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Suneel Kumar

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi, drsuneel.sbsc@gmail.com

Shivangi Gupta

University School of Management and Entrepreneurship, Delhi Technological University, shivangigupta_phdusme2K19@dtu.ac.in

Shekhar Asthana

Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi, shekhar0481.sa@gmail.com

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Determinants of Spiritual Tourism Consumption: A Hierarchical Approach

Suneel Kumar

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi
drsuneel.sbsc@gmail.com

Shivangi Gupta

University School of Management and Entrepreneurship, Delhi Technological University
shivangigupta_phdusme2K19@dtu.ac.in

Shekhar

Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi
shekhar0481.sa@gmail.com

This paper aims to analyse the relationship between factors influencing the travel intentions of the spiritual tourist. The research design comprises three segments, i.e., identifying factors from the literature, conducting interviews with the academic experts and managers, and analysing the responses recorded. The *Interpretive Structural Modelling* (ISM) technique is used to determine the interlinkage between the factors and develop a hierarchical relationship. This paper identified twelve factors that influence the travel intention of spiritual tourists. The results indicate that the pro-tourism attitude of the management of religious monuments, presence of relaxation and recreational activities, historical and cultural heritage of a destination, infrastructure development, and accessibility of place significantly drive tourist motivation to undertake spiritual tourism. Also, destination cost, reference group influence, marketing of the destination, destination image, and stress and spirituality level of tourist influence intention to undertake spiritual tourism, but get influenced by tourist motivation drivers. The study's value lies in clarifying the relationship between factors influencing the travel intentions of spiritual tourists, an area where limited research has been done.

Key Words: spiritual tourism; motivation; hospitality management; Interpretive structural modelling

Introduction

Spirituality is defined as an aspect of human existence wherein one tries to find out the meaning and purpose of life. It aims to give direction to one's journey to seek answers to questions that guide one's living (Baker, 2003). It is proven to have a significant positive impact on a person's health and well-being, thereby improving the quality of life (Adegbola, 2006; Counted, Possamai & Meade, 2018; Jafari *et al.*, 2010; Koenig, 2012; Vitorino *et al.*, 2018). Tourism, where the primary purpose is leisure, and mental peace, has imbibed the principle of spirituality in its product, spiritual tourism. Spiritual Tourism, therefore, can be defined as tourism undertaken to know oneself, seeking answers to the purpose of existence, for mental and emotional well-being, and connecting with the supreme divine (Bone, 2013; Buzinde, 2020; Ivona & Privitera, 2019; Sharpley, 2016; Singh, 2009). Several studies have been conducted

on various aspects of spiritual tourism, highlighting it as a sub-section but different product from religious tourism, its relative importance for the economy and visitors, and the theoretical framework for its development. Studies have pointed out the difference between religious and spiritual tourism. A religious tourist's travel intention is to act on their religious beliefs, whereas a spiritual tourist travels to explore life's meaning (Sirirat, 2019).

Researchers globally have hovered around the factors that can help develop spiritual tourism. Each of the studies is unique in identifying different factors influencing the travel intention of spiritual tourists. Insight into these factors helps in strategic policy-making by explaining the 'What' and 'How' of spiritual tourism. However, a study on the interrelationship between these factors is missing and demands the researcher's attention. In many developing and underdeveloped nations, good investment proposals suffer from crowding out due to

scarcity of funds. Thus, there is a significant chance that spiritual tourism, although a potentially lucrative niche tourism segment, might fail to gain policymakers' attention compared to other mass tourism segments.

Identifying and working on every possible factor will become ineffective as it would heavily consume scarce resources. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to strategically develop the industry by focusing on factors with the greatest potential. Thus, this study attempts to bridge the literature gap and help policy makers formulate spiritual tourism strategies by highlighting the most important factors influencing spiritual tourist travel intentions. This will help allocate resources strategically and act as a base for future research in this direction.

The study objectives can be summarised in the form of the following research questions.

- RQ1:** What factors influence the motivation of spiritual tourism consumption?
- RQ2:** How are these motivators interrelated?

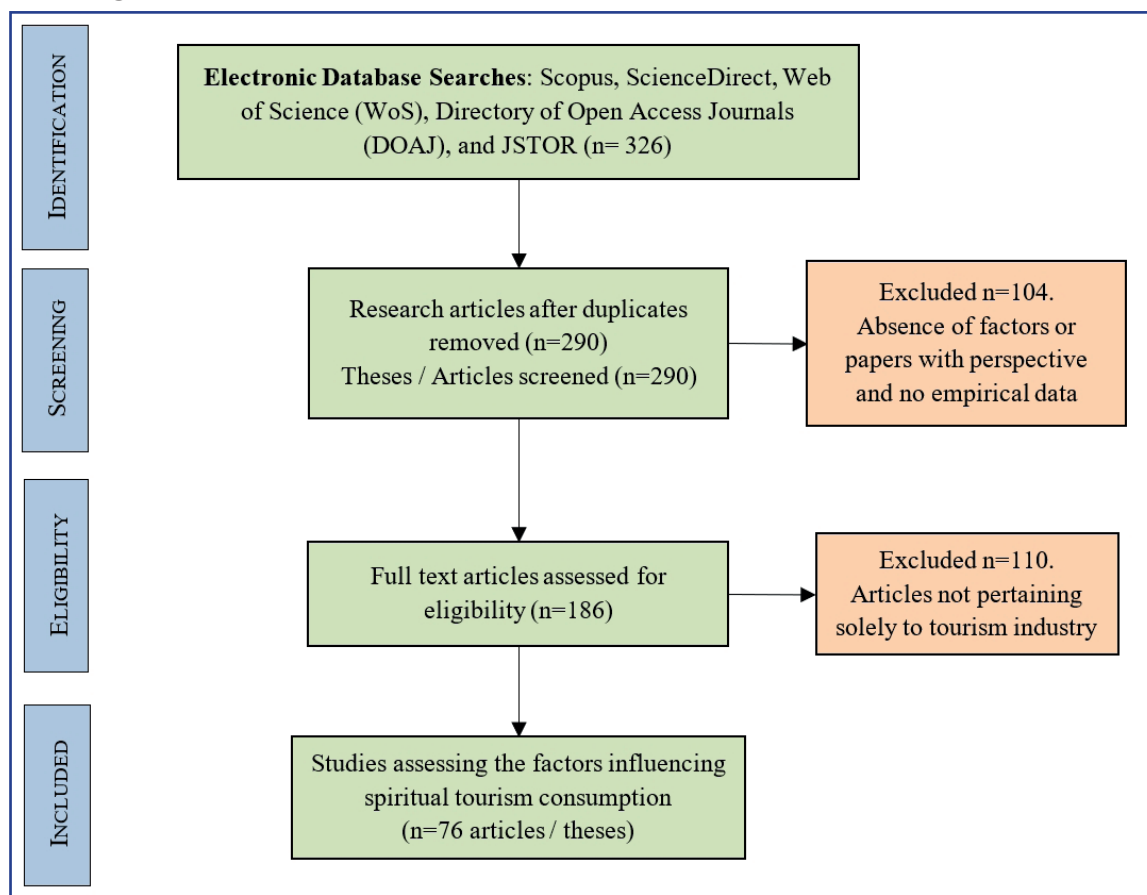
Review of Literature

The authors conducted an extensive literature review to identify the factors influencing the spiritual tourist intention to undertake spiritual tourism (Figure 1). 326 articles on different databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and JSTOR), were identified and screened to identify factors. At each stage, articles / theses were removed if they had no empirical data or were perspective articles. Articles were also rejected from the process if they did not focus on the tourism industry. A final number of 76 articles / theses were explored to identify the different factors influencing spiritual tourists' travel intention.

Factors impacting travel intention of spiritual tourists

Spiritual tourism has been a hot topic of academic interest. The role of marketing this sector will be to attract spiritual tourists by building a compelling brand and image for spiritual tourism (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Geary, 2008; Phukan, Rahman & Devdutt, 2012). Proper

Figure 1 Review of Literature - Process Followed in the Identification of Factors



Source- Author's own

marketing will also ensure tourists are aware of spiritual tourism, assess how much they are interested in it, how well they desire spiritual tourism, and how much they are willing to undertake it (Haq & Jackson, 2009). Spiritual events, activities, and journeys act as catalysts in spiritual tourism development by increasing spiritual tourism acceptance amongst businesses and academics (Haq & Wong, 2010). Heritage buildings have proven to be a spiritual transmission sources for tourists (Willson & McIntosh, 2013). Spirituality is felt more in places with a history of rich heritage and culture (Kumar, 2018; Piewdang, Mekkamol & Untachai, 2013). People are influenced by cultural values and try to seek answers to their problems and attain enlightenment. This often links to a mechanism which blends with the community's rich cultural heritage (Power, 2015).

The cost incurred in travelling is one of the critical factors impacting tourist behaviour (Nicolau & Más, 2006; Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2017). Destination costs will impact tourist decisions in relation to factors such as activities performed, length of stay and expenditure incurred during the trip. This will motivate or demotivate a spiritual tourist to undertake a journey. Public potency, the religious importance of a place, religious administration, art and culture, the attraction of potential opportunities, and community cooperation are among the primary attributes for developing spiritual tourism (Kuralbayev *et al.*, 2017). Individual factors such as wellness, adventure or recreation, and religious motivators such as religious observance, ritualised practice, and reaffirmation of identity are the primary influencers for spiritual tourism (Cheer, Belhassen & Kujawa, 2017). Spirituality plays a role in altering the consumption pattern of a consumer (Skousgaard, 2006). A person with a low spiritual level might not feel the need to undertake spiritual tourism in the same way as a spiritually awakened person.

Spirituality has often been linked to positive well-being (Lifshitz, Nimrod & Bachner, 2019). Relaxation and recreational activities at destinations will tend to have positive impact in reducing the stress level of tourists (Dowson, 2016; Moal-Ulvoas, 2016). Religions are a prominent means of attaining spirituality (Fry, 2000; Noronha, 2015). Many people visit religious monuments to seek answers to their questions and change their lifestyle. If the administration is reluctant to allow people to stay there for long or has certain other restrictions, spiritual tourism will not prosper. Destination accessibility and tourist travel motivation are interrelated (Kumar,

Shekhar & Guleria, 2019). An accessible destination will attract a tourist that wishes to enjoy their time traveling and seeking solitude away from mental turmoil. The absence of infrastructure, however, might discourage spiritual tourists from visiting a destination (Hartini & Dewi, 2019).

People tend to follow their reference group consciously or subconsciously (Fernandes & Londhe, 2015). A person might have a spiritual interest on their own, or because reference groups influence tourist behaviour. Families with elders who have high spiritual intellect tend to undertake such trips with their families - including small children who, at their age, might not be spiritually awakened. Stress is a modern-day concept and even young children are impacted by stress (Kleber, 2019; Lodha, 2018). Spirituality is one of the ways to get relief from this stress. People with high-stress levels tend to seek solace from their problems by undertaking spiritual tourism. Intention to undertake spiritual experience can be a crucial motivator for a tourist. This creates demand. A product has to be demanded by the tourist to become successful (Cooper, 1994) and in the absence of demand, there will be no market and hence no revenue.

Research Methods

Conceptual Framework

The extant literature suggests that spiritual tourism consumption is a function of several factors. However, there exists interrelatedness between these factors. This interrelatedness gives rise to hierarchical relationships between these factors. For instance, relaxation and recreational activities will increase destination cost and directly influence the marketing mix of the destination. It would also impact the intention of a tourist to undertake spiritual tourism. However, to develop these activities, there must be adequate infrastructure that must be established, mindful of the cultural and historical heritage of the destination. Similar interrelationships exist between other factors. The development of strategies requires time and money that in short supply. Thus, it is not advisable to target all of the factors associated with the Spiritual Tourism system. Thus, there is a need for a flexible hierarchical system within which, policy makers can adjust a number of factors and evaluate how these have impacted on the system's influences.

Methodology

Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) finds its origin in John Warfield's work in the early 1970s. Since then, researchers have widely used it in strategic management (Alzebdeh, Bashir & Al Siyabi, 2015; Guo, Li & Stevens, 2012; Tripathy, Sahu & Ray, 2013). Due to its simplicity and effectiveness, ISM's use in the tourism industry increases (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). ISM is an interpretive modelling technique based on an experts' interpretation and gives final output in the form of a model. Developing a hierarchical model using ISM involves a series of steps (Gupta, Gupta & Shekhar, 2021). The first step involves identifying factors by an extensive review of the literature. If the need arises, experts are consulted for additional factors. The factors are scored on the nature of their relationships, and insignificant factors are removed. This gives us the final list of factors to be included in the study. Once the factors have been identified and coded, the next step is to prepare a self-structural interpretation matrix (SSIM). This matrix is also known as the V-A-X-O matrix, where the relationship between variables is coded in the following manner:

If a factor leads or drives another factor; the relationship is denoted as **V**;

If a factor is led or driven by another factor; the relationship is denoted as **A**;

If the two factors are interdependent; the relationship is denoted as **X**;

If the two factors are unrelated; the relationship is denoted as **O**;

The SSIM is then converted into a binary form, with V and X relationships converted into one, and the rest coded as zero. The resultant matrix obtained from this is known as the Initial Reachability Matrix. From the initial reachability matrix, the next step is to incorporate transitive links into the matrix. The driving power and dependence level help to calculate the hierarchical position of the factors. The driving power and dependence level calculation helps classify factors into autonomous factors, linkage factors, driving factors, and dependent factors. It is also known as MICMAC (Matrix of Cross-Impact Multiplications Applied to Classification) analysis. Categorising the factors helps in identifying the controllable and uncontrollable factors in a system. In the end, the connections are established; firstly the process includes all the links, and then, transitive links are removed in the final di-graph.

Survey Instruments and Measurement

The validity of the identified factors is examined through conducting structured interviews with experts. In this research, the authors used a bilingual questionnaire (in Hindi and English) to gauge the authenticity of the factors and the nature of interrelationship among them. There were additional questions on respondents' demographics. The experts were asked if the various factors act as motivators for spiritual tourists and were asked to rate each on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 means not a motivator and 5 means highly significant motivator. Respondents were then asked to fill a Self-Structuring Interaction Matrix (SSIM). The author obtained the respondents' consent before participating in the research and ensured that their responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Two scholars proofread the survey that resulted in a few grammatical edits.

Data Collection

The data were collected in three months from January 2020 to March 2020. The authors collected data solely from Indian respondents. The authors contacted the experts by phone and briefed them about collecting data. These experts are people that have expertise in the field of religious and spiritual tourism or are working in organizations in the spiritual tourism industry. Initially, thirty experts were identified through convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify subsequent experts. For ease of recording and analysis, the questionnaire was mailed to a hundred and forty respondents, of which one hundred and twenty questionnaires were returned. Twenty of the returned surveys were rejected as they were incomplete, and thus, analysis was done on the one hundred usable responses.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample was dominated by academic experts (65 of 100 respondents), meaning only 35 percent of the respondents were industry experts. The sample was slightly dominated by males (58 percent). Of the total sample, 41 were between 35 and 40 years of age, 25 were between 30 and 35 years, 19 percent indicated that they were between 25 and 30, and 15 were above 40 years of age.

Table 1: Average Scores of Factors Determined Through Expert Interaction

Factor Code	Factor	Average Score
01	Destination cost	3.58
02	Spirituality level of tourist	3.88
03	Marketing Mix of Destination	3.64
04	Historical and Cultural Heritage	4.24
05	Relaxation and Recreational facilities	3.98
06	Management of religious monuments	4.48
07	Accessibility of Destination	4.12
08	Infrastructure	4.16
09	Reference Group Influence on tourist	2.69
10	Destination Image	2.85
11	Stress level of Tourists	4.01
12	Intention to undertake spiritual tourism	4.84

Source: Author's calculation

About their highest level of education, most of the respondents (71) had a PhD, while 19 had a professional degree, and 7 had an MPhil. However, only 3 had a graduation degree. Concerning their spiritual tourism consumption, 45 had been on a spiritual trip within six months, 35 within one year, and the remaining 20 had been on a spiritual trip some time during their life.

Examining the interrelationship between the factors

Experts' scores on each factor were averaged to calculate the score for the factor out of five (Table 1). Intention to undertake spiritual tourism, management of religious

monuments, and historical and cultural heritage of the destination were the factors that scored the highest with 4.84, 4.48, and 4.24 respectively. Reference group influence on tourists scored the lowest with a value of 2.69. All of the factors managed to score above 2.5 (a cut-off score pre-determined by the authors in the study), so all factors were included in the study.

The SSIM (Table 2) shows the relationships identified by the experts between the factors.

It shows that *destination cost* influences the marketing mix of the destination and the destination image.

The *spirituality level of the tourist* influences their desire to undertake spiritual tourism.

The *marketing mix* of the destination influences the destination image.

The destination's *historical and cultural heritage* influences the destination cost, marketing mix of destination, relaxation and recreational activities, infrastructure development, and destination image.

The presence of *relaxation and recreational activities* influences the destination cost, destination marketing, the stress level of the tourists, and destination image.

The *attitude of the management* of a religious monument influences the historical and cultural heritage of the destination, development of relaxation and recreational activities, accessibility of the destination, infrastructure development, and destination image.

The *accessibility* of the destination influences the destination cost, marketing mix of the destination,

Table 2: Self-Structural Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
01	-	O	V	A	A	O	A	A	O	V	O	O
02	O	-	O	O	O	O	O	O	A	O	A	V
03	A	O	-	A	A	O	A	A	O	V	O	O
04	V	O	V	-	V	A	O	X	O	V	O	O
05	V	O	V	A	-	A	A	A	O	V	V	O
06	O	O	O	V	V	-	V	V	O	V	O	O
07	V	O	V	O	V	A	-	A	O	V	O	O
08	V	O	V	X	V	A	V	-	O	V	O	O
09	O	V	O	O	O	O	O	O	-	O	O	V
10	A	O	A	A	A	A	A	A	O	-	O	V
11	O	O	O	O	A	O	O	O	O	O	-	V
12	O	A	O	O	O	O	O	O	A	A	A	-

Source: Author's compilation

Table 3: Initial Reachability Matrix

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
01	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
02	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
03	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
04	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
05	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
06	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
07	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
08	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
09	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Source: Author's compilation

development of relaxation and recreational activities, and destination image.

The *development of infrastructure* influences the destination cost, marketing mix of the destination, historical and cultural heritage, development of relaxation and recreational activities, accessibility of the destination, and destination image.

The *reference group* pressure influences tourists' intention to undertake spiritual tourism and spirituality level.

The *destination image* influences tourists' intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The *stress level* of the tourist influences the decision to undertake spiritual tourism.

The SSIM is converted to its binary form to produce an Initial Reachability Matrix (Table 3).

Transitivity helps to identify new indirect relationships (Table 4).

The *marketing mix* of the destination, by transitivity, drives a tourist's intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The destination's *historical and cultural heritage* also influences the accessibility of the destination and stress level of the tourist, and intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The presence of *relaxation and recreational* activities now shows an influence on the intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

Table 4: Final Reachability Matrix

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	Driving power
01	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
02	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
03	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1*	3
04	1	0	1	1	1	0	1*	1	0	1	1*	1*	9
05	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1*	6
06	1*	0	1*	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1*	1*	10
07	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	1*	7
08	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1*	1*	9
09	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dependence Level	6	2	7	3	5	1	4	3	1	8	6	11	

Source: Author's compilation

Code	Factor Name	Partition Level
01	Destination cost	Level 5
02	Spirituality level of tourist	Level 7
03	Marketing Mix of Destination	Level 6
04	Historical and Cultural Heritage	Level 2
05	Relaxation and Recreational facilities	Level 4
06	Management of religious monuments	Level 8
07	Accessibility of Destination	Level 3
08	Infrastructure	Level 2
09	Reference Group Influence on tourist	Level 6
10	Destination Image	Level 7
11	Stress level of Tourists	Level 7
12	Intention to undertake spiritual tourism	Level 1

Source: Author's calculation

The *attitude of management* at a religious monuments now additionally drives destination cost, marketing mix of the destination, the stress level of the tourists, and intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The *accessibility* of the destination and infrastructure development now influences the tourists' stress level and intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The 'driving power' and the 'dependence level' is calculated for each of the factors.

With the help of the driving power and dependence level calculated in the previous step, the partition level of each factor is thus determined (Table 5). For instance, the 'driving power' and 'dependence level' of the management of religious monuments are six and one. This means that the management of religious monuments influences six factors and gets influenced by one factor.

Partition level means the positioning of each of the factors in the hierarchical model (Table 5). The driving power (reachability set) and dependence level (antecedent set) form an intersection set. If the reachability set is equal to the intersection set at a level for a factor, that level becomes the partition level. This cycle is repeated until the partition level of each factor has been determined (see appendix). The results show that the management of religious monuments is placed at level one. At level two are infrastructure and historical and cultural heritage. The accessibility of the destination occupies the third level. At the fourth level is the presence of relaxation and recreational facilities. Destination cost occupies the fifth level. At the sixth level are reference group influence and marketing mix of the destination. Stress level, spirituality

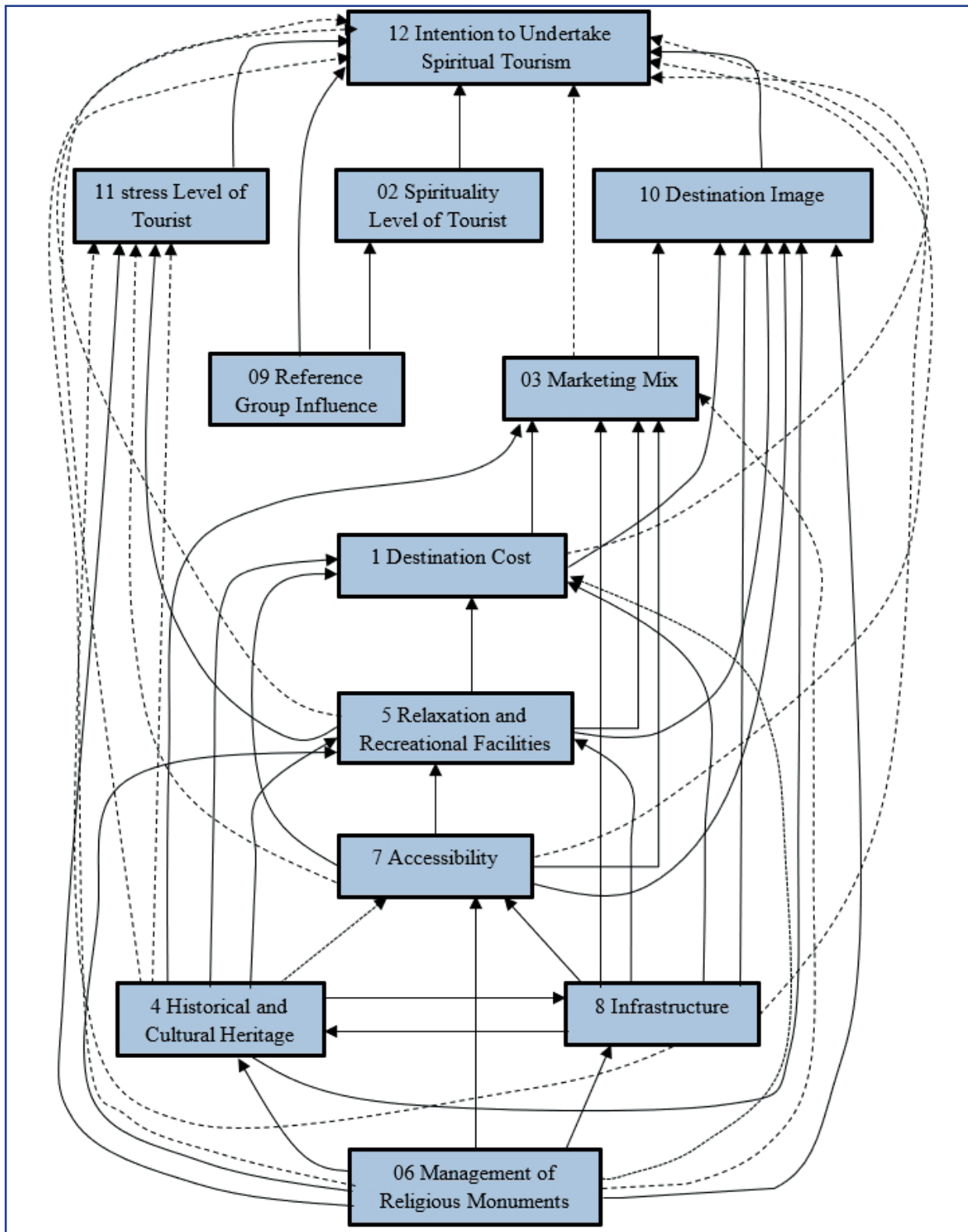
level of the tourists, and destination image occupy level seven. At level eight is the intention to undertake spiritual tourism.

The initial digraph (Figure 2) is prepared and represents all the links that exist between the factors. The placement of factors in the digraph follows increasing order, i.e., factors with level 1 are placed at the top and followed by factors at level 2, 3, up to level 8. Factors identified at the same level are placed at the same level in the digraph, i.e., horizontally adjacent.

The final ISM digraph (Figure 3) shows eight levels in the hierarchical structure of factors. Factors that are at a lower level drive the factors at the upper level of the hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the management of religious monuments. It means that it channels the tourist motivation or intent to undertake spiritual tourism. It directly influences infrastructure development and historical and cultural heritage that are interdependent. Infrastructure development directly influences the accessibility of destinations which influences the presence of relaxation and recreational activities. These activities will impact the destination costs and the stress level of tourists, which influences the intent to undertake spiritual tourism. The destination cost influences the marketing mix directly and alters the destination image. The reference group influences the tourists' spirituality level and destination image, impacting the intent to undertake spiritual tourism.

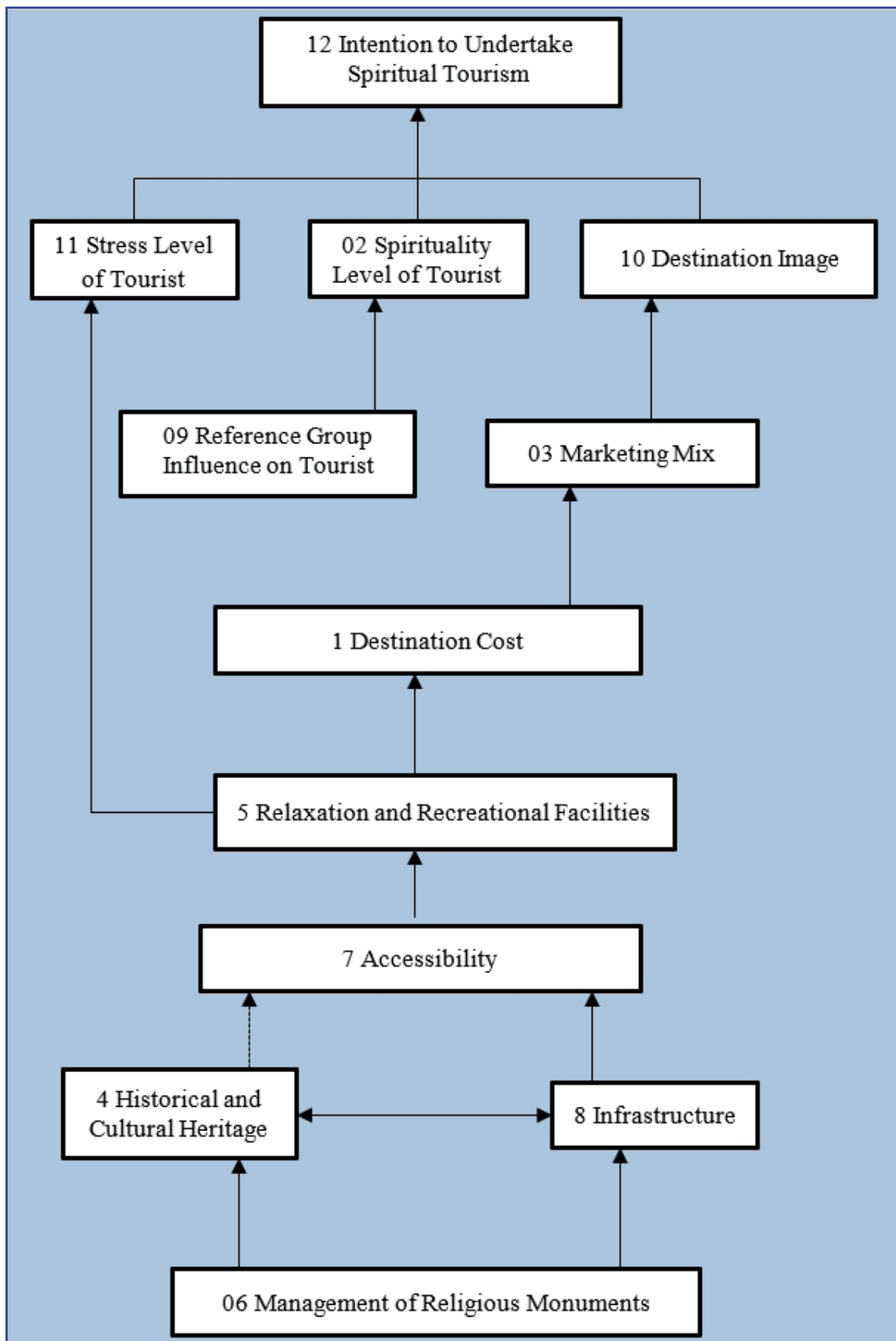
MICMAC analysis (Figure 4) shows that reference group influence on a tourist and spirituality level of tourists are autonomous factors. The management of

Figure 2: Initial Digraph Showing Hierarchical Relationship Among Factors Influencing Spiritual Tourism



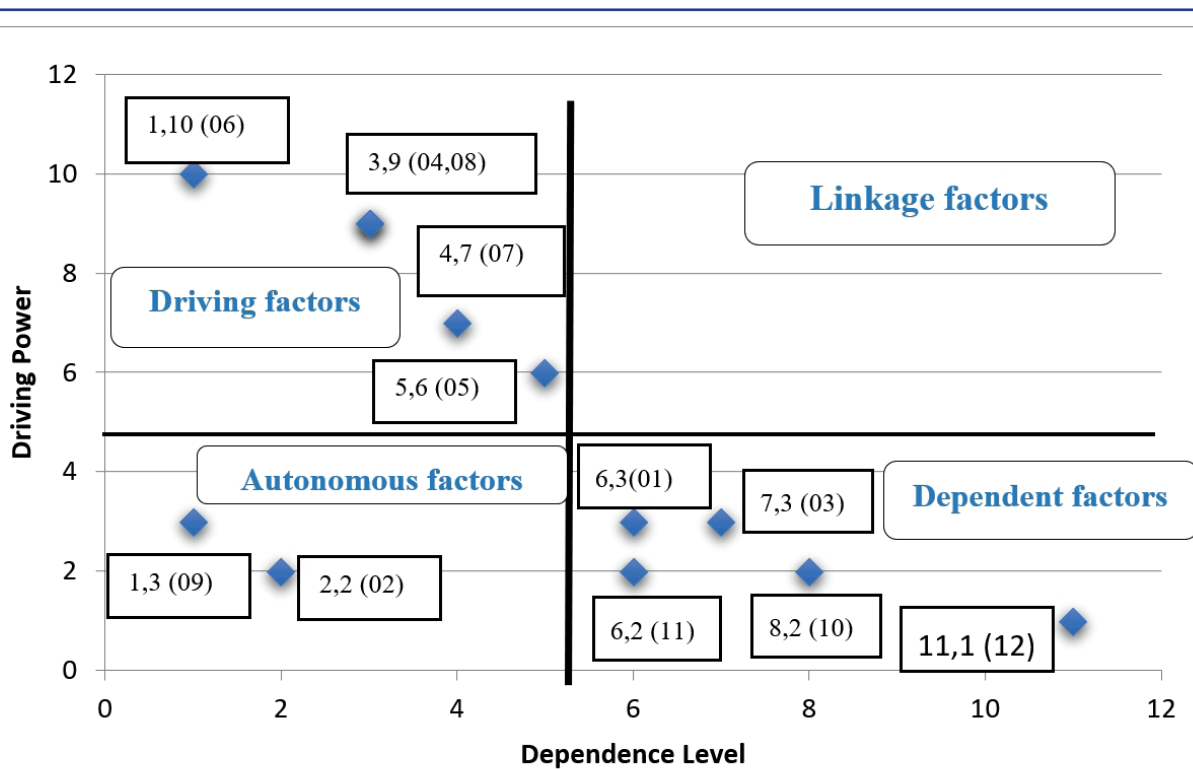
Source- Author's own

Figure 3: Final Digraph Showing Hierarchical Relationship Among Factors Influencing Spiritual Tourism



Source- Author's own

Figure 4: Driving and Dependence Matrix



Source- Author's own

religious monuments, historical and cultural heritage, infrastructure, relaxation and recreational facilities, and destination accessibility are driving factors. The destination cost, marketing mix, destination image, the stress level of tourists, and tourists' intention to undertake spiritual tourism are dependent factors. The analysis clarifies that all the factors except tourists' stress level and reference group influence on tourists are uncontrollable. Also, the results obtained are consistent with the digraph.

Discussion and Implications

This study suggests several ways a spiritual tourist can be motivated for spiritual tourism consumption. The attitude of the management of religious monuments plays a pivotal role in attracting a spiritual tourist. They act as the central authority that permits or forbids tourism activity on their premises (Shinde, 2018). Tussles with the management of religious monuments will harm the development of spiritual tourism. At first, the management of the religious monuments will influence the development of infrastructure at a place. Infrastructure development is necessary for promoting tourism (Jovanović & Ilić, 2016; Seetanah, Teeroovengadum & Nunkoo, 2020). And then,

the management will have control over the cultural and historical heritage of a place. However, infrastructure development should be aligned with cultural and heritage values as many destinations are visited more for their heritage qualities than religious qualities (Chrysanthi, Panoraia & Lagos, 2015; Egresi, Bayram & Kara, 2012).

Moreover, heritage can act as a transmitter of traditional customs and values (Alizadeh, 2011; Aulet & Vidal, 2018; Nolan & Nolan, 1992). Also, too much modern infrastructure tends to harm cultural values (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). Infrastructure development will positively influence the accessibility of destinations; thereby, improving tourist satisfaction (Khuong & Luan, 2015; Mistry, 2018). Further, while increasing accessibility, care should be taken that historical and cultural heritage is not destroyed due to over-tourism. Relaxation and recreational facilities have proven to be stress-busters (Chen, Petrick & Shahvali, 2016; Ohe *et al.*, 2017). The development of these activities at tourist destinations will reduce incoming tourists' stress, and they might develop a liking for the place (Bagri & Kala, 2015). This liking might translate into intention to revisit the destination (Seetanah, Teeroovengadum & Nunkoo,

2020). Improved accessibility and infrastructure will further enhance the spiritual tourist motivation.

The development of relaxation activities will increase destination costs for tourists and the local community. There should be an assessment of social carrying capacity and a check on destination costs while developing these activities (Nicolau & Más, 2006; Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2017; Zhuang, Yao & Li, 2019). An increase in destination cost will impact the destination's marketing mix, and that will alter the destination image and intention of a tourist to undertake spiritual tourism. The marketing mix determines the success of a product or a service (Alipour & Darabi, 2011; Bahman, Kamran & Mostafa, 2013). Lucrative offers, product bundling, and strategic development of spiritual tourism will prove beneficial for spiritual tourism (Zouni & Digkas, 2019). Destination image should be tailored for spiritual tourism. It should be created, keeping in mind the cultural and historical heritage, destination cost, marketing mix, and infrastructure at the destination (Kocyigit, 2016). However, once an image has been created, it can lead to stereotyping (Tu & Su, 2014; Tung, King & Tse, 2020), and there can be concerns that other typologies of tourism that are in contrast with spiritual tourism might not be able to prosper in such destinations.

Increasing stress levels are widespread in young people in urban areas (Lodha, 2018; Parikh *et al.*, 2019). So, businesses should be targeted as a market to spread awareness about spiritual tourism (Fedorova, 2016). The spirituality level of tourists is dependent on the influence of their reference group (Shekhar, Gupta & Valeri, 2021). So, elders in a family should be the target audience for spiritual tourism, influencing others to visit the destinations. Furthermore, measures should be undertaken to increase people's spirituality levels (Carr, 2008).

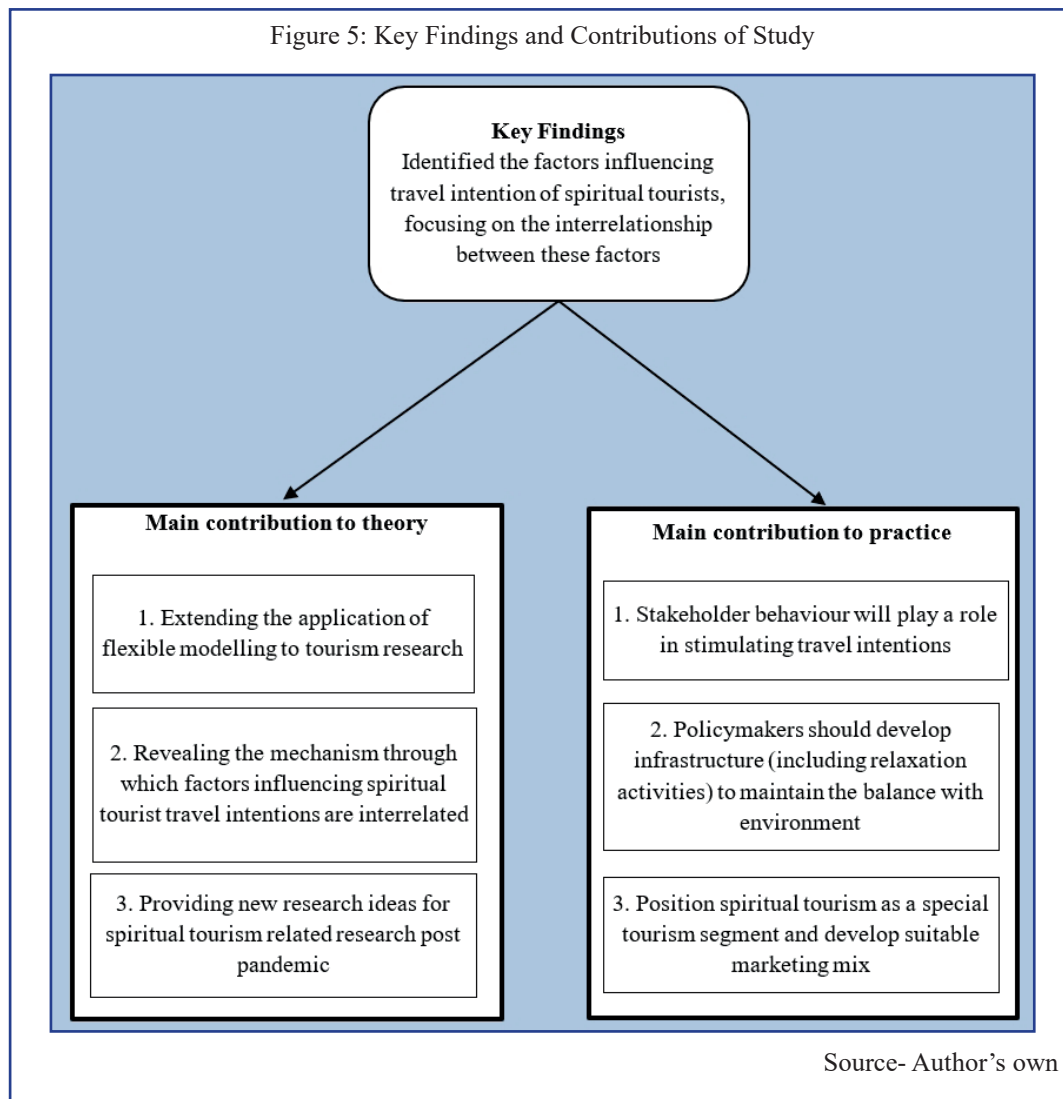
Implications of Study

This study highlights gaps in spiritual tourism research and contributes to theory and practice (Figure 5). Several challenges and opportunities for spiritual tourism development are identified in this model. The spiritual level of the tourists and reference group influence are the autonomous factors. The pandemic outbreak has directly influenced people's spirituality level (Goodman, 2020; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the possibility for spiritual tourism post-pandemic might increase amongst tourists.

The intention to undertake spiritual tourism might be higher in older adults. As this age-group people are decision-makers or influence decisions, and reference group pressure is a motivator for spiritual tourism, this age group should be targeted by effective niche marketing. Further, destination costs should remain competitive to attract tourists. Building a destination image for spiritual tourism might be a challenge for policymakers. A primary challenge for policymakers will be to develop spiritual tourism as a 'mass tourism' or 'niche tourism' segment. The administrator's focus should be on preserving the heritage and monuments of places by ensuring development is undertaken to the highest levels of sustainable development.

Developing standardised infrastructure, marketing mix, and relaxation and recreational activities will depend on the nature of consumer targeted. Local community participation will be a must as locals are the flagbearers of a destination's cultural heritage. Small business entrepreneurs must be used to make spiritual tourism inclusive. Therefore, there should be a core group or working committee comprising entrepreneurs from all concerned sectors and the local community to improve the industry. Policymakers must develop trust with the management of institutions and balance tourist inflow and religious sanctity. Unwarranted incidents, (for instance, recent tussles with religious monuments happening across India), should be avoided. To provide authentic information about heritage and local customs, traditions, and values should be imparted to incoming tourists. Management must help tourists concentrate on enjoyment rather than diverting their attention towards struggling to find information.

This study suggests different ways to stimulate spiritual tourism development. Coupling this analysis with continuity-change matrix, High-Medium-Low (HML), and Vital-Desirable-Burden (VDB) analyses would help select a suitable channel to boost the industry's development. Spiritual tourism destinations are spread globally. Spiritually abundant nations must carry out exploratory studies to explore their destinations which could serve as tourist destinations, existing infrastructure at those destinations, and possibilities for tourism development in those sites and regions. To create necessary infrastructure at destinations, carrying capacity analysis must not be overlooked. Studies should be conducted to determine the physical, social, and economic carrying capacity of such destinations. Spiritual tourism must be



positioned in various communication channels to remind the audience of the product availability and its associated benefits. Researchers should empirically establish the role of spiritual tourism in reducing the stress levels of tourists.

Conclusion and Study Limitations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were designed by the United Nations in 2015. SDG 3, 8, and 11, propose that by 2030 regions must , devise policies and activities that promote good health and well-being, generate decent work and economic growth, resulting in sustainable communities and cities. Spiritual tourism development can significantly contribute to achieving sustainable development these goals. Spiritual tourism development also supports SDG 16, which focuses on achieving global peace and justice.

These desired goals can be achieved by adopting a strategic development approach for spiritual tourism.

Strategic assessment will answer the necessary ‘What’ and ‘How,’ to frame effective policies. Thus, this paper attempts to promote strategic policy and decision-making in the development of spiritual tourism. It is a unique project where analysis has been undertaken to identify ‘what motivates the spiritual tourist?’ and addresses ‘how the various variables are interrelated?’ The study identified twelve variables influencing spiritual tourist motivation and modelled them through the interpretation of a hundred experts to show the interrelationships.

The analysis confirms the presence of several driving motivators that influence the other motivators for a spiritual tourist. By focusing on policy development around the drivers identified, the desired impact on the dependent factors can be achieved. Incorporating flexibility will remove the need to reformulate strategies from scratch in a dynamic environment. It will help in avoiding effort duplication and help in the optimum allocation of resources. The paper has listed managerial

and academic implications for future research in spiritual tourism.

The study, however, is not free from limitations. The study is based on respondents from India. Incorporating respondents from various countries might result in additional spiritual tourism motivators. On increasing the factors identified, the categorisation of the variables might change. The number of experts reached was limited. Increasing the sample size of experts (particularly including those with industry expertise) may lead to variations in results (Watson, 1978). The variations in results are an inherent drawback of ISM which is an interpretive methodology (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). ISM also fails to explain the cause of the relationship between variables. The impact of COVID-19 on spiritual tourist motivators has not been addressed in the study.

Despite its limitations, this study will contribute to the literature on spiritual tourism and attract the interest of academics and policymakers.

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Appendix

Iteration	Factor No	Reachability Set	Antecedent Set	Intersection Set	
Iteration 1	1	1,3,10	1,4,5,6,7,8	1	I
	2	2,12	2,9	2	
	3	3,10,12	1,3,4,5,6,7,8	3	
	4	1,3,4,5,7,8,10,11,12	4,6,8	4,8	
	5	1,3,5,10,11,12	4,5,6,7,8	5	
	6	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12	6	6	
	7	1,3,5,7,10,11,12	4,6,7,8	7	
	8	1,3,4,5,7,8,10,11,12	4,6,8	4,8	
	9	2,9,12	9	9	
	10	10,12	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10	10	
	11	11,12	4,5,6,7,8,11	11	
	12	12	12	12	
Iteration 2	1	1,3,10	1,4,5,6,7,8	1	II
	2	2	2,9	2	
	3	3,10	1,3,4,5,6,7,8	3	
	4	1,3,4,5,7,8,10,11	4,6,8	4,8	
	5	1,3,5,10,11	4,5,6,7,8	5	
	6	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11	6	6	
	7	1,3,5,7,10,11	4,6,7,8	7	
	8	1,3,4,5,7,8,10,11	4,6,8	4,8	
	9	2,9	9	9	
	10	10	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10	10	
	11	11	4,5,6,7,8,11	11	
Iteration 3	1	1,3	1,4,5,6,7,8	1	III
	3	3	1,3,4,5,6,7,8	3	
	4	1,3,4,5,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	
	5	1,3,5	4,5,6,7,8	5	
	6	1,3,4,5,6,7,8	6	6	
	7	1,3,5,7	4,6,7,8	7	
	8	1,3,4,5,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	
	9	9	9	9	
Iteration 4	1	1	1,4,5,6,7,8	1	IV
	4	1,4,5,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	
	5	1,5	4,5,6,7,8	5	
	6	1,4,5,6,7,8	6	6	
	7	1,5,7	4,6,7,8	7	
	8	1,4,5,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	
Iteration 5	4	4,5,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	V
	5	5	4,5,6,7,8	5	
	6	4,5,6,7,8	6	6	
	7	5,7	4,6,7,8	7	
Iteration 6	4	4,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	VI
	6	4,6,7,8	6	6	
	7	7	4,6,7,8	7	
	8	4,7,8	4,6,8	4,8	
Iteration 7	4	4,8	4,6,8	4,8	VII
	6	4,6,8	6	6	
	8	4,8	4,6,8	4,8	
Iteration 8	6	6	6	6	VIII