation elucidates the intricate characteristics of religious tourism by combining theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence. The knowledge it provides is valuable for individuals working in destination management seeking

to improve their strategies and activities for sustainable tourism expansion.

This explanation emphasizes the first and second hypotheses, which were backed by the research results, together with religious tourism, destination management, and marketing strategies. We reached a consensus on both alternatives. The study confirmed that tourist incentives influenced the probability of tourists returning, supporting the first premise. This demonstrates how an individual's primary motivation for visiting a holy place influences their probability of making a return visit. [Zhou et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize the need of comprehending visitors' objectives, which could involve spiritual enrichment or gaining knowledge about the host culture. To develop personalized visitor experiences and marketing tactics, it is essential to comprehend their requirements. Authorities and tourism promoters should advertise services and events tailored for religious travelers. Therefore, it is recommended to visit the site often and show loyalty. The second hypothesis is that religious tourism experiences play a mediating role in the connection between visitors' motivation and their intention to return. This was supported by empirical findings. The quality and scope of religious tourism experiences significantly impact the probability of travelers revisiting sacred sites. According to [Hung Lee et al. \(2021\)](#), religious tourist experiences develop over time. This is because of their duty as mediators. The trips encompass sightseeing, spiritual and personal development, and cultural immersion. Hence, stakeholders of the destination should focus on authentic and engaging connections with religious heritage, traditions, and people to enhance the religious tourism experiences of guests. Tourism sites may enhance guest engagement by offering memorable experiences. Guests are encouraged to return and recommend the property for this reason.

Accepting the initial and subsequent hypotheses of religious tourism demonstrates the interplay between travelers' experiences, motivations, and intentions to revisit. The findings highlight the importance of destination stakeholders managing the destination comprehensively. This approach surpasses conventional marketing by addressing guest needs and generating significant and authentic experiences ([Liao et al., 2021](#)). The findings emphasize the importance of continually assessing and improving a destination's amenities to meet changing passenger and industry needs. Destinations can profit economically, socioculturally, and ecologically from destination loyalty, repeat business, and sustainable religious tourism. Enhancing religious tourism



experiences and using goals achieves this. The third and fourth assumptions concern religious tourism. The ideas show how tourists' opinions of a place and brand affect their probability to return. Research confirmed the final hypothesis that visitors' impressions strongly affect the relationship. Initial trip motives, cultural authenticity, service quality, and overall experience impact travelers' intentions to revisit holy sites. These views are vital for encouraging travelers to return hallowed sites. This shows how stakeholders influence passengers with clever branding, destination marketing, and excellent service. Repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty can promote sustainable tourism. When guests leave, make sure they like the place. The fourth hypothesis was confirmed, showing that brand confidence motivates and retains visitors. This was supported by evidence. According to [Xiong et al. \(2024\)](#), travelers who trust religious institutions are more inclined to return. The reasons they first visited religious sites demonstrate this. Reputation management and destination branding are crucial to recruiting and retaining religious travelers, and the concept was well received. Excellent service, open communication, and ethical business methods build tourist trust. Brand trust can differentiate destinations in the competitive travel industry, retain customers, and manage religious tourism for long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits.

The third and fourth hypotheses were confirmed, showing that religious tourism visitor behavior is complicated and that site perception and brand trust influence return visits. Results reveal destination stakeholders must strategize and implement destination management. This technique requires destination branding, marketing, and good service to gain tourist trust. It is important to consistently assess and analyze the destination's performance to pinpoint areas requiring enhancement in order to meet market and tourist expectations. Destinations can cultivate brand loyalty, draw in new business, and emerge as global frontrunners in religious tourism by using tourists' confidence in the brand. Recognizing the four assumptions demonstrates the importance of comprehending the return rates of religious visits. Variables include visitors' intentions, previous experiences, viewpoints, and strategies for creating trust. This study utilizes theoretical and empirical data to elucidate the connection of religious tourists to their places and the probability of their return. The results indicate that destination stakeholders need to manage the destination intentionally and cautiously. The strategy should prioritize genuine, significant, and unforgettable interactions. The events should cater to the attendees'

requirements and ambitions. Encouraging destination loyalty, repeat business, and sustainable religious tourism can lead to economic, sociocultural, and ecological benefits for destinations. Visitor viewpoints, religious travel, traveler incentives, and brand reliability can accomplish this objective.

This study sheds light on the intricate connections between the reasons for the visit, experiences with religious tourism, visitor perception, brand trust, and the desire to return. Empirical study indicates that travelers' desire to return to holy sites are influenced by their experiences and reasons. These results demonstrate the transformative and significant effects of religious travel. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of destination branding, marketing, and service quality in fostering positive tourist views and trust, ultimately resulting in return business and destination loyalty. The cross-sectional design and self-reported data of the study may restrict causal inference and generalizability. While this study has yielded valuable insights, it is important to recognize its limitations. Nonetheless, governments, destination stakeholders, and tourism professionals can benefit from this research's theoretical and practical implications by enhancing visitor experiences and destination management plans for religious tourism. For a deeper understanding of religious tourism visitor behavior, future research may employ cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal designs, and multi-method methodologies. Resolving these research voids and investigating novel approaches could enhance the theory and application of religious tourism. This will support the sustainable growth of religious tourism destinations across the globe.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This research advances theories related to religious tourism. First, the expectancy-value theory and the elaboration likelihood model are supported by the observation that visitors' behavioral intentions are influenced by cognitive processes, subjective assessments, and trust mechanisms. This study explains the complex relationship between religious tourist visit motive, experiences, perception, brand trust, and re-tourism intention using theoretical perspectives and empirical tourism data. The identification of moderators and mediators in significant variable interactions reveals mechanisms behind tourist behavior, facilitating the growth and improvement of theory. Theory also affects marketing beyond tourism, destination management, and consumer behavior. The

attitudes, trust, and conduct of tourists are influenced by destination branding, marketing, and service delivery, which emphasizes the necessity for stakeholders to engage in strategic and comprehensive destination management. The theoretical ramifications of this study help us comprehend religious tourism and lay the groundwork for additional study and consideration.

By enhancing religious tourism destination management, marketing, and visitor experiences, this research benefits governments, destination stakeholders, and travel industry professionals. First, by examining important factors including visit motivation, religious tourism experiences, visitor perception, and brand trust, destination marketers may tailor their marketing campaigns and offerings to the various interests and reasons of travelers. By comprehending the behavioural intentions of religious travelers, location stakeholders may tailor marketing and authentic, meaningful experiences to foster repeat visits and loyalty. Travelers' trust and positive opinions are increased by branding, reputation management, and providing high-quality services, therefore destinations should invest in infrastructure, hospitality, and community involvement. In order to enhance visitor experiences and destination competitiveness, destination stakeholders can better understand tourist behavior mechanisms and design targeted, strategic interventions by identifying moderators and mediators in important variable linkages. In order to maintain religious tourism destinations, this research can assist destination stakeholders in enhancing destination management, branding, and the memorable experiences of religious travelers.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

This study sheds light on religious tourism, but there are significant drawbacks. Self-reported data may lead to more variable links in the study due to method bias. In order to gain a deeper understanding of visitor behavior, future research may involve observational studies or interviews with destination stakeholders. In addition, causal relationships are challenging due to the cross-sectional aspect of the study. The temporal dynamics and causal processes of visit motivation, religious tourism experiences, visitor perception, brand trust, and re-tourism intention could all be studied through longitudinal or experimental research. Generalizability may be limited by the study's sample and setting. The study could be repeated in the future to assess traveler behavior and destination

management in a variety of settings, cultures, and religions.

Many research directions are suggested in this paper. Future research could look into how VR and AR could enhance destination marketing and religious tourism. As sustainability gains importance, future research may look at how sustainable tourism practices impact visitor behavior and destination competitiveness in religious tourism contexts. It is possible to research the interactions between visitor experiences and motivations by studying religious tourism and other specialist tourism categories. Volunteer travel and wellness are becoming more and more common. The attitudes and actions of religious tourists ought to be examined in light of the place's character and image. In order to strengthen theoretical and practical understanding and maintain religious tourism destinations across the globe, future study can close these gaps and investigate new facets of religious tourism.

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## APPENDIX 1

### *Brand Trust*

1. To what extent do you believe that religious institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are reliable and trustworthy?
2. How confident are you in the reputation and credibility of the religious leaders associated with the religious sites you visited?
3. How would you rate the consistency and reliability of the information provided by religious organizations about the history and significance of the religious sites?
4. How much faith do you have in the commitment of religious institutions to safeguard the cultural and religious heritage of the sites you visited?
5. To what extent do you trust the efforts of religious organizations to ensure the safety and security of pilgrims during their visits?
6. How confident are you in the ethical standards and integrity maintained by religious institutions in managing the religious sites and pilgrimage experiences?

### *Visit Motivation*

1. What are your primary reasons for visiting religious sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
2. To what extent do spiritual or religious factors influence your decision to embark on religious tourism?
3. How important are cultural or historical factors in motivating your visits to religious destinations?
4. Do personal factors such as seeking inner peace or spiritual growth influence your motivation to engage in religious tourism?

### *Visitors' Religious Tourism Experience*

1. How satisfied are you with the accessibility of religious sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
2. To what extent did you find the facilities and amenities at religious sites met your expectations?
3. How would you rate the overall authenticity of your religious tourism experiences in the Kingdom?
4. Did you encounter any challenges or obstacles during your religious tourism experiences in the Kingdom?
5. How memorable were the religious rituals and ceremonies you participated in during your visits?
6. How satisfied are you with the level of interaction and engagement with local communities during your religious tourism experiences?
7. To what extent did your religious tourism experiences meet your spiritual or

religious expectations?

8. How would you rate the cultural immersion and learning opportunities provided during your religious tourism experiences?
9. How satisfied are you with the quality of accommodation and hospitality services available during your religious tourism trips?
10. Did you perceive any cultural or religious authenticity in the activities and events organized at religious sites?
11. How meaningful were the encounters and interactions with fellow pilgrims and religious practitioners during your visits?
12. To what extent did your religious tourism experiences contribute to your overall sense of spiritual fulfillment?

### *Visitor Perception*

1. How would you rate the cleanliness and maintenance of religious sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
2. To what extent did the friendliness and hospitality of locals influence your perception of religious destinations?
3. How safe and secure did you feel during your visits to religious sites?
4. How would you rate the level of respect and reverence shown towards religious practices and traditions?

### *Re-Tourism Intention*

1. How likely are you to revisit religious sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the future?
2. Would you consider recommending religious destinations in the Kingdom to friends or family members?
3. How strongly do you intend to engage in future religious tourism activities in the Kingdom?

How likely are you to prioritize visiting religious sites in the Kingdom over other travel destinations in the future?